THE SCHOOLBOY ACTORS' AMAZING EVIDENCE!

HANDFORTH BUTTS IN!

(A striking incident from this week's fine long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.)

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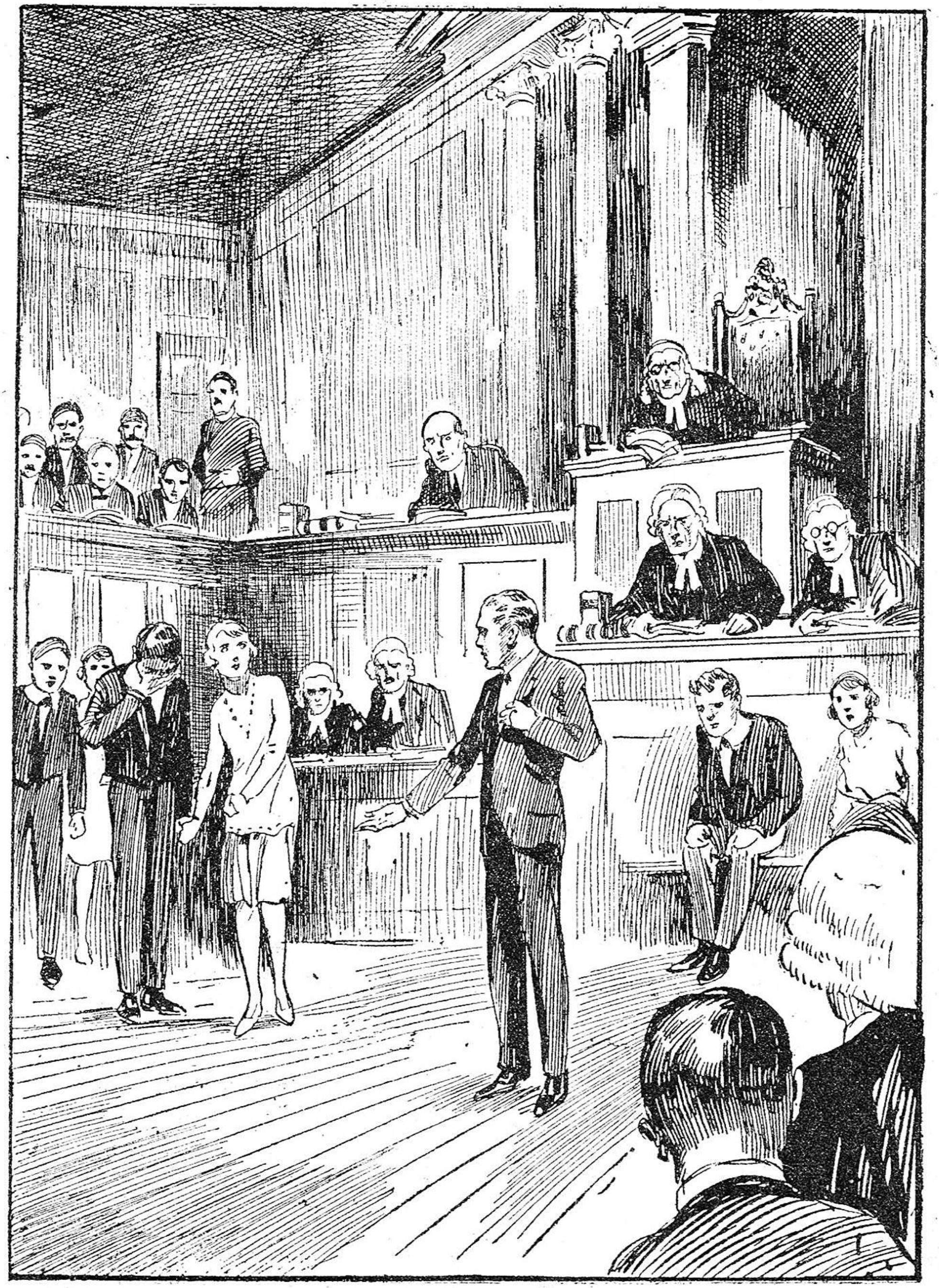

Judge and jury listened in amazement as the schoolboy actors and a Moor View girl began to speak the lines of the play that Horace Stevens' father had written. Except for the mere names, the watchers saw that they were acting Roger Barton's play—word for word.

ST. FRANK'S IN COURT!

A Grand Long Complete Story of the Boys of St. Frank's, featuring the Schoolboy Actors in Court.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

CRICKET!

TOM BURTON, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, glared balefully at Jerry Dodd, his Australian chum of Study F in the Ancient House. And Jerry Dodd returned that baleful glare with a hundred per cent interest.

"You're mad!" said Tom Burton fiercely.

"Am I?" snapped Jerry Dodd. "I wouldn't have a mind like yours for a fortune! By jings! You haven't got the intelligence of a kangaroo!"

"Souse my scuppers!" gasped Burton. "You—you—— Who told you that you were a cricket expert?"

"I know more about the game than you'll learn if you live for a century!"

"Look here——"

"You silly ass——"

They glared at one another again—across the breakfast table, each wrenching fiercely at the morning newspaper. Captain Thomas Joseph Burton, entering the room at that moment, paused in the doorway, and chuckled.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "Another squabble? That's no way to treat a guest, Tom! I'll be hanged if you haven't quarrelled like this for three mornings running!"

Tom's father was a big, bluff old gentleman with a full beard. He was a sea dog of the old type—a man who had sailed the world in every kind of vessel that floated—a man who had explored the uttermost corners of the seven seas. His face—where it could be seen—was tanned by the suns of tropic skies, and weather-beaten until it was the colour of mahogany. His twinkling, good-humoured eyes were surrounded by countless tiny wrinkles. There was something refreshingly breezy about him.

"I can't help it, dad," said Tom hotly. "This—this Australian fathead has the nerve to say that his country's rotten old team is going to whack England in the Test Matches. Great marlinspikes! The nerve!"

Jerry Dodd snorted.

"Nerve, is it?" he retorted. "What about yours? It's like your sauce to think that England stands an earthly chance! Why, our team's going to make you eat out of their hands!"

"You conceited Aussie rabbit!"

"You water-brained English donkey!"

Captain Burton roared with laughter.

"Go ahead!" he said encouragingly. "Splendid! This is the best row you've had—in my hearing, at any rate. Of course, you don't mean a word of it—and between the pair of you, that newspaper will soon look like a rag. Simmer down, my cheery young lubbers! Simmer down! Get those usual grins on your faces, and you'll look more natural."

For a moment, the two juniors continued to glare, and then Tom Burton allowed himself to chuckle. Jerry Dodd's flushed face changed its aspect, and a moment later they were both laughing.

"What's the good of having a shindy, anyhow?" asked Jerry. "We're cobbers, aren't we, Tom?"

"Always will be, souse me!" grinned Tom.

"But we shall have to keep off cricket!" went on Jerry, relaxing his hold on the newspaper. "The fact is, we're both hot-tempered, bo'sun. And you're not going to tell me that the Aussie team isn't real dinkum."

"We're going to whack it, anyhow," said Tom confidently.

"Oh, are you? Just you wait——"

"Steady—steady!" chuckled Captain Burton. "You no sooner make peace than you clear for action again! Steer quietly into harbour, my lads, and get snugly to your moorings! It's breakfast-time, anyhow!"

These cricket duels were quite frequent in Captain Burton's comfortable, unpretentious home in Leigham Court Road, Streatham, in the south-western district of London. Jerry Dodd, whose parents, of course, were in Australia, frequently spent his holidays with his chum. And this Easter was no exception to the rule.

Cricket was now thoroughly in the air. For months past the papers had been discussing the coming test matches—the great duel between the stalwarts of England and the stalwarts of Australia. So far as the sporting world was concerned, there was really no other subject worth mentioning.

And Jerry Dodd, who took cricket as any other fellow would take his meals, had aroused an almost equal enthusiasm in Tom—who was generally known in the Remove as the "Bo'sun."

Jerry, naturally, was absolutely convinced that Australia would win the rubber, and retain the Ashes. And Tom was equally certain that England would wipe out many old scores, and obtain a sweet revenge. Tom wouldn't even dream of the possibility of an English defeat.

And so, at every meal-time, cricket formed a very solid part of the menu. There were no ladies present at these discussions, since Captain Burton was a widower, and long since retired. He lived quietly with an elderly housekeeper, and spent a lonely life except during the holidays. Indeed, he practically lived in his club, where he was in the habit of hob-nobbing with old cronies after his own heart.

"There's no telling who'll win this series of Tests, my boys," he said genially. "What's the good of worrying, anyhow? Let the best team win—that's what I say! Let the best man sail into port!"

"Dad's right, Jerry, you know," agreed the Bo'sun. "Souse me! Why should we have all these arguments for nothing? Cricket's a great game—the best game in the world—and it's silly to quarrel over it."

"Well, you started it this morning," said Jerry.

"I didn't! You began by saying that——"

"You haven't forgotten that appointment for this morning, have you, Tom?" put in his father diplomatically. "And you mustn't forget to bring young Alec back to tea. By ginger! I haven't seen him yet—although I've heard quite enough about him from Jerry."

Jerry Dodd nodded.

"Alec Duncan is a New Zealander, sir," he said. "Our families have known each other for years. My dad's particularly keen that I should show him round a bit. He's for St. Frank's, sir."

"So I understand," nodded the skipper.

"A New Zealander..eh?" remarked Tom Burton thoughtfully. "We shall have the Empire fairly well represented at St. Frank's now. We've already got a Canadian, and an Indian, so we shall only need a South African to complete the list. This Alexander Duncan chap is booked for the Remove, isn't he?"

"Rather," said Jerry. "I'll try and get him into the Ancient House, too. But we're going to give him a real bonzer time to-day. It'll be good to talk over old times. I haven't seen Alec since we were on dad's station together."

"Station?" repeated Tom. "I suppose you mean ranch?"

"We don't call 'em ranches in Australia, you ass!" sniffed Jerry.

They continued to discuss Alec Duncan. A few days earlier Jerry had received a letter from his father—forwarded on to him from St. Frank's. It told him the news concerning Alec Duncan. The latter's father was a wealthy New Zealand sheep farmer.

The Duncans and the Dodds were very old friends, and when last Jerry had been at home, Alec Duncan and his sisters had been visiting Australia—and staying on Mr. Dodd's station, in New South Wales. Jerry knew that Alec was a fine, cheery sort of youngster, and he was keen upon renewing the friendship. It had been a piece of good news for him that Duncan was to enter the St. Frank's Remove. In fact, Jerry's father was responsible for this move, having given Mr. Duncan the benefit of his advice.

At that moment, Alec Duncan was staying at the Savoy Hotel, having travelled from New Zealand with some old family friends. Until St. Frank's opened for the new term, Alec would be remaining at the hotel.

"We've fixed it all up, dad," said Tom. "We're going to the Marble Arch Pavilion this morning—eleven o'clock prompt."

"So I understand," nodded the captain. "But what's the idea, Tom? The pictures don't start until the afternoon, do they?"

"They do this week, sir," put in Jerry. "They've got a special film showing—'England's Public Schools.' A sort of

educational arrangement, I believe. And St. Frank's is being featured to-day."

"So we're going to take Alec to have a look at St. Frank's before he actually gets there," explained Tom. "I'm keen on sounding the lubber about his cricket, too. Swab my decks! If he thinks that Australia is going to win the Test Matches, I won't have anything to do with him!"

Jerry Dodd glared.

"You'd better make up your mind at once, then!" he snorted. "Alec's bound to be on my side. He's an Australasian, don't forget! He knows as well as I do that the Ashes aren't in any danger."

"Why, you boasting gum-sucker——"

"Gum-sucker!" howled Jerry.

"That's what I said, swab you!"

"But I'm not a Victorian!" roared Jerry indignantly. "I'm from New South Wales. I'm a corn-stick!"

The Bo'sun nodded.

"I thought you were green!" he said tartly. "All corn stalks are green when they're young! Cricket! Huh! A fat lot you know about the trouble that's in store for your mouldy team!"

And in another second the squabble was raging as fiercely and furiously as ever.

CHAPTER II.

THE FELLOW FROM NEW ZEALAND.

OF course, it only lasted a few minutes. Jerry and Tom never quarrelled on any other subject but cricket, and their tiffs were always brief and heated. Once over, they were as chummy as ever.

They always made up their minds to bar the subject of cricket from all conversation—but it was a hopeless project. Cricket simply cropped up at every hour of the day, and couldn't be avoided.

"We're going to do big things at St. Frank's this summer, too," said Jerry enthusiastically, when peace was restored. "There's nothing to beat the summer term! Cricket and fine weather! Of course, it would be better if your English summer was anything like the real article. But you can never rely on it. To get real summer, you've got to go to Australia."

"And get dried up to a clinker?" asked Tom Burton tartly. "Do you call that summer? Droughts and dust! Not a green blade of grass for miles! People collapsing everywhere! Swill my scuppers! Summer, eh?"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"No, old son, you can't make me wild over the climate," he chuckled. "What about your wet Junes and Julys? Rain every day! Soaked wickets—no possibility of play! In Australia we can play cricket every day of the week, and start a game with the certainty of finishing it!"

"The sooner you boys get off, the better," put in Captain Burton. "Two minutes ago you said you wouldn't include cricket in the conversation, and now I'm sunk if it hasn't cropped up again! Hoist your anchors and set sail! Maybe you'll forget cricket when you reach the open sea!"

And it wasn't long before the two chums were off to keep their appointment with Alec Duncan. They had arranged to meet him at ten forty-five sharp, outside the Marble Arch Pavilion.

There was a big difference between this pair of friends, but they both cut good figures as they swung briskly down Leigham Court Road to the main street, where they were bent upon catching a 'bus to Oxford Circus.

Jerry Dodd was loose-limbed and wiry, and he walked with a free-and-easy gait. While not being handsome, his twinkling eyes and his cheerful countenance were typically Colonial. Burton, on the other hand, was one of the clumsiest fellows imaginable — big-limbed, lumbering, and deeply tanned. His jolly, good-natured face was the essence of bluff geniality. His eyes were frank and innocently blue, and his hair was brown and curly. And both juniors were utterly careless in their attire—free and easy and comfortable. They cared nothing for creased trousers or stiff collars.

They had purposely started off early, in order to guard against traffic delays. It was quite natural, therefore, that their 'bus should have a clear course throughout the journey, and land them at Oxford Circus by 10.15.

"If we had started late, we should have jumped on a crawler!" grinned Tom, as they set off down Oxford Street. "No need to ship a passage, messmate—we'll walk it."

"Might as well," said Jerry. "Alec won't be there for nearly half-an-hour, and it's only ten minutes' walk. Hallo—look at that!" He pointed down a side-street as he spoke. "Handforth's at it again!"

As he said, Edward Oswald Handforth was certainly "at it." Church was gently dabbing at his nose, while Handforth was squaring up to McClure.

Even as Jerry and Tom watched, they saw Handforth lash out wildly. He caught McClure squarely on the jaw, and sent him flying backwards—just as a motor-'bus rolled towards them, close in to the kerb.

The watchers gasped. It seemed as though McClure must fall under the heavy wheels of the weighty vehicle. Then Church forgot his damaged nose, and shot out his hand—just in time. He grabbed McClure by the shoulder and yanked him back.

"You—you mad ass!" gasped McClure. "I might have been run over!"

"You ought to be," growled Handy, "if you can't stand up to a little tap on the

chin! Come on, and—— Oh, there's the Bo'sun!"

The three of them moved towards Jerry and Tom. Handforth was looking flushed, and Church was gently dabbing his nose with his handkerchief; McClure rubbed his chin carefully and with due caution.

"Trouble?" asked Jerry politely.

"It's Handy!" grumbled Church. "We can't walk ten yards in the street without a scrap!"

Handforth regarded his pals with lofty contempt.

"It was your own dotty fault!" he snapped. "You shouldn't get such idiotic ideas about the Test Matches!" He turned to Jerry and Tom. "Think of it!" he snorted. "These—these traitors actually said that England will have to fight hard to win the Ashes!"

"So they will!" said Church warmly.

"Rats!" retorted Handforth. "Rot! Piffle! We've got these Australians whacked this year! They won't stand an earthly chance of winning the rubber. At least, they won't if the selection committee took my advice——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Souse me!" murmured the Bo'sun. "Jerry, shipmate, we'd better be moving along. It seems dangerous to argue with Handy——"

"It's fatal!" said Church, gently dabbing his nose.

"I'm going to say what I like," growled Jerry Dodd. "Why, you ass, Handforth! You—you coot! I'll bet my last deener that Australia knocks England half-way across the calendar!"

Handforth glared, and Church, McClure, and Tom Burton looked alarmed. Various other people who were trying to get round the knot of schoolboys regarded them with amused interest.

"What's that you called me?" said Handforth ominously.

"A coot!"

"What's a coot, you Australian land-crab?"

"A coot's a chap of no account!" retorted Jerry, with relish.

"You—you fat-headed gum-sucker!"

"I'm a cornstalk!" hooted Jerry, exasperated. "If you call me a gum-sucker again——"

"Steady, Handy, old man!" gasped Church. "He's only pulling your leg. A coot is really a kind of water-fowl——"

"That means he called me a water-fowl!" snorted Handforth indignantly.

"Yes, but he didn't mean——"

"Cheese it!" grinned Jerry, cooling down. "We don't want a row in the street, do we? I wonder why we're always having these squabbles about cricket? It's only my chiack, Handy."

"Your what?" asked Edward Oswald suspiciously.

"Can't you understand English?" demanded Jerry. "Chiack's banter—pulling your leg, you know."

"And what's a deener?" asked Handforth tartly.

"Why, a shilling, of course."

"My only hat! You Australian chaps are as bad as the Americans!" sniffed Handforth. "You're not satisfied with straightforward English. Why can't you speak the language as we do? Why the dickens can't you sling these rotten slang words aside, and use decent English? I'm fed-up with hearing our language mutilated, you potty chump! Any more of it, and I'll biff you one on the nob! It's getting a bit too giddy thick!"

Jerry Dodd grinned widely.

"Is that what you call straightforward English?" he asked blandly.

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors roared at Handforth's expression—as he realised that his own English was not exactly a pure pattern of the mother tongue. But good humour was restored, so everything was all right.

They managed to reach the Marble Arch Pavilion without any further trouble, for it turned out that Handforth & Co. were attracted to this famous cinema by the St. Frank's film, too.

"Of course, it'll be all wrong," said Handforth judicially. "It's bound to be a mess-up. The camera men were only at St. Frank's for one afternoon—and, of course, they chose an afternoon when most of us were playing an away match against Helmford."

"A bit of nerve, I called it!" agreed Church. "We didn't know anything about it until we got back. The film's naturally incomplete without Handy. How can it show St. Frank's properly without him?"

"Ridiculous!" said McClure gravely.

"I'm glad you realise it!" sniffed Handforth. "The last time we discussed the matter you seemed to think—— Hallo! How goes it, old son? Haven't seen you for days!"

Archie Glenthorne, lounging elegantly near the entrance of the cinema, anxiously looking towards the Marble Arch in search of Marjorie Temple, suddenly received a clap on the back which knocked half the wind out of him. The swell of the St. Frank's Remove gave a yelp of sheer horror. His cane went in one direction, his gloriously shiny topper in another, and his monocle jerked from his eye, broke from its cord, and splintered to fragments on the pavement.

"Good gad!" he gasped. "I—I mean, what?"

He turned, and gazed at Handforth with glassy dismay.

"Ripping morning, Archie!" said Handforth genially.

"Odds earthquakes and eruptions!" ejaculated Archie. "You—you frightful steam-roller! I mean to say, it's a bit dashed

thick when a chappie can't gaze peacefully at the populace without a bally barge pushing along and absolutely wrecking him!"

"Why, you ass, I haven't touched you!"

"Here I was, at peace with the whole frightful world!" complained Archie bitterly. "I mean to say, the old bean was fairly simmering with joyous thoughts, and cheery what-nots. And then—absolutely zing! —along comes this human thingummy—this beastly juggernaut—and absolutely converts me into a feeble blancmange. A bit thick, what? In fact, decidedly on the solidified side!"

Church rescued Archie's hat, and McClure restored his stick. And Archie found that he had a spare monocle in his waistcoat pocket—so things weren't so bad, after all. All the same, he gazed at his topper with acute distress. He observed the dusty blemishes.

"This," he breathed, "is where old Phipps would rally round in the most frightfully useful fashion. Good gad! The lad would absolutely shove it across the old topper in two bally jiffs, and—— What-ho! Odds visions and fairies. Marjorie, by gad! How goes it, old girl?"

Marjorie Temple, of the Moor View School, came along with Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley—and all three girls were looking perfectly charming in their summery frocks—for the day was sunny and mild.

It seemed that half St. Frank's was collecting outside the cinema—all drawn by the special film. But Jerry Dodd wasn't interested in this crowd—he was looking searchingly for Alec Duncan. At last he found him.

"Jerry!" exclaimed the New Zealand boy, as they gripped hands.

"I hardly knew you, old man!" gasped Jerry. "You're about a yard taller than you used to be!"

"You don't look the same, either!" grinned Alec Duncan.

He was a different type from Jerry—being broad-shouldered, tall, and strikingly good-looking. A fine, strapping youngster—aglow with health and high spirits.

Dick Hamilton & Co., the popular leaders of the Remove, were introduced, to say nothing of Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and Handforth & Co. Dick Hamilton—the ever-popular Nipper—practically gave Duncan an official welcome—Nipper being Form skipper.

But not many compliments could be exchanged, for it was now nearly eleven o'clock, and time to buy their tickets. They all crowded in, happy and cheerful.

HANDFORTH says :—

"You've all been asking for it—and now you're going to get it!"

Full details of a big surprise—

NEXT WEEK!

CHAPTER III.

AT HORACE STEVENS' HOME.

"FOR goodness' sake, don't worry, —mother! I was afraid of this all along, and now you'll only get yourself thoroughly ill."

Horace Stevens, of the Fifth Form, spoke anxiously and concernedly. He was bending over a frail-looking lady who sat in an arm-chair. It was his mother, Mrs. Vincent Stevens, and they were both in the drawing-room of their house at Regent's Park. It was morning—and the cheery weather outside was in striking contrast to the anxiety and concern on Mrs. Stevens' face.

"But—but I don't understand," she said, looking up at him with deep worry. "It all seems such a tangle! Why didn't I know about this before? Why should you keep it from me——"

"I didn't want you to know a thing, mother," interrupted Stevens. "My idea was to get it all over and done with before you heard a word. You've got quite enough to upset you as it is."

"No, dear, things are better than they were," denied his mother. "You remember Mr. Webb?"

"That infernal money-lender?" said Stevens. "By jingo! Do I remember him! I'll guarantee he'll never forget me! I not only knocked him down, but I kicked him out of the house——"

"I was dreadfully concerned about it at the time, Horace, and I was afraid that he would take drastic action," said Mrs. Stevens softly. "But I have had a letter from him this morning to say that he regards the account as settled. And yet I've paid him nothing more! Why has he done this, Horace? Of course, he has received far more than the original loan," she added thoughtfully. "Perhaps you frightened him. Anyhow, it is a great relief to know that our home is in no danger. The bill of sale is cancelled."

Her son took a deep, deep breath.

"Browne!" he muttered.

"What did you say, Horace?"

"Eh? Oh, nothing!" said Stevens hastily. "Nothing, mum! I'm jolly glad about Webb—he's finished with, thank goodness! And it won't be long before all our other troubles are over, too."

He hardly knew what he was saying, for his thoughts were straying in another direc-

tion. Browne—of course! His masterful chum—William Napoleon Browne, the captain of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's—had been at work here. It was very distinctly a Browne touch.

During these holidays Stevens had made one or two jarring discoveries. Not the least of them had been the knowledge that his mother was far worse off than he had ever supposed. His late father had left them a comfortable income, but shares had decreased in value—Stevens didn't know the exact facts of the case—and money was tight.

Mrs. Stevens had denied herself consistently in order that her son should feel no pinch at school. She had even become entangled with a moneylender, and this man had threatened to turn her out of house and home. As a reward for this attitude, Mr. Webb himself had been not merely turned out, but kicked out.

Stevens had told Browne all about it. And now, only about a week later, his mother had received a letter to say that the transaction was settled! Stevens looked grim. He would compel Browne to tell him how much it had cost to square the moneylender.

"And dear old mother thinks that it's Webb's doing," breathed Stevens to himself. "Catch a moneylender relaxing his grip on a victim! I'll bet that Browne's pater did the trick!"

He remembered, then, that Browne had promised to get his celebrated father on the job. The Fifth Form skipper's pater was Sir Rufus Browne, K.C., one of the most famous men at the Bar. There was just a chance that he had forced Mr. Webb to call the deal closed without any cash being handed over. But this was very unlikely.

"But it's this other matter that is so dreadful," continued Mrs. Stevens. "To think of it, Horace! Your father's play stolen! Produced in London under another name! What can we do? What hope is there for us to get any justice?"

"We can fight, mother."

"Oh, my boy, you don't seem to realise that it costs money to fight," she replied. "It's a terribly expensive business to bring an action in the Law Courts. We've got nothing! But the people who have produced the play are wealthy. Indeed, Mr. Arrowsmith is a millionaire."

"And the play is the biggest success that London has had for years!" gloated Stevens. "Think of it, mother! Dad's play! A roaring, raging triumph! Why, they are booked up solid for months ahead at the Emperor Theatre. The show's a riot!"

Stevens' face was glowing. For the moment, he had forgotten that he and his mother were reaping none of the benefits.

"Yes, dear, I realise all that," said his mother gently. "And it seems that there has been an injunction, or something. And there's talk of a law suit. Mr. Tudor quite confused me with all he said, and I don't really know what to think. But he seemed very confident. Yet I don't know who instructed him, or who——"

"You haven't got to think of those things, mother," interrupted her son. "Of course, old Tudor couldn't help it—he's our family lawyer, so he had to come along and tell you everything. But I wish he'd seen me first—it wouldn't have given you such a shock."

Until this morning, Mrs. Stevens had known nothing of the theft of her husband's play and of its recent production in London. She had known, of course, that a play called "The Whirlpool," by Roger Barton, had made an unprecedented success at the Emperor Theatre. But she had never dreamed that this play was actually "The Third Chance," written by her own husband some little time before his death.

The news had come as a great shock to her—particularly as she had not been prepared for it. Mr. Tudor, the kindly old lawyer, had assumed that she was acquainted with the facts, and had taken no trouble to break the news gently. Hence Mrs. Stevens' present agitation. The solicitor had only left the house twenty minutes earlier.

"I never realised that you'd have to know everything, mother," went on Stevens slowly. "But, of course, you'll be the plaintiff."

"The plaintiff!"

"Yes, in the law suit."

"Oh, dear! I'm sure it'll be dreadfully trying——"

"It won't, mother—take my word for it," interrupted Stevens confidently. "You'll simply have to sit in the court and do nothing. I was hoping that we could get the action over and Barton in gaol before you heard anything. But, legally, the play is yours, so you've got to be the plaintiff. I'm a mere nobody," he added, with a grin.

"Yet you seem to know a lot more about it than I do, Horry," smiled his mother. "Who is this man Barton? I want to hear everything now. You mustn't keep me in the dark like this. It's cruel."

Stevens made himself more comfortable.

"I like that!" he said indignantly. "I was thinking of your peace of mind, and you call me cruel!"

"I didn't actually mean it, dear."

"I know you didn't," he said softly. "The fact is, mum, we first came across Roger Barton near St. Frank's, in old Andy Noggs' Travelling Theatre. I've told you about dear old Noggs, haven't I? A regular genuine old boy! Barton was his business manager."

"Did you suspect him of wickedness then?"

"Why, Browne and Nipper and Pitt and some of the other fellows actually discovered him trying to swindle old Noggs out of his theatre!" said Stevens indignantly. "We dished him properly by lend-

ing Noggs some money, and the brute was paid out. After that he disappeared —and I didn't hear of him again until this play was produced. The confounded hound must have stolen it from St. Frank's."

"But how did he know about it?"

"Why, because we produced it at Noggs' Theatre," explained Horace. "Don't you see? It's as plain as a pikestaff! Barton saw the play then, but only jeered at it. Of course, he secretly told himself that it was a masterpiece. And he burgled St. Frank's, and stole it."

"How do you know——"

"Know!" broke in Stevens. "Isn't it obvious? On the last day of term I couldn't find the play anywhere. I assumed that I had left it in one of the other lockers — but the Housemaster had the key, and he'd left, so I couldn't be certain. But Barton stole the play. He came to London, and had the unutterable nerve to present it under his own name! I shall never forget that first night! He came on the stage and accepted the applause of the audience—just as though he were the real author! I don't remember much after that—but I know I called him a liar, and I know that I was turned out of the theatre."

"Horace!"

"Yes, and I horsewhipped him, too!" went on Stevens gloatingly. "I horsewhipped the beast right up the Haymarket——"

"Horace, what are you saying?" gasped his mother, staring at him in horrified amazement.

Handforth's fist caught McClure squarely on the jaw, and sent him staggering backwards.
It seemed as though he must fall under the heavy wheels of the weighty vehicle. Then Church forgot his damaged nose and shot out his hand—just in time.

CHAPTER IV.

BROWNE'S LITTLE WAY.

HORACE STEVENS pulled up with a jerk.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "Oh, my hat! I didn't mean to tell you that, mother! Not that it matters —it's out now. Yes. I was so thundering wild that I borrowed a horsewhip and made the brute dance."

"But, Horace, you might have been arrested!" breathed his mother.

"I wanted to be," he replied promptly.

"Oh, you foolish boy!"

"Nothing would have suited me better," went on Horace grimly. "In court, I could have explained why I horsewhipped the cad. Barton knew it, too, and refused to charge me. Since then there's been a kind of lull, and I was beginning to fear that there was no hope. That play at the Pall Mall has taken up a lot of time, too."

Mrs. Stevens regarded her son rather proudly. On Easter Monday, at a few hours' notice, he had undertaken to play the leading part, owing to a motoring accident which had involved both the leading man and his understudy.

Stevens was a remarkable young actor—he possessed the true sense of the theatre, and exercised a magnetic influence over his audience. In one so young, this faculty was indeed astonishing. With development, Horace Stevens had a wonderful future before him.

He had played the part for three or four nights—until the leading man could resume.

They had been glorious nights for Horace Stevens, and Mr. Augustus Crowson, the manager of the theatre, had promised to do big things for him later.

But now there was this business concerning Roger Barton.

"I don't understand what's happened, Horace," said Mrs. Stevens. "But it seems there's been an injunction—whatever that may be. And I'm not even sure that there has been an injunction. I'm afraid I'm no good at legal matters at all. Mr. Tudor confused me terribly."

"There's no need for you to know a lot about legal matters, mother," replied Stevens. "In fact, the less you know, the better. Didn't Mr. Tudor make it clear what was in the wind?"

"He only told me that I should probably have to go to the Law Courts."

"Yes, I suppose you will," said Horace thoughtfully. "It oughtn't to be difficult to prove dad's authorship. I don't know how Barton could have had the terrific nerve to alter the names and the title and call it his own."

"He's a clever man, Horace," said Mrs. Stevens gravely. "And he's rich, too—rich with money that ought to be ours. And he's backed by Mr. Samuel Arrowsmith, the great theatrical magnate. Do you think Mr. Arrowsmith is equally guilty?"

"No fear!" replied Stevens promptly. "He may not be too particular, but he's not a crook. I'll guarantee that he thinks this is a stunt of ours—and that Barton is the genuine author. An injunction, eh? By jingo, mother, I hope you're right about that. It means they'll have to suspend the play until the case is settled."

"I think they've made a special arrangement about this," said Mrs. Stevens. "The play is such a great success that it would be a grave matter to stop it—particularly as so many advance bookings have been made. I'm sure I don't know what Mr. Tudor told me, but I believe the takings must be kept intact, and a strict account of all expenses kept. And neither Mr. Barton nor Mr. Arrowsmith must touch a penny. Some such special arrangement has been reached, I think. But I'm no good at legal matters, Horace."

"Oh, well, as long as the case is going forward we needn't worry," said Stevens briskly. "It ought to be child's play to prove that dad wrote the show under another title. Barton's destroyed the original script, of course. That's a certainty, but there are bound to be plenty of proofs——"

"That's where I am so worried, Horace," interrupted his mother concernedly. "I don't believe there are any proofs. I told Mr. Tudor so, and he was very worried. Oh, why did you take the play to St. Frank's? If it hadn't been for that——"

She broke off and sighed.

"It's no good speaking in that way, mum," said Horace, shaking his head. "If I hadn't taken the play to St. Frank's it would never have been produced. But isn't there something we can get hold of? One of dad's old diaries, perhaps? Some of his original notes about the play? A typewritten copy of it?"

"I don't know at all—but I'm afraid not," said his mother. "Such a lot of things were cleared out and destroyed. Years ago, Horace, when we had a lot of lumber removed. I remember, there was a dreadful mistake. I had filled two boxes with dad's old papers, and they were taken away in error—and then we found that everything had been burnt. Isn't it just fate? I don't know where to look for any proof. I don't think there's a scrap of paper—not even a diary."

"We shall have to make a thorough search, that's all," said Horace confidently. "The tiniest shred will be enough to upset Barton's case completely. He won't have a leg to stand on—— Hallo! Somebody at the door," he added, as he heard a knock. "Sounds like old Browne."

"You mean Billy?"

"He hates being called Billy—not by you, of course," smiled Stevens. "But if I started, he'd have a fit. Everybody at St. Frank's calls him 'old Browne'——"

"Old in wisdom, Brother Horace, but young in years," said William Napoleon Browne from the doorway. "Greetings, Mrs. Stevens! The freshness and fragrance of the morning is as nothing compared to your own charm. But am I wrong in fearing that Brother Horace's prattling has bored you? I detect certain signs of weariness."

He shook hands, and beamed upon them.

"It's not Horace, but something very different," said Mrs. Stevens. "I've heard all about Mr. Barton, Billy."

"Forgive my little criticism, but why insult millions of harmless 'Misters' by including a mere reptile in the category?" asked Browne. "I have even ceased to refer to this scorpion as 'Brother Barton.' And I can assure you the case must be exceptional, indeed, for me to depart from my time-honoured method."

"What do you call him now?" asked Stevens, smiling.

"But for your mother's presence, I should unquestionably call him a double-distilled dirty dog," replied Browne calmly. "But I would not dream of offending gentle feminine ears by such language. It has recently become my custom to think of this human canine as Burglar Barton. I pride myself on the fact that it fits him as snugly as a sausage fits its skin."

"He's a burglar right enough," agreed

Stevens, nodding. "He broke into St. Frank's and stole that play, anyhow."

Browne nodded.

"He has also been stealing divers amounts from the Emperor Theatre pay-box," he remarked. "We may take it as a certainty that Burglar Barton has severely chewed Mr. Arrowsmith's ear on many occasions."

"Chewed his ear, Billy?" asked Mrs. Stevens, in wonder.

"A mere figure of speech, dear lady," explained Browne. "Biting one's ear is simply another definition of touching one. But I venture to suggest that Burglar Barton would not be content with a mere bite."

"And that money's ours!" said Stevens indignantly.

"Unquestionably," agreed William Napoleon. "I fear that it can never be recovered—but do not be alarmed regarding the present and future. Our doggish friend will receive no more chews. Until the case is settled, every penny of money must be held intact, and so far as Burglar Barton is concerned, the cupboard is bare. And so the poor dog will have none."

Mrs. Stevens looked at him earnestly.

"Tell me, Billy, what have you been doing?" she asked, her voice quiet but firm. "Mr. Tudor, our lawyer, came to see me this morning. It seems that he has had instructions—but he would not say from whom. There is this injunction, too. And I understand that I am plaintiff in a case which will soon be heard in the Law Courts?"

Browne nodded.

"In the main, your information is reliable," he admitted.

"But who has done this?" demanded Mrs. Stevens.

"The morning," said Browne dreamily, "is singularly balmy. Very suitable to your constitution, Brother Horace. Let us venture forth and sip some of the airy nectar. I might even suggest a visit to the pictures."

"At this time of the day?" asked Stevens. "There aren't any pictures, you chump. Besides, it's so sunny——"

"The Marble Arch Pavilion is honouring London by showing a special film of St. Frank's," explained Browne smoothly. "You may judge the importance of this occasion when I assure you that the film is presented as a special programme. I have promised to be there, Brother Horace. Imagine the consternation if I fail to arrive on time. Imagine the utter horror if I am five minutes late! We must lose no more precious seconds!"

But Mrs. Stevens placed a hand on his arm.

"It's no good, Billy—you can't get out of it like that," she smiled. "You haven't answered my question yet."

CHAPTER V.

THE BEST OF NEWS.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE sighed. "I feared it would be useless," he said sadly. "But I have at least made the attempt. And who can do more than his best? At the same time, I urge you, Mrs. Stevens, to ask no questions."

"But I must ask, Billy," she insisted. "You don't seem to realise what this means to me and to Horace. My late husband's play has been stolen and produced at a West End theatre. It is a big success—with a fortune in it for the owner."

"That fortune's ours," put in Stevens eagerly. "We're the owners, you know—at least, you are."

"They say that possession is nine points of the law, Horace," replied Mrs. Stevens. "And we've got to face the fact that Mr. Barton is in possession of the play. So far as the producers are concerned, they regard Mr. Barton as the author."

"A brainy remark, Mrs. Stevens," agreed Browne. "Burglar Barton has undoubtedly got the half-nelson on those nine points of the law. But what about the tenth? That, let me whisper, is where we slide gracefully into the picture."

"You think there's a real chance?"

"It's a cert., dear lady," replied Browne smoothly. "A mere matter of waiting a few days. Just the question of placing the facts concisely before the beak. My father, Sir Rufus Browne, has been briefed, and various legal reels of red tape have been considerably unwound. There is always one danger in connection with this tangle of red tape. A fellow is apt to get caught round the ankles, and trip. Perhaps, indeed, that is the very reason this red tape is used."

"You're deliberately getting away from the point again, Billy," said Mrs. Stevens severely. "Why can't you be frank with me? You know my circumstances—and you know how impossible it is for me to pay any heavy legal expenses——"

"But you are rich," insisted Browne. "The proceeds from this play will fill your coffers to bursting-point."

"But we've got to prove our ownership in a court of law."

"Precisely; but why quibble over such trifles?" asked Browne, with a wave of his hand. "After the action has been won——"

"Listen, Billy! Supposing we lose?"

"Oh, that's impossible, mother!" broke in Horace.

"Not so impossible as you think," said his mother quietly. "It is not always the just cause which gets the favourable decision, Horace. In so many of these cases it is largely a question of money. And the side which can spend the most is the side which wins."

Browne looked shocked.

"Alas! That such fair lips should form such cynical words!" he exclaimed. "I am grieved, Mrs. Stevens, that you should allow such harsh thoughts to take possession of you."

"But we are dealing with facts, Billy—not with fancy," she reminded him. "And we must be prepared for the worst. How can I pay these expenses if we lose the case? That is the worrying point."

"We shall not lose—we shall win with supreme ease," declared Browne. "The matter of expenses can then be entered into. For the moment, I urge you to think no more of the question. I will not bore you with details concerning the injunction, the coming case, and other legal rigmarole. Let it be enough to know that the wheels are thoroughly lubricated, and revolving to some considerable purpose."

"And your pater has been briefed?" breathed Stevens. "Sir Rufus Browne! By jingo, old man, things are moving!"

"But we can't afford it, Horace!" said his mother anxiously. "Billy, what an exasperating boy you are! I never know when you are earnest and when you are flippant! I don't believe a word about your father! He is one of the most exclusive K.C.'s at the Bar. His fees must be fabulous! How can I afford to brief him? Besides, I haven't even seen Sir Rufus over this case—we haven't discussed it once. I believe you are fooling me."

"Besides, your pater's a judge," added Stevens.

"It is at such moments as these that I realise the dangers of talking," said Browne sombrely. "I see that I must adopt my habitual custom, and remain silent. Alas, that I should have altered my tactics for once! I will return to my oyster-like state of impassive quietude. Years of experience have taught me that it is the strong, silent man who wins."

Stevens grinned.

"Then you'll always be a loser," he chuckled. "Look here, Browne, cheese it! Any more of this rot, and I'll have a row with you! Is it true that your pater has taken up this case?"

"Perfectly true."

"But who—who briefed him?"

"'I,' said the sparrow, 'with my bow and arrow——'" Browne checked himself. "That is to say, I briefed him," he explained.

"You!"

"Who better?"

"But—but, you howling ass, how the dickens could you brief your father—a judge?" yelled Stevens. "And are you trying to kid us that your father would accept instructions from——"

"Peace!" interrupted Browne calmly. "With all truthfulness, I assure you that my father has condescended to step down from his judge's pedestal, and he will be your advocate in this case. For the plaintiff—Sir Rufus Browne, K.C. For the defendant—Sir Donald Bance, K.C. You see, everything is already on the move. Why tell you the details? You wouldn't understand them. And, to be truthful, I don't understand them myself!"

At last he had convinced his hearers.

It was a piece of good news that sounded almost fantastical in its import. Sir Rufus Browne possessed a reputation that was second to none. If he couldn't secure justice for Mrs. Stevens, nobody could.

Browne somewhat appeased the lady by assuring her that his father would call round for a chat in the near future. He required no fees at present. He was, in fact, taking on the case out of a sheer love of justice. For he was convinced of Barton's villainy, and equally convinced of Mrs. Stevens' helplessness. Browne, in his own inimitable way, smoothed out the difficulties, and assured Mrs. Stevens that everything was all right.

"It has taken me a considerable time to apply the flat-iron effectively, but I trust there are no more creases to be flattened out. Let it rest as it is, Mrs. Stevens; and let us venture forth upon our movie mission, Brother Horace. Perchance we shall run into a few of the merry lads. My Rolls-Royce is waiting at the door."

"Your father indulges you too much, I fear," smiled Mrs. Stevens. "I understood that your car was smaller than a Rolls-Royce——"

"So it is, mother," grinned Horace. "When will you learn to take ninety per cent off everything he says? He's only got a Morris-Oxford!"

"I dislike that note, Brother Horace," said Browne severely. "Let me assure you that the Morris-Oxford represents a much higher percentage than you indicate. Were I voicing this in public, I might suggest to Mr. Morris a new spot-light, by way of commission."

Browne refused to discuss the coming law suit any longer, and dragged his chum out into the sunshine. He had convinced Mrs. Stevens that there was nothing to worry about, and she was left in a condition of inward excitement. Could it possibly be true that her trials and troubles were nearly at an end?

CHAPTER VI.

WILLY'S STRATEGY.

WILLY HANDFORTH jumped up briskly. "Here we are!" he sang out. "Come on, you chaps!"

The leader of the Third and his two inseparable chums were on the top of a 'bus, and the 'bus had just reached the stopping-place near the Marble Arch Pavilion. Willy descended the

stairs by the simple expedient of slithering down the outer rail.

It was only by the merest fluke that he avoided a disaster. An old gentleman was just getting on, and Willy's feet took him fairly in the small of the back. At least, so it appeared. But, by a miraculous twist, Willy careered over the rear of the 'bus, and alighted with acrobatic skill in the road.

"Sixpence if you do that, Chubby!" he grinned.

"None o' them tricks, my lad!" said the conductor darkly. "You'll get me into trouble, you will! Larkin' about on my 'bus!"

Willy affected a lofty indifference, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon descended to the pavement in a more sedate fashion. The three fags were in their usual condition of untidiness. It was bad enough to keep smart at school. Why bother over such trifles now?

"Good!" said Willy. "Only five past eleven now. The St. Frank's film doesn't come on until half-past, so we've got tons of time. We ought to be able to get good seats for one-and-three."

"It strikes me as being a waste of money," said Juicy Lemon. "Why spend three-and-threepence to see St. Frank's? We shall see it for nothing in a few days' time," he added gloomily. "My hat, the vac.'s nearly over!"

"It's my money, so you mind your own business," retorted Willy. "And who told you that three one-and-threes are three-and-threepence? No wonder old Suncliffe shoves you in extra lessons for arithmetic!"

Juicy flushed.

"Three shillings and three threepences——" He retired into a state of acute mental distress. "You ass! I'm right all the time!" he burst out suddenly. "Three pennies——"

"Oh, crumbs!" interrupted Willy abruptly. "I've left my money in my other togs! I changed just before I came out, you know——"

His chums gazed at him blankly.

"No money!" gasped Chubby Heath.

"Only these coppers," said Willy, looking at them dolefully. "They were in my jacket, you know. I forgot all about the silver in my bags. One of you chaps'll have to fork out."

"You're welcome to all I've got," said Chubby promptly. "Sevenpence."

"And I'm stoney," said Juicy. "I spent my last bob yesterday on a battery for my electric torch."

"Yesterday!" said Willy, staring. "But it won't light!"

"The fatheaded switch got stuck, or something, and it was on all night!" explained Juicy. "I call it a swindle, charging a bob for a rotten fraud like that!"

"It's lucky for the makers they haven't got many customers like you!" said Willy tartly. "But, in another sense, they probably welcome such careless idiots! But blow your electric torch! How about this film? We haven't got enough money to get in!"

"You told us you had nearly ten bob——"

"So I have," growled Willy. "It's Ted's fault, really. The chump got in my way this morning, when I was in the bathroom. I got about two gallons of water on my other bags, and had to change 'em."

"Well, you've got nothing to grumble at—you chucked your major into the bath, didn't you?" asked Juicy.

"He fell in," corrected Willy. "I just happened to drop the soap on the floor—that's all. Just like Ted to stand on it!"

They considered the problem for some moments. All told, they possessed one-and-a-penny between them—which wasn't very satisfactory, considering that three-and-ninepence was required.

"Let's just swank in," suggested Willy thoughtfully. "Leave it to me, you chaps. Follow close behind, and be ready for trouble."

They entered the cinema briskly, and walked straight past the pay-box. But at the inner door they were confronted by the attendant in uniform.

"Tickets, please," he said callously.

"It's all right—St. Frank's chaps!" explained Willy, with an air of utter carelessness. "Thanks! This way? Good!"

But before Willy could get through, the door closed again.

"Sorry, young gent, but there's no free admission," explained the hard-hearted attendant. "I can't let you in without a ticket. We've got plenty of seats left, if you'll go to the pay-box."

Willy & Co. neglected the pay-box, and went outside again.

"A fat lot of good adopting your ideas," said Chubby tartly. "You're losing your skill, Willy, old son. The trick didn't work that time."

Willy glared.

"I'm not a magician!" he said warmly. "If I was alone, I'd get in—but I'm hampered with you asses. I'd better pop inside, and see my major. He's in the one-and-three seats, with lots of other Remove chaps."

"But they won't let you in——"

"You wait and see!" interrupted Willy. "I'll borrow five bob off Ted, and then come—— Hallo! Corn in Egypt! My sons, gaze upon the deliverer!"

Willy's eyes were suddenly sparkling. A smart saloon had just glided up, and Horace Stevens was stepping out of it. The elegant figure of William Napoleon Browne was at the wheel. Willy seized his opportunity in a flash.

"Going inside, you chaps?" he asked briskly, running up to the open door of the car. "You can park your car at the back. I'll get the tickets for you, Browne. Two at two-and-four, eh?"

"I'm paying," said Stevens. "But I don't see——"

"It doesn't matter who pays——" began Willy.

"Forgive me, Brother Horace, but this is my picnic," interrupted Browne firmly. "Buy tickets at your peril. Brother William, it is fortunate that you are on the spot. Take this scrap of tissue, and purchase two excellent seats at two-and-four. I shall expect to find you in the foyer."

"I'll be there," said Willy promptly. "Anything to oblige, Browne, old man. See you in two minutes."

He whisked the pound-note out of Browne's hand, and vanished. Browne stroked his chin dubiously.

"The young gentleman was singularly eager to oblige us, Brother Horace," he remarked. "I trust I am wrong, but I suspect sinister and ulterior motives. My instinct is rarely at fault."

"You'll be lucky if you see any change!" said Stevens, nodding. "Don't you know young Handforth by this time, you ass?"

Browne sadly shook his head, and drove off to the rear—where he found a quiet street in which to park the car. A few minutes later he was back. Stevens joined him, and they both entered. Willy & Co. were waiting with cheerful grins, and Willy displayed five two-and-four tickets.

"Got 'em, Browne," he said briskly.

"So I observe, Brother William—so I observe," said Browne. "Possibly my vision is impaired, but do I see aright? Yes, there are certainly five tickets there. But surely Brother Horace and myself do not require two each, and one for our hats?"

Willy grinned.

"You will have your joke," he said. "Let's go in."

"One moment," said Browne firmly. "There is a question of change. I will accept this piece of Dick Turpinism with due fortitude, and say nothing further. But with regard to the change——"

"Eight-and-fourpence," said Willy, nodding. "If you'll do me a favour, Browne, you'll ask Ted for it. I'm a bit short at present, and I thought you'd be willing to ——"

"Enough!" interrupted Browne. "Brother Horace, behold one of the world's supreme twisters! Youthful, but full of resource. I tremble to think of his possible record when he reaches the age of discretion. Let us forget this unfortunate affair."

They went inside, and Willy grinned cheerfully to his chums.

"Old Browne's a brick!" he murmured. "He knows we wouldn't twist him, and I'll get some money from the pater to pay him back. But he's a handy sort of chap to have about."

They settled themselves in the two-and-four seats, as far down the hall as possible—since Browne preferred to be comparatively near the screen. By pure chance—or were Willy's acute eyes responsible?—they sat down immediately behind Handforth & Co., who were in the last row of the one-and-threes.

"Splendid!" murmured Browne. "The St. Frank's film has not yet graced the screen——"

"Hallo!" interrupted Edward Oswald Handforth, turning round in his seat. "I thought I recognised that voice! How goes it, Browne? Haven't seen you—— Hallo! What the—— By George, my minor!"

Browne nodded sympathetically.

"I quite appreciate the dismay in your tone, Brother Ted," he said sadly. "It must indeed be a shock to have your peace rudely disturbed by such a discovery."

"I'm glad you're here, Ted," said Willy. "Let me remind you that you owe Browne fifteen-and-fourpence. This is just so that you shall bear it in mind. Don't say I haven't told you."

"This is far worse than I anticipated!" murmured Browne.

"You're dotty!" said Handforth. "I don't owe Browne a cent! You can't spoof me like that! I haven't borrowed fifteen-and-fourpence off him."

"No; I did that," explained Willy blandly.

Handforth glared.

"If you think I'm going to be responsible for your giddy debts——"

"Peace!" interrupted Browne urgently. "Let us defer this discussion until a more fitting moment. The St. Frank's film is just coming on."

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH SPEAKS UP!

"HUH! Do they call this thing a film?" Edward Oswald Handforth spoke with utter scorn, and turned round in his seat in order to give Browne the benefit of his loud remark. For some strange reason, Browne did not seem to appreciate it.

Perhaps this was due to the fact that Handforth had made a habit of this revolting business. Browne and Stevens hadn't had a minute's peace since they entered the picture theatre. From the very first moment, Handforth had generously given them the benefit of his criticism, and he had taken no trouble to lower his voice.

"Do they call this thing a film?" he repeated disgustedly. "St. Frank's is ten times better than this! It's—it's a libel! It doesn't show any of the Remove chaps. And I'm not in it at all!"

Browne sighed.

"We paid two-and-fourpence in order to be exclusive, Brother Horace," he exclaimed.

"and we find ourselves in this atmosphere of disorder and discontent. I fear we have to thank Brother William——"

"Not likely," put in Willy. "I didn't know Ted was here. It's just our bad luck."

"Your what?" snorted his major, standing up in his seat. "Just let me reach you, you little rotter——"

"While appreciating the brawn of your manly form, Brother Ted, I must confess that its obtrusion between myself and the screen does not improve my general comfort," said Browne smoothly. "Brother Church, be good enough to remember your duty. Brother McClure, ditto. As keepers, you are sadly lacking in discipline."

"Keepers!" breathed Handforth. "Do you think I'm a lunatic?"

"The meanest of us have a right to our thoughts, Brother Handforth," replied Browne smoothly. "But do I perceive a mountainous attendant in the offing? It would grieve me to see you summarily ejected."

Handforth settled down in his seat again, and found himself grabbed by Church and McClure, who sat on either hand—and who had been awakened, by Browne's words, to a sense of their duty.

"Chuck it, old man," urged Church. "Give the poor chaps a bit of rest. The film isn't half so bad as you make out, either."

"It's jolly good," said McClure.

As a matter of fact, the other St. Frank's fellows shared McClure's opinion—with the single exception of Handforth. The film was interesting in the extreme, for it gave some excellent exterior views of the famous school, with peaceful glimpses of the various Houses, the old clock tower, the inner court, the playing fields, and other celebrated spots. Handforth's grumbles appeared to be based upon the fact that he, himself, had been left out of the picture.

"You can say what you like—it's a dud film!" he said flatly. "An absolute frost! Look at that now! The Ancient House, with those grinning apes, Chambers and Bryant, of the Fifth! Not a Remove chap in sight!"

Church and McClure forbore any comment. Undoubtedly, Chambers and Bryant of the Fifth were grinning, but this fact only added to the charm of the film. And the Ancient House was shown splendidly.

Immediately in front of Handforth sat two boys of about his own age—strangers to him, and therefore to be regarded with suspicion. They had been taking an animated interest in the picture from the first.

"Shure, and I'm after thinking the ould school is a fine place," observed one of these youngsters, with a decided Irish brogue. "We've got better in Ireland, but for this country, it's not so bad. Faith, what do ye think, Van?"

"I'll agree that it's a fine place, Terry," said the other boy, nodding. "A lot better than I thought. Hallo! What's this? The Junior Pavilion! H'm! Rather a disappointment."

"Faith, it's no bigger than a hut!" agreed the Irish boy.

"By George!" breathed Handforth, over their shoulders.

"Is it speaking to me, ye are?" asked the Irish boy.

"Eh? Yes, rather!" said Handforth grimly. "It's like your giddy nerve to run St. Frank's down. Or the film, either! It's one of the best pictures I've seen for years! In fact, it's the finest picture in the world!"

"That's not quite the same as you were saying five minutes ago, is it?" smiled one of the strangers, looking round. "You were running St. Frank's down on your own account——"

"I'm a St. Frank's chap, and I can run it down as much as I like!" retorted Handforth firmly. "But when I hear a blessed outsider calling our pavilion a hut, I'm going to biff him in the eye unless he apologises."

"Steady, Handy!" murmured Church.

"You can't biff people about in public places!" urged McClure hastily. "Besides, you started the argument, didn't you? Chuck it, old man!"

Numerous glares were being bestowed upon Handforth from his nearest neighbours. Fortunately, they were nearly all St. Frank's fellows.

"Can't you keep that ass quiet?"

"Smother him, somebody!"

"Gag him!"

"We can't enjoy the show!"

"You see, Brother Handforth, how much you are disturbing the general peace," murmured Browne, bending forward. "I have no wish to be critical, but it appears to me that you owe these strangers an apology."

"An apology!" gasped Handforth.

"Undoubtedly. It was you who threatened——"

"Well, they shouldn't run St. Frank's down!" broke in Handforth indignantly. "Any stranger who dares to——"

"Wisht! Aisy, now!" broke in the Irish boy. "Shure, and it's a spalpeen ye are for talking. We both belong to St. Frank's—although it's ignorant ye are of the fact."

"St. Frank's is our school, you know," explained the other boy.

Handforth glared at them warmly.

"You—you spoofing bounders!" he panted. "Don't I keep telling you that we're St. Frank's chaps? We've never seen you before——"

"That's aisy," interrupted one of the pair. "This is my friend, Herbert Vandyke, of South Africa. And I'm Terence O'Grady, of Ireland. And it's both in the St. Frank's Fourth Form we are."

"Or will be when the new term starts," said Vandyke, smiling.

"Jolly pleased to meet you," said Church and McClure simultaneously. "We're in the Remove, you know. It's the same as the Fourth, really, only we board in different houses."

Handforth underwent a quick change.

"Oh, well, of course," he said heartily, "that's different! Why the dickens didn't you say so before? An Irish chap, eh? Jolly glad to welcome you, my son. And an African, too! That is topping——"

"You'll be after offending Van if you call him an African," chuckled Terry O'Grady. "He's an Afrikander."

"What's the difference?" asked Edward Oswald, as he shook hands.

"Faith, and I can't see a lot—but Van can!" smiled the Irish boy. "We're staying together at my uncle's, and we're both booked for St. Frank's."

Later on, Jerry Dodd introduced Alec Duncan. In fact, the juniors remained outside the picture theatre for some little time, chatting and making appointments for the immediate future. Even Browne was greatly interested, and solemnly shook hands with the three new fellows.

"It delights my old heart to see this concrete evidence of the Empire spirit," he said benevolently. "The far-flung outposts of Greater Britain have contributed two new lambs to the fold. It can scarcely be said that Ireland is far-flung—although it is doubtless fond of its own fling."

"Ireland's all right!" said Jerry Dodd, nodding.

Terry O'Grady grinned, and remarked that he was after thinking that Jerry Dodd knew what he was talking about.

Terry was typically Irish in appearance, with merry, twinkling eyes, and an engaging manner which attracted immediately.

Herbert Vandyke, the Afrikander, was of a different type, being tall, lean, and browned, with dark hair and a Colonial air about him which was as distinctive as Jerry Dodd's.

"It's an unexpected pleasure to meet you fellows here," he was saying. "We only came to look at the St. Frank's film—so that we could get a kind of pre-view. I'm glad we shall have an Australian there—and a Canadian, too."

"We may safely say that the Empire Circle is complete," observed Browne. "Ah, brothers, an idea! A typical Browne brainwave! Let me suggest the formation of this circle. It will be a distinct acquisition to the numerous junior clubs of St. Frank's."

"It's not a bad idea," said Nipper, nodding. "Let me see, Jerry Dodd, Australia; Alec Duncan, New Zealand; Terence O'Grady, Ireland; Herbert Vandyke, South Africa; Clive Russell, Canada; Hussi Kahn, India. By Jove! We shall certainly have the Empire well represented in the Lower School."

"Splendid," beamed Browne. "Let me give you my blessing, brothers, and then let me depart. I shall take pleasure in renewing your acquaintance at a later date. For the moment, urgent business demands my presence elsewhere. You would not have half London at a standstill by detaining me, would you?"

He and Stevens went off, and the juniors, led by Dick Hamilton, took the three new fellows off for lunch. It was felt that nothing less than a sumptuous feed would fit the occasion.

William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens returned to Regent's Park well satisfied with their little jaunt. And when they arrived they found a visitor at the house in the person of Sir Rufus Browne, K.C.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONSULTATION.

ALTHOUGH the Fifth Form captain had only spoken in a general sort of way, when telling Mrs. Stevens of his father's interest in the case, Sir Rufus Browne knew most of the facts.

He had been present at that memorable first night. He had witnessed Horace Stevens' indignant outburst. And his son, moreover, had fully explained to him the manner in which the play had been produced by the schoolboys, weeks earlier.

In short, Sir Rufus was quite convinced that Barton was a rogue, and that Mrs. Stevens was the victim of his treachery. William Napoleon had left no shred of doubt in his father's mind.

And the famous K.C. had undertaken the case because it interested him—and because he wanted to see justice done. Unless a man of his standing appeared for Mrs. Stevens there was little hope of success.

The legal machinery was already in motion, and Sir Rufus' great influence had made an early hearing of the case possible. But the other side was not taking things tamely. Sir Donald Bance was a man whose reputation was not much inferior to Sir Refus' own. And Sir Donald had been briefed by Mr. Samuel Arrowsmith—the millionaire theatre-owner who had presented the stolen play.

Sir Rufus was talking quietly with Stevens' mother when the two Fifth-Formers entered.

He merely acknowledged them, and went on talking. Sir Rufus was a tall, impressive-looking gentleman, and it was easy to understand how William Napoleon got his coolness and assurance.

"You may rest quite content, Mrs. Stevens, that I am perfectly satisfied regarding your husband's authorship of the play," he was saying. "My son has left me no loophole for doubt on that point. Your own statements, too, are sufficient in themselves. Unfortunately, I am not the one who matters. We must convince a jury—in face of clever and studied opposition. Barton is going to fight, and Arrowsmith is backing him. They will battle hard in order to retain possession of this play."

"But I don't see how they can have the amazing effrontery to maintain their claims in a Court of Law!" protested Mrs. Stevens. "My husband wrote the play years ago. There's no question of it. There's no mistake about it. Except for the title and the names, the whole play is exactly the same. Horace will tell you. He saw it——"

"Yes, yes—quite so!" interrupted Sir Rufus gently. "But that doesn't advance us very far, Mrs. Stevens. You must remember that Barton is a man of cunning and resource. He stole this play like any common burglar. He will not hesitate to commit perjury in the witness-box in order to maintain his rights of ownership. He will lie like a trooper. He will probably bring bribed witnesses to his aid. We must be prepared for every possible move on Barton's part. And our strongest possible line is to produce some certain evidence that 'The Whirlpool' is merely another name for 'The Third Chance.' Once we convince the jury of that, the verdict will be ours."

"We've only got to tell the truth, sir," said Stevens eagerly.

Sir Rufus shook his head, and his son sighed.

"Such childish innocence!" murmured William Napoleon Browne.

Handforth saw Archie Glenthorne lounging elegantly near the entrance to the cinema. "Hallo! How goes it?" Edward Oswald asked cheerfully as he slapped the swell of the St. Frank's Remove on the back with a force that sent his shiny topper flying and knocked half the wind out of him.

"Unfortunately, it is not always the truth which emerges triumphant," said Sir Rufus quietly. "A desperate man like Barton will lie so consistently that the cleverest counsel will find it impossible to trip him up. And this particular case, although so trifling at first glance, is really a most difficult one. If Barton can bring evidence to prove that the play is actually his—faked evidence will serve quite well if it can convince the jury—we shall not have a leg to stand on. Our course is to attack. And I want something concrete if I can get it."

"You mean one of my husband's old diaries, with an entry concerning this play," suggested Mrs. Stevens.

"I am afraid that would be of little value," replied the famous K.C. "You see, the title is different, and a mere reference to the play would mean nothing. Barton will not dispute the fact that your husband wrote 'The Third Chance.' His policy will be to swear that 'The Whirlpool' is quite another play, and entirely his own work. So

a mere reference in a diary would be valueless."

"Yes, I see what you mean," admitted Mrs. Stevens.

"We must have something more solid than that," continued Sir Rufus. "Of course, if we are ready to burst a bombshell in the enemy camp, we need the original manuscript—that would wipe out their case in less than ten minutes. But Billy tells me that it was this script which was stolen."

"Yes, that is the terrible part of it."

"You took the actual original to St. Frank's with you?" asked Sir Rufus, turning to Stevens. "The play in your father's own handwriting?"

"Yes, sir," replied Stevens ruefully. "And all the parts, too. All sorts of matter dealing with the play, you know. In fact, everything. Barton must have got hold of them, or he couldn't have produced the play. They were the only copies in existence."

"Dear, dear, that's bad," said Sir Rufus, frowning. "And we can produce no jot or tittle of evidence that Barton broke into the school and took these documents away. H'm! I am afraid this is serious. Isn't there anything else? Another copy of the play? A typewritten re-production?"

"Not that I know of, sir," replied Stevens. "And the original's destroyed by this time, of course. Barton wouldn't keep it a minute after he'd copied it."

"Naturally not," said Sir Rufus. "But surely, surely there must be something among your later husband's papers, Mrs. Stevens? It will pay us to make a thorough search. A single page, even, would be of immense value. A duplicate sheet of the original, perhaps? Most playwrights throw aside pages of their work here and there——"

Mrs. Stevens interrupted, and explained the tragedy of the lost boxes. Those boxes had contained treble the evidence now needed—but, owing to a foolish blunder, they had been lost—destroyed. At the time, it had seemed a mere annoyance—the destruction of old papers which were valueless except from a sentimental point of view. It was the irony of fate that they should now prove to be worth a great fortune!

"I am concerned by this news," said Sir Rufus, at length. "I was hoping for something better. But you must not despair, Mrs. Stevens. We will prove your rightful claim to the play."

"It will be perfectly easy, pater," said Browne smoothly. "You apparently overlook the fact that this play was produced in Bellton privately—in Brother Noggs' theatre. Various brothers and sisters of St. Frank's and the Moor View School played the parts. They are all willing witnesses for this case. They will enter the box, and give their evidence soundly. And let me remind you that this private production took place weeks before the presentation of 'The Whirlpool.' Let Burglar Barton lie as he may, he can never smash down the wall of truth that we shall build up."

"You seem very confident, Billy, and I'm hanged if you don't instil the same confidence into me," smiled his father. "We shall have to get this man Noggs up to London. He will be a valuable witness. You think he will be willing to come?"

"I shall command him!" replied Browne simply.

"And these boys and girls you referred to?"

"I have but to breathe a word, and they will hurl themselves into the fray with the eagerness of hounds on the trail of a fox," replied William Napoleon smoothly. "Leave such matters in my hands, pater. You surely know that you could trust none so well?"

Sir Rufus chuckled.

"You are certainly an optimist, Billy," he remarked drily. "But I'm not sure about leaving these vitally important matters in your hands. We can't afford to take any chances. I shall see that this Mr. Noggs is secured as a witness. If necessary, he shall have a subpœna."

"Such a drastic measure will not be necessary, pater," replied William Napoleon. "Noggs is our willing slave. We have but to sound the call, and he will answer. I might mention, quite casually, that I telegraphed to him last night, and got his reply this morning. He has promised to be here on the morning when the case opens."

"You rascal!" said his father. "No wonder you were confident!"

"We can always trust your son to think of everything in advance, Sir Rufus," said Mrs. Stevens. "I think he must take after you. He is so cool—so resourceful—so capable."

Browne bowed.

"We are honoured, fair lady," he murmured. "Since words have apparently failed my father, I must needs acknowledge the compliment for us both."

CHAPTER IX.

ROGER BARTON PREPARES FOR ACTION.

MR. SAMUEL ARROWSMITH paced up and down his office agitatedly.

"The whole thing's an infernal worry, Morgan," he was saying. "The worst of it is, I am not absolutely sure of Barton. He swears he wrote the play, and I must confess I believe he did. But why should this woman bring the action if there's no truth in it?"

"Probably a mere coincidence," said the other man in the office. "They're always happening, Mr. Arrowsmith. Two authors get the same idea independently—and then there's trouble. That's how I look at it.

Just a mere coincidence, I believe. Mrs. Stevens may be acting in good faith, but we can't tell."

They were in the Emperor Theatre—in the sacred inner sanctum of Mr. Arrowsmith, the millionaire theatrical magnate. Morgan was one of his lawyers, closely associated with this pending lawsuit.

"The case is coming on to-morrow, eh?" went on Mr. Arrowsmith, jerking out his cigar case, and selecting a long smoke. "H'm! Quick work, Morgan—too quick for my liking."

"Well, it won't last long," replied the other. "I should think there'll be a decision before the afternoon."

"In our favour, of course?" asked Mr. Arrowsmith sharply.

"Naturally," replied Morgan. "This woman doesn't stand a chance."

"But don't forget that Sir Rufus Browne is her counsel——"

"Even Sir Rufus Browne, with all his reputation, will find himself up against a difficult opponent in Bance," replied the lawyer confidently. "We've had it all over with Mr. Barton, and we are absolutely confident. There's no reason why you should worry so much. This publicity is a good advert., isn't it?"

Mr. Arrowsmith grunted.

"It's not the kind of advertisement I like," he replied, frowning. "The play doesn't need any boosting, anyhow. It's the biggest success the theatre's ever known. And this lawsuit is only giving us an unsavoury tang. I'm uncertain about Barton, too. There's something about the man I don't like."

"Really?"

"Of course, this is quite confidential," went on Mr. Arrowsmith. "I may be wrong about the man, but my instinct isn't often at fault. There's nothing wrong with his play—it's a winner every time. But you can never tell with these authors and playwrights! They're a queer crowd!"

"No worse than women!" growled Mr. Morgan. "Take this Mrs. Stevens, for example. The widow of an unsuccessful playwright—full of fancies and suspicions. When it comes down to actual facts, I'll guarantee that her husband's play isn't anything like 'The Whirlpool.' The theme might be possibly the same—but that's about all. If it comes to that, hundreds of stories and plays are built upon the same theme."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Arrowsmith. "The woman must be crazy. Plenty of money, too, apparently, or she couldn't afford to brief a man like Sir Rufus Browne. And in my opinion there's been some jiggery-pokery, too. The whole thing has been rushed through at a tremendous speed."

"Browne's influence, of course," said the lawyer. "Everything's quite in order, you must understand, but there is not the slightest doubt that Sir Rufus is taking a very special interest in the case. He isn't merely an ordinary K.C. He's something bigger. But Bance will be equal to him. Those people can never prove their ridiculous contentions."

"Why, the other side admits that the play isn't called by the same title, and that all the characters have got different names," growled Mr Arrowsmith. "It's obviously a misunderstanding. Why, in the name of wonder, can't these things be settled out of court? Think of the expenses."

A tap sounded at the door, and one of Mr Arrowsmith's assistants looked in.

"Mr. Barton, sir," he said.

"Good! Show Mr Barton in."

The millionaire gave Morgan a quick glance, and prepared for Roger Barton's entry. It was quite obvious that Barton had completely fooled the Emperor Theatre management, and its advisers. They honestly believed that he was the author of the play. But Barton had not fooled Mr. Arrowsmith regarding his personal character. The great man instinctively disliked this mushroom playwright—who had been unknown a few weeks earlier. But he was the author, and therefore a man to be dealt with diplomatically.

"Ah, Mr. Barton, thank you for coming round so promptly," said Mr. Arrowsmith, shaking hands. "I think Mr. Morgan wants you to accompany him to Sir Donald Bance's chambers. Just a little conference, I believe."

Roger Barton nodded.

"Nothing could suit me better," he replied. "I have brought a considerable amount of evidence along," he added, with a smile, indicating an attache-case. "This case won't last more than an hour, in my opinion. It's a ridiculous business, anyhow. Infernally disconcerting, too."

There was a great change in Roger Barton. Not so many weeks ago, when he had been manager for Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs, he had looked smart and businesslike. He still looked businesslike, but his smartness had developed into an absolute Adonis-like mania. From tip to toe he was gorgeous—arrayed in the finest triumphs of Savile Row. He simply exuded prosperity.

As a matter of fact, his unexpected success had got into his head. He was already handling sums of money the like of which had never before burned his pockets. He had spent all his life in the theatre—mostly with touring companies, up and down the country. It had always been more or less of a struggle, and he had deemed himself lucky to possess a fiver over and above his current expenses.

But the sensational production of "The Whirlpool" had lined his purse with undreamed of wealth. And there was every prospect that he would continue to draw colossal royalties. It wasn't an expensive show to stage, and the profits were huge. Mr. Arrowsmith was convinced of a two-years' run, and no less than four touring

companies were already being put into rehearsal.

Roger Barton was determined to fight like grim death to retain his grip on the stolen play. Possession was nine points of the law, and he was ready to go to the limit. Arrowsmith was financing him now—paying the expenses of the defence. For the producer was compelled to back up his author.

"There's nothing to worry about, Mr. Arrowsmith," continued Barton. "We'll soon polish off this crazy claim."

"Your confidence is encouraging, Mr. Barton," said the other. "I hope you can produce something of a concrete nature——"

"Just wait a minute," interrupted Barton, smiling.

He snapped open his attache-case, and brought out some bundles of paper. He placed one of these on the table.

"Here's the original script of the play," he said. "Not the copy you have previously seen—that was typewritten. This is the original—with all my pencilled alterations. Just glance through it."

Mr. Arrowsmith turned over the dog-eared leaves.

"Sir Donald will be interested in this," he commented, with satisfaction.

"And in these, too," said Barton, untying a tape. "Here are my scribbled notes, Mr. Arrowsmith—the actual embryo of the play. They cover many months of thought, and quite a number are dated."

"Convincing—quite convincing," remarked Mr. Morgan, glancing at them. "At the same time, Sir Donald was hoping that you might be able to produce a witness—somebody who can testify to the fact that you wrote the play months ago——"

"That's all right," said Barton, smiling. "My good friend, Mr. Lister, is coming from Manchester to-day, in response to my recent letter. He was on the road with me for many months. Shared diggings with me in various towns. And I wrote most of this play in his company. He knows practically every character by heart, and every scene."

Barton's confidence was so infectious that both his listeners were impressed. It seemed impossible to suspect that all this evidence had been faked—and that Lister was a man in Barton's pay.

At the first indication of a lawsuit, Barton had received a nasty jolt. He knew that he had stolen the original script of Vincent Stevens' masterpiece. And he knew that it was the only copy in existence. He knew, furthermore, that Mrs. Stevens was in no position to defend her rights. So the original injunction had come upon him as a shock—and the knowledge that Sir Rufus Browne was handling the case came as an additional bombshell.

But his momentary panic had passed, and he was full of assurance. He knew how difficult it would be to prove his guilt. There was no shred of evidence that he had stolen the play, and no evidence that it had ever been in Horace Stevens' possession. The testimony of the St. Frank's boys would be valueless without something concrete to back it up. The judge and jury could think what they pleased—suspect what they pleased—but in a British court of justice it was necessary to prove one's claim before judgment was passed. And Barton's faked evidence was sufficient, in his opinion, to wipe out anything that the opposition might put forward.

Barton had no qualms whatever. He was certain of victory.

CHAPTER X.

THE MORNING OF THE CASE.

"READY?" asked Willy Handforth briskly.

"Ages ago!" replied his sister Ena.

"If that wasn't a fib, I should want some water to revive me!" retorted Willy. "Why, you haven't got your hat on yet! We've got to buzz off, you know—or we shall never get in. Where's Ted?"

"I think he sneaked into the library for something," said Ena. "You needn't worry about my hat—it'll only take me a jiffy. What a lovely morning! It seems a pity to go and sit in a stuffy old police-court all day."

They were in the wide entrance-hall of Sir Edward Handforth's West End Mansion, and the hour was comparatively early. Breakfast, in fact, had only concluded a few minutes before.

"Police-court!" sniffed Willy. "What do you think this case is—a criminal one? We're going to the Law Courts, you duffer! It's a civil action."

"In that case it'll be a novelty for you!" said Ena coldly.

She walked off, leaving Willy to fathom her subtle meaning. He grinned, and marched into the library—having first assured himself that his father was still in the dining-room, buried in "The Times."

Edward Oswald Handforth was at the telephone.

"Oh, rot!" he was saying. "There must be a number! Just because I can't find it in the directory—— What? Here, I say! Hallo! Where the dickens have you got to——"

He hooked the receiver on with a grunt.

"These telephone people ought to be boiled!" he said, glaring at Willy. "I've been trying to get on to the Law Courts, and they won't give me the number!"

"What number?"

"The number of the Public Gallery."

"The what!" gasped Willy, staring. "What on earth have you been trying to do, Ted?"

"Book seats for this morning's case, of course," retorted Handforth. "I want two in the front row. I promised to take Irene, you grinning young ape! What's the matter with you? What's that hyena face for?"

Willy tapped his head significantly.

"Poor old Ted!" he said, with deep sympathy. "I don't blame you, old man—you can't help it. It must be awful to go through life with such a handicap. Something ought to be done about it."

Handforth turned red.

"Look here, you young ass!" he said thickly. "Are you trying to tell me that I'm dotty? For two pins, I'll——"

"Don't excite yourself!" interrupted Willy. "That's always a bad sign. You poor, pitiful chump! Do you think the Law Courts are like a theatre? Do you think you can ring up and book a couple of stalls?"

"I don't know about stalls, but they've got seats, I suppose?" asked Edward Oswald. "It's always better to book in advance——"

"You silly ass!" yelled Willy, exasperated. "We've got to take our chance—and the sooner we get there, the better. These Law Courts are only small places—and lots of them won't hold more than fifteen or twenty members of the public. If we're late, there's no chance at all. We might just as well try to get into Buckingham Palace, or Brixton Prison!"

"It wouldn't take you long to get into Brixton Prison, my lad," said his major coldly. "But you're mad! I always thought these courts were huge places, with hundreds of seats."

"You're probably thinking of the House of Commons," interrupted Willy. "It's easy enough to get a seat there, of course. You've only got to get a card from the pater, and it's done. But what's the good of going to the House of Commons? Who wants to be asleep all day?"

"Aren't you boys ever coming?" inquired a voice at the door. "I've been waiting for you, Ted——"

"Irene, by George!" breathed Handforth, with a leap.

Several other visitors had arrived, too—including the inevitable Juicy Lemon and Chubby Heath of the Third. They had all arranged to go to the Law Courts together.

At about the same time, other little parties were starting out from different parts of London. Dick Hamilton & Co., for example, from Grays Inn Road—Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey from the former's house in Duncan Square—Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent from Jermyn Street. It seemed that St. Frank's would be fully represented during the hearing of this case. The only problem was in connection with the seating accommodation.

And while the various groups of young people were converging on the Law Courts, Sir Rufus Browne, K.C., was quietly sitting in one of the inner chambers, conversing with Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs, the old showman.

Mr. Noggs had only arrived that morning, and it was not necessary to put him in possession of the facts. He knew everything. William Napoleon had seen to that. And Mr. Noggs was indignant.

"We'll make short work of this varlet, never fear, sir," he declared, in his booming voice. "By the ghost of Garrick! Barton could no more write a play than I could swim the Channel!"

"That may be so, but it really fails to affect our case," said Sir Rufus gently. "We have got to prove that this play is not his work, but the work of Mr. Vincent Stevens. It won't be so easy, Mr. Noggs."

The old showman breathed hard.

"We shall win," he said confidently. "'They can conquer who believe they can'—Emerson. This reptile, Barton, attempted to rob me of my world's possessions. I can give evidence that will prove his villainy. I can explain how he planned and plotted——"

"One moment, Mr. Noggs," interrupted Sir Rufus. "Such evidence will not be admitted, I am afraid. We cannot submit any facts concerning Barton's character. It will only be admissible if it is pertinent to the issue. I should like you, therefore, to confine your thoughts to the actual play."

Mr. Noggs shook his head.

"'I understand a fury in your words, but not the words'—Shakespeare," he said, in astonishment. "Why should not this man's villainy be exposed?"

"Because it would prejudice the case," said the K.C., smiling. "British justice, Mr. Noggs, does not admit of such methods."

"Then I have been wasting your valuable time," said Mr. Noggs regretfully. "My talk has been empty, and you are probably cursing me silently. 'Talk that does not end in any kind of action is better suppressed altogether'—Carlyle. I will therefore take my instructions, and do as you bid."

"It is possible that you will be called upon as a witness, Mr. Noggs," explained Sir Rufus. "This play was produced in your theatre, was it not?"

"It was."

"I shall merely question you, in the witness-box concerning the nature of the play, and various points of a similar character," continued Sir Rufus. "I shall only require you to give straightforward answers, Mr. Noggs. And when you are cross-examined, you need have no fear. You have but to stick to the truth, and it will be impossible for the other side to upset your statements."

Mr. Noggs stroked his bluey chin.

"I shall enjoy this," he said contentedly. "'No pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth'—Bacon. 'Let her and falsehood grapple—whoever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?'—Milton."

Sir Rufus smiled.

"Perhaps I might be permitted a quotation, too," he said. "'It seems to me that the simplest and most necessary truths are always the last believed'—Ruskin. So you must be very careful, Mr. Noggs. It is a regrettable fact that a good lie will sometimes break down the strength of a simple fact."

"'Truth is truth to the end of the reckoning'—Shakespeare," retorted Mr. Noggs firmly.

"With that, of course, I can do nothing but agree," replied Sir Rufus, who was already taking a great liking to the simple old showman. "You must try to think of every detail, Mr. Noggs. No incident will be too small. The smallest points may sometimes mean the hardest hits."

"I will remember," replied Mr. Noggs gravely. "'To a philosopher, no circumstance, however trifling, is too minute'—Goldsmith. Have no fear. We shall confuse this wretch. 'Men are led by trifles'—Napoleon."

They continued talking, and then Mrs. Stevens arrived, accompanied by her son. Sir Donald Bance was anxious for a short consultation with his rival, and there was a general air of quiet bustle.

The public, fortunately, took only a desultory interest in the case—or, more probably, the public knew nothing about it yet. So the St. Frank's and Moor View contingents were enabled to find room on the public benches. Every fellow and every girl who had acted in the play were there—and not a few others, in addition.

"My word, this is going to be thrilling!" whispered Doris Berkeley, her dark eyes sparkling. "Of course, there's no question about the result, is there? Mrs. Stevens is bound to win!"

"We mustn't think of anything else," breathed Reggie Pitt.

"Shall we have to go in the box?" murmured Irene.

"I expect so."

"How thrilling!" she replied delightedly.

"You wait till I get in the box!" put in Handforth, with no attempt to lower his voice. "I'll confuse these rotters! It won't take me two minutes to squash all the evidence. By George! Look there! That beast, Barton!"

He stood up, and glared at Roger Barton, who had just walked into the court, and taken a seat at the solicitors' table.

"Shush, you ass!"

"Dry up, Ted, or you'll be turned out!" murmured Willy.

"I'll dry up when I like!" retorted Handforth curtly.

"All right, old man—go ahead!" grinned Willy. "Do a bit of shouting. Then we shall be rid of you for good. The sooner these tragedies are over the better"

"You young bounder——"

"Silence in court!" boomed a gentleman from below.

"Please, Ted!" whispered Irene urgently.

That, of course, was sufficient. Handforth merely bestowed a final glare upon his minor, and relapsed into silence. The entire personnel of St. Frank's could ask him to dry up, and he would be noisier than ever. But a whisper from Irene was tantamount to a royal command.

CHAPTER XI.

SIR RUFUS OPENS THE CASE.

IT seemed to the juniors that the opening proceedings were extremely tedious and unnecessary. There were all sorts of consultations, all manner of delays, and nothing seemed to be done.

And the necessity for silence was irksome. Poor old Handforth was in great danger of bursting a blood-vessel, particularly when his minor made various whispered remarks concerning him. To be denied the privilege of raising his voice was torture to Edward Oswald.

But at last something happened.

Sir Rufus Browne, in fact, opened the proceedings for the plaintiff. The plaintiff, of course, was Mrs. Stevens, since she had brought this action. And Roger Barton was the defendant.

There was a special jury, and the judge was a very eminent personage. Sir Rufus' opening speech was quiet and dignified, and rather too unexciting to suit the taste of the youthful listeners. But it was an improvement on the prefacing remarks of his junior counsel.

"We suggest that 'The Whirlpool' is merely 'The Third Chance' under another title," continued Sir Rufus quietly. "This play was written some years ago by the plaintiff's husband, Mr. Vincent Stevens, and until recently it was in the possession of their son, at school. It is necessary, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, that I should give you a full account of the happenings which took place at this school—St. Frank's College, in Sussex. I shall call witnesses to prove these events at the right time."

"They have a direct bearing on the issue?" asked the judge.

"A very direct bearing," replied Sir Rufus, nodding. "In fact, it will be impossible to form any judgment unless these facts are given in detail. At the time of which I speak—some weeks ago—a small travelling theatre pitched in the village of Bellton, near St. Frank's College. This theatre was—and is—owned by Mr Andrew Noggs, and was managed by the defendant, Mr. Roger Barton. It is important that you should remember that the defendant was closely associated with this travelling theatre."

"Now we're getting along!" murmured Horace Stevens.

"Hush, brother!" breathed William Napoleon Browne. "Whilst feeling that I could handle the case better than my pater, I must nevertheless admit that he is doing admirably."

"It was only natural that the boys of the school should become interested in this travelling theatre," pursued Sir Rufus. "They not only attended various performances, but persuaded Mr. Noggs to let them use his theatre for their own productions. It was at about this time that the plaintiff's son remembered his father's play, 'The Third Chance.' Kindly bear in mind, gentlemen of the jury, that young Stevens had kept this play hidden in his own trunk. He had not even spoken of it to his own personal friends—until now. One of these personal friends—who will presently be called as a witness—persuaded him to have the play performed in Mr. Noggs' theatre."

"That means me, Brother Horace," murmured Browne. "Alas, I am merely referred to as 'a personal friend.' It appears that the limelight is cut off at the main to-day."

"Shut up, you chump!" whispered Stevens.

"This private performance of 'The Third Chance' was duly given," said Sir Rufus, "and all the characters were undertaken by these schoolboys and their girl friends."

He glanced round the court.

"I think the members of the cast are with us now," he added, smiling "The play was given fully, without any omissions or alterations—exactly as the plaintiff's husband had written it. And, my lord, you will kindly remember that the defendant was present—being, in fact, the business manager of this travelling theatre. You will appreciate the importance of this circumstance."

"Quite—quite," agreed the judge—Lord Riggindale.

Willy descended the stairs by the simple expedient of slithering down the outer rail. An old gentleman was just getting out, and Willy's foot took him fairly in the small of the back.

"I protest, my lord," interrupted Sir Donald Bance, rising. "I suggest that this account of the events near the school are quite irrelevant."

"I am sorry, Sir Donald, but I cannot uphold your protest," said the judge.

"Good!" said Handforth firmly.

The judge gave him a severe look, and various be-gowned and be-wigged gentlemen glanced at the culprit balefully.

"Oh, sorry!" gasped Handforth. "I—I forgot!"

"Silence in court!"

"The defendant, let me repeat, witnessed this special performance of 'The Third Chance,'" proceeded Sir Rufus. "Shortly after this, he severed his association with Mr. Noggs, and almost immediately the play, 'The Whirlpool,' was put into rehearsal in London. I suggest that the defendant not only founded his own play upon 'The Third Chance,' but that he actually gained possession of the script, and copied it word for word."

"Hear, hear!" breathed Willy, nodding.

"What rot!" muttered his major. "What's the good of suggesting it? It's an absolute fact! Didn't I catch the rotter sneaking about the Ancient House in the middle of the night? Didn't I grab one of his overcoat-buttons? By George, that's a point! If we can only prove——"

"Oh, Ted, you mustn't talk!" murmured Irene.

Sir Rufus proceeded to state the facts with telling effect. He recounted everything that had a bearing upon the play. And he laid particular stress upon the fact that Roger Barton had seen the play in Noggs' Theatre, had then gone away, and had afterwards offered a play to the Emperor Theatre.

It was also important to remember that Horace Stevens had missed his original script very soon afterwards. A search had failed to bring it to light. In fact, that script had completely vanished, and no trace of it had since been discovered.

To the listening juniors, it seemed that Sir Donald Bance would be quite unable to rebut his rival's suggestions. It was as clear as daylight, to anybody with a grain of common sense, that Barton had stolen the play, and sold it under a new title.

But the fellows overlooked one important point. No matter how things looked, it was necessary to prove the defendant's guilt to the satisfaction of the jury. They could give no decision unless that proof was forthcoming. At least, they would be compelled to bring in a verdict for the defendant.

Everything certainly seemed cut and dried—a clear case which could have but one result. Barton had never written a play previously. He had no reputation as a playwright. For years he had been associated entirely with the business side of the theatre. Was it not remarkable that he should suddenly write a play which was obviously the work of an experienced, brilliant playwright?

This was a telling point, and the jury was undoubtedly impressed. There were other points of a similar character, and Sir Rufus Browne made the most of them. When, at last, he sat down, there was a feeling of confidence among the St. Frank's fellows.

"We've only to give our evidence in the box, and old Barton will be squashed!" declared Reggie Pitt. "Wait till Browne gets there! He produced the play, and he'll tell the court a few things!"

"I shouldn't be too sure, if I were you," murmured Nipper. "I don't want to be pessimistic, but you've only heard one side yet. The defence hasn't come here unprepared, mark my words. I've been in these courts before."

There was a bit of a lull, and whispers were possible.

"But surely, Dick, they can't do anything?" asked Mary Summers, who was sitting beside Nipper. "We're all ready to go into the witness-box and swear that the two plays are one and the same! We acted in it—and then we saw it at the Emperor Theatre, afterwards. There's nothing been altered except the names."

Nipper shook his head.

"Well, I may be wrong, but I wouldn't like you to be too optimistic—that's all," he replied. "Barton was prepared for all this. He knew it would come. And you can be jolly sure he's got a plausible tale up his sleeve. He'll deny all knowledge of Stevens' play, and ridicule the suggestion that he stole it."

"But we can prove that his play's just the same!" argued Mary.

"How can we?" asked Nipper. "We can swear on oath that the speaking parts are the same, but we can't produce any real evidence. Stevens' manuscript has been destroyed, and there isn't another copy of it in existence. Our testimony won't be enough, I'm afraid."

"Shush!" murmured Tommy Watson. "Something's going to happen."

He was right. Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs was entering the witness-box.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. NOGGS IN THE BOX.

HAVING been duly sworn, the old showman was ready for the fray.

He made quite an impressive figure in the box; his long hair resting nearly upon his shoulders, and his old-fashioned attire emphasised by his surroundings. These were prosperous days for Mr. Noggs—for, owing to the efforts of the St. Frank's fellows before the holidays, his theatre was doing big business.

"You were present, Mr. Noggs, when these schoolboys produced their play in your theatre?" asked Sir Rufus Browne.

"I was, sir."

"You witnessed the whole show?"

"Not one word did I miss," replied Mr. Noggs. "In my wide experience, I have seldom seen a more magnificent work. I am a lover of Shakespeare, and I can assure you that——"

"You must confine yourself to counsel's questions," interrupted the judge severely.

"I stand corrected, sir," said Mr. Noggs, bowing.

"You have told us that you saw this performance, Mr. Noggs, and I should like you to assure the jury that you can remember it," said Sir Rufus. "It was a play which you could not easily forget?"

"It was a play I shall never forget."

"Have you witnessed 'The Whirlpool'?"

"As recently as last night."

"And what conclusion have you formed?"

"There is but one conclusion," replied Mr. Noggs. "Both plays are one and the same. Scene for scene, and word for word, they are identical. A theft has been committed. This arrant rascal, Roger Barton, has committed the foul deed of stealing another man's brains. An unspeakable act. 'A deed without a name'—Shakespeare."

Sir Donald Bance protested vigorously, and it was some moments before the flutter was over. Mr. Noggs was a rather difficult witness, for he insisted upon expressing his own opinions—which, of course, were quite out of order.

"You state, quite definitely, that 'The Third Chance' and 'The Whirlpool' are identical?" asked Sir Rufus.

"To all intents and purposes, yes, sir."

"Why do you say 'To all intents and purposes'?"

"Because the names are different."

"Otherwise the script is the same?"

"Precisely the same."

"Can you tell the jury if defendant was present in your theatre during the performance of 'The Third Chance'?"

"Yes, he was present," replied Mr. Noggs. "From the first rise of the curtain he stood watching. It was a special performance, produced entirely by the boys and girls from the schools. I see it now, particularly the acting of young Stevens. A wondrous actor, indeed! Who doubts that this play was written by the lad's father? Every word he knew by heart—not a mere amateur effort, but a masterly exhibition of genius. That boy has known this play for years. He has studied it in every shade and light. Not merely his own part, but every part. Who shall say that Roger Barton wrote this masterpiece? The words are the same—the scenes are identical——"

He was pulled up, and he shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"A thousand pardons," he said gravely. "I am inclined to become indignant. But I must remember where I am. 'I am a feather for every wind that blows'—Shakespeare."

Mr. Noggs' evidence was soon given, and Sir Donald Bance rose to cross-examine him. During all this time Roger Barton had sat quite calm and indifferent, smiling contemptuously at the evidence. But now a little stir was felt in the court, and the St. Frank's fellows became eager.

"You have said, Mr. Noggs, that you did not produce the play yourself?" asked Sir Donald smoothly.

"That is so, sir."

"It was, in fact, produced by one of the boys?"

"Yes."

"Did you witness their performance from first to last?" asked Sir Donald. "Think carefully, Mr. Noggs. Did you witness it from first to last, or merely drop in from time to time?"

"I may have been away for a few minutes once or twice——"

"Ah!" said Sir Donald triumphantly. "I beg of you to take notice of this, my lord. The witness has admitted that he only saw scraps of this play. And how long ago was it produced, Mr. Noggs?"

The old showman gave the exact date, and Sir Donald smiled.

"And you saw 'The Whirlpool' last night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir.

"And do you really expect to convince the jury, Mr. Noggs, that your memory is so good?" asked counsel. "Might it not be that the two plays have a certain slight similarity? I suggest that you have made a mistake——"

"Then away with your suggestions!" boomed Mr. Noggs indignantly. "By the shade of Sheridan, are you seeking to trap me? 'Oh, it is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant'—Shakespeare."

"You must not interpolate these quotations, sir!" said the judge severely.

Mr. Noggs bowed.

"I will endeavour to remember," he replied gravely. "But I fear that my own speech will be drab and dull. 'Variety is the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour'—Cowper."

A ripple of laughter went through the court, and the judge frowned.

"Really, Mr. Noggs, you are very trying," he said. "Excellent though your quotations may be, they possess no bearing upon this case. You must confine yourself to answering counsel's questions."

Sir Donald was looking grim.

"I suggest that you have made a mistake," he said coldly. "You did not produce 'The Third Chance,' and you did not even see the whole of the performance. I suggest, Mr. Noggs, that you are not competent to give evidence in this court."

"I strongly protest against that statement, my lord!" said Sir Rufus hotly. "My learned friend has no right to interpolate——"

The judge interposed, and the trifle was smoothed over.

"Let us not quibble and carp," said Mr. Noggs, from the witness-box. "What matters if I am slandered? Am I not accustomed to it? 'Slander, that worst of poisons, ever finds an easy entrance to ignoble minds'—Hervey."

"Really, Mr. Noggs!" protested the judge angrily.

"'A hit—a very palpable hit'—Shakespeare," murmured Mr. Noggs. "But I must remember where I am, and moderate my enthusiasm. Who questions that Roger Barton's name will not be enriched by this case? 'Men's evil manners live in brass—their virtues we write in water'—Shakespeare. Is there such a thing as justice in this world?"

"This witness is impossible!" stormed Sir Donald.

"'Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip'—Shakespeare," chuckled the old showman triumphantly. "I am too much for your cleverness."

But he was compelled to stand down from the witness-box—and there was such a buzz in the court that his lordship threatened to clear it. If Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs had not assisted the plaintiff's case much, he had certainly provided a refreshing interlude.

William Napoleon Browne was the next witness to be called, and the St. Frank's fellows groaned inwardly as they realised that they couldn't give him a cheer. It required tremendous fortitude to remain silent. Handforth, in fact, was bottling up so much supercharged emotion that he was growing redder and redder in the face. He was so accustomed to shouting at any and every opportunity that this enforced silence was a sheer torture to him.

"You are the boy, are you not, who produced 'The Third Chance' in Mr. Noggs' theatre?" asked Sir Rufus, after a few preliminary questions.

"Yes, sir—that is so," replied his son.

"Can you remember the play?"

"Perfectly."

"Can you produce the script and the parts?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Where are they?"

"That is impossible to say," replied Browne. "They were in Brother Stevens' possession, but he lost them. Their disappearance remains a mystery. Not," he added, "that any doubt exists in my own mind——"

"You must confine yourself to answering my questions," frowned Sir Rufus. "Did you see the first night of 'The Whirlpool'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see any similarity between the two plays?"

"There are not two plays," replied Browne calmly. "They are identical except in name and a few trivial details. Why should there be any doubt or question regarding this point?" he went on, regardless of the fact that he was out of order. "The script of 'The Third Chance' is missing, but that is nothing."

"I cannot allow——" began the judge.

"One moment, brother—one moment," interrupted Browne smoothly. "Perhaps I am guilty of base conduct, but the call of justice compels me to make a suggestion."

"You must not make any suggestions——"

"The whole crux of the case depends upon 'The Third Chance' and 'The Whirlpool' being one and the same," continued Browne. "Why let a trifle like court routine defeat the course of justice? I have a simple plan——"

"Be silent, sir!" thundered the judge furiously.

"A perfectly simple plan," said Browne imperturbably, while the court listened, horrified. "There is no script of 'The Third Chance,' but I take it that there is a script of 'The Whirlpool.' I suggest, my lord, that you send for a copy of the latter, and feast your eyes upon it. Meanwhile, the entire cast of 'The Third Chance' is in this court-room—and I have but to lift my finger to make them perform their tricks. That is to say, we will give the first act, word for word, precisely as we played it originally."

CHAPTER XIII.

BROWNE'S AMAZING SUGGESTION.

SIR RUFUS BROWNE was angry with his son for defying all the etiquette of a court of justice. Browne knew better than this. He had done it deliberately—with a full knowledge of his "crime." Sir Donald Bance was fairly quivering with rage.

"I appeal to you, my lord!" he shouted. "This boy is converting the whole dignity of the court into a travesty——"

"I appreciate your windiness, Brother Bance," interrupted Browne benevolently. "Is not every rule subject to an exception? Instead of dragging this case out for days, why not settle it forthwith? What could be fairer? You maintain that there are two plays—I declare there is one. Apply the test, and nobody can grumble. The script of 'The Third Chance' has vanished—but it remains, invisibly imbedded in the minds of these youthful actors and actresses," he added, indicating the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls by a wave of his hand.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Browne!"

"We're game!"

There was such confusion that the judge forthwith adjourned the court—for he was quite flustered, and felt that something drastic was essential. He could not remember such irregularities as this. In any case, it was lunch-time, so the tension was relaxed.

"Confound you, Billy, what is the matter?" stormed Sir Rufus, as he grabbed hold of William Napoleon. "Haven't you got more sense than to defy——"

"One moment, pater," interrupted Browne, with dignity. "It is possible that I have outraged your sense of fitness, but I venture to suggest that I have impressed Brother Riggindale to no small extent."

"The judge will have nothing to do with such irregularities——"

"Perhaps not, pater, but one never knows," replied Browne smoothly. "In the ordinary course of events I could not have made such a suggestion—so I forced the opportunity. What a chance! Why deliberately neglect it? All these fellows are ready to speak their parts. The judge has merely to compare them with the script of Barton's alleged play, and the defence goes phut! You see the point?"

His father took a deep breath.

"By Jove, I see the point, but for sheer audacity, Billy, you take my breath away," he exclaimed, cooling down. "Upon my word, it is undoubtedly a brilliant suggestion. But it won't be permitted. It won't be allowed for a moment. We can't count——"

"And yet," murmured Browne dreamily, "methinks I saw a certain twinkle in his lordship's eye. Who knows? It is even possible that he may develop a grain of common sense after a comfortable luncheon. Such cases are not entirely unknown."

Outside the court, the St. Frank's juniors and the Moor View girls were all talking at once, for they all had a tremendous lot to say—the greater part of which had been bottled up for hours.

"That suggestion of Browne's is a giddy brain-wave!" said Nipper enthusiastically. "I've got an idea the judge will throw aside all custom, and admit the evidence. Lord Riggindale is famous for his unconventional ways, you know. He's the one judge to do it."

Reggie Pitt looked dubious.

"But isn't it a bit too thick?" he asked. "It's totally opposed to all precedent, you know. The opposing counsel would protest like the dickens, too."

"Why?" demanded Handforth. "What's he got to protest against? Hasn't he said that there are two plays? If that's the case, we shall prove it in two minutes if 'The Third Chance' is different to 'The Whirlpool.'"

"But they're not different, Ted," said Irene Manners. "That's why Sir Donald will protest."

Handforth stared.

"But isn't he here to see justice done?" he asked blankly.

"Poor, innocent, old Handy," grinned Nipper. "Sir Donald is here to look after Barton's interests, and if he thinks this scheme will wreck his client's case, he'll protest to the last limit."

"But supposing the judge insists?"

"Then he may have to submit," replied Nipper. "The case has taken a rummy turn—mainly because of old Browne's audacity. The way he stood there in the witness-box and kept on talking was the richest thing I've seen for years."

"We shall have to get back into our places as soon as ever we can," said Willy thoughtfully. "There were reporters in the court, you know, and they'll have the papers out in ten minutes. 'Great Sensation in the Law Courts!' There'll be a crowd here for the afternoon show!"

"Something in that," admitted Nipper, nodding. "We don't want to be squashed out, do we? Not that there's much fear. Most of us will be required as witnesses, sooner or later."

Another conversation was going on at this moment between Sir Donald Bance and Mr. Roger Barton. Barton was obviously agitated — and Sir Donald couldn't help being impressed.

"Is there any chance of this outrageous suggestion being put into practice?" Barton was asking. "Good heavens, Sir Donald, do you think the judge will allow it?"

"Are you afraid?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Barton hastily.

"It's always difficult to know exactly what Lord Riggindale will do," said Sir Donald, stroking his smooth chin. "Perhaps it would be an excellent idea to encourage the plan?"

"Encourage it!"

"Why not?" asked Sir Donald. "Your play is totally dissimilar to 'The Third Chance,' so the matter would be quickly settled—and the point would tell enormously against the plaintiff."

Barton gulped.

"Yes—yes, of course," he panted. "I—I see your point."

Inwardly, he was in a ferment of alarm. For, of course, he knew that he would be utterly destroyed if those boys spoke their parts in the hearing of the judge and jury. For he had stolen the play, word for word! There could be only one result if—— But wait!

Barton's cunning brain was already getting to work. Perhaps there would be a loophole. Perhaps he could even strengthen his own case by admitting the unconventional evidence. It would mean another witness. But there was no reason why he

WILLY says :—

"I've always said it's what was needed—more scope, and all that. Everybody agrees with me, of course!"

If you can't make out what Willy is driving at, you will see—

NEXT WEEK!

couldn't get one.

"I see your point, Sir Donald," he repeated, making up his mind with desperate speed. "But are you sure that this is a genuine affair? I have every reason to know that young Browne is a resourceful boy. His coolness is colossal. And he is full of ideas. This may be merely a trick to thwart us."

They talked for some time, Sir Donald becoming amazed, and then deeply concerned. Now and again he looked suspicious, too. It seemed as though he did not fully trust his client. But he could not throw up the case because of this.

It was obvious, however, that something was on the move. There was a good deal of bustling about, and quite a lot was accomplished before the court reassembled.

The St. Frank's fellows and their companions secured their seats—but a lot of people were unable to get in. It was already becoming known that this case was unusually interesting.

There was an imperturbable expression on Lord Riggindale's face as he entered the court—but those who knew him best were on the alert. Whenever he contemplated anything unusual, he always looked calm and half asleep. He took his seat, and the court prepared to resume.

"Since adjourning the court, gentlemen of the jury, I have been thinking things over," said the judge quietly. "Strange as the last witness's suggestion may seem, it is nevertheless a practical idea. I am inclined to waive a certain amount of formality, and suggest to our learned friends, Sir Donald Bance and Sir Rufus Browne, that the course should be adopted."

He looked inquiringly at the counsel.

"I raise no objection, my lord," said Sir Rufus promptly.

"By all means, apply this test, my lord," agreed Sir Donald readily. "My case is that there are two distinct and different plays, and I am not afraid of this so-called test. Let it proceed."

"In the hope that you would be agreeable, I have had twelve copies of the first act of 'The Whirlpool' prepared," said the judge calmly. "These will be handed to the gentlemen of the jury, and they will thus be enabled to compare the spoken words of 'The Third Chance' with the written words of 'The Whirlpool.'"

"Good man!" breathed Handforth. "He's done it!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TEST.

SENSATIONAL, indeed, was the nature of this pronouncement.

Instead of allowing the usual procedure to take its course, the judge was determined to adopt William Napoleon Browne's audacious suggestion. He had, indeed, compelled twelve typists to work like machines during the luncheon interval, in order to get those copies of the first act prepared.

The issue was so simple.

The plaintiff maintained that Barton had stolen her husband's play. If so, the boys and girls would speak the exact lines of "The Whirlpool," and the jury would know what to do.

The defendant, on the other hand, held that there were two distinct plays. If this were true, the difference would be detected after the first few lines. It was a simple and direct method of deciding the issue.

The fact that it was unconventional made it all the more interesting. There was no possibility of the girls and boys having learned the parts of "The Whirlpool" since the court had been adjourned—for there had been insufficient time, and, in any case, they could not have gained access to the manuscript.

They had learned "The Third Chance"—and they would speak their parts of that play, and none other.

For some few minutes there was a bustle and stir in court, and the jurymen took their copies of the first act and glanced through them. In the meantime, the various members of the cast were placed in a cleared spot, which was made to serve as an improvised stage.

"Let the evidence proceed," said the judge, at length.

It proceeded.

Quietly, without any hesitation, two of the characters commenced talking—one of the St. Frank's fellows, and a Moor View girl. They knew their parts perfectly. At first they had feared that certain words might slip them, but they all came back as soon as they started talking. And the others knew their cues with scarcely a fault.

The judge and jury listened to the words, and compared them to the written play. For the judge, of course, was also provided with a copy.

"Upon my soul," murmured his lordship, after a few moments.

The jurymen were glancing at one another in astonishment and with grim understanding. For this test was indeed conclusive.

Except for the mere names, these boys and girls were speaking Roger Barton's play word for word. Horace Stevens took his cue at the right moment, and acted as though he were in a real theatre.

More than once the judge thought of stopping the "performance," but he did not do so. He was grimly determined that the test should be complete. The whole of the first act should be played.

Stevens completely forgot his surroundings. Being such a remarkable young actor, and knowing the play so perfectly, he became lost in the part. Within a minute of his "entrance" he was holding the whole

court enthralled. Even Roger Barton sat there, apparently numbed.

There was something gripping about Stevens' elocution—something magnetic about his delivery. Ordinarily, he was just a commonplace sort of senior schoolboy. But the very instant he started acting, his whole personality changed.

Learned legal gentlemen sat there, astounded. Stolid policemen and court ushers listened to this extraordinary scene with bated breath. Reporters worked overtime, in order to do justice to the sensation. And the first act of the play went on.

of emotional acting on Horace Stevens' part. There was something rather comical in Stevens' attitude at that moment—and something just a little pathetic, too. He finished, and stood there panting. And he looked round, dazed and momentarily bewildered. He had only just come back to reality. He was only just recalling the fact that he was in a court of justice.

And then the judge's voice sounded.

"I think, gentlemen of the jury, that the test has been fairly conclusive," he said gravely. "Sir Donald, if you have any suggestions to make I shall be glad to hear them. You realise, of course, that my plain

"Sorry, young gent, but there's no free admission," explained the hard-hearted attendant to Willy. "I can't let you in without a ticket."

At first Roger Barton had looked very pale, and Mrs. Stevens had felt, with a glow of happiness, that everything was going to be all right. But there was an ugly little glint in the corner of Barton's eye. And Sir Donald Bance himself was by no means perturbed.

Relentlessly, the judge allowed the thing to go on. There wasn't a word altered—except an occasional adjective, or some such unimportant trifle. The brilliant dialogue was unchanged. And Mrs. Stevens was amazed—startled—by the performance which her son gave. She had had no conception of his wonderful powers.

But at last the act ended—with a burst

duty is to advise the jury regarding their verdict?"

"We've won!" breathed Horace Stevens happily.

"Of course we've won!" chuckled Handforth. "I knew it all along. It's all over bar shouting now. They can't do a thing. It's as clear as daylight that this play is Mrs. Stevens' property.

"Good old Browne!"

"Rather! It was his brain-wave!"

Everybody agreed that the case was over. It had been a masterstroke on Browne's part. The verdict for Mrs. Stevens was not merely probable, but a certainty.

And then Sir Donald Bance exploded his mind.

"Since unconventional methods are the order of the day, I beg leave to utter a strong protest, my lord," he exclaimed. "On the face of it, it seems that the defendant has no case to place before the jury!"

"I am glad you have come to such a decision, Sir Donald," said the judge drily.

"But I suggest that this evidence has been deliberately faked!" thundered Sir Donald.

"Faked!" gasped Pitt.

"He's mad!" snorted Handforth, glaring.

"I shall require you to justify that statement, Sir Donald," said Lord Riggindale quietly. "What possible grounds have you for making such an accusation? You have maintained that 'The Whirlpool' is a totally different play to 'The Third Chance.' We have applied a test, and the result is so obvious that I fail to see——"

"I beg of you, my lord," interrupted counsel. "I still maintain that there are two plays. And I suggest that these boys and girls have been speaking the words of 'The Whirlpool' with the premeditated intention of defeating the ends of justice."

This was another sensation, indeed!

"Bear in mind the fact that the suggestion came, in the first place, from one of the boys," continued Sir Donald. "It has seemed very conclusive, but I can tear this fabric of falsehood to tatters in a very short time. I have another witness to produce."

"Where is this witness?" asked the judge sharply. "How can he alter the unmistakable conclusions——"

"I ask you not to be deceived by the clever trick which has been perpetrated—to the everlasting disgrace of the culprits," continued Sir Donald hotly. "I suggest that this plot has been prepared in advance. These boys have been primed, and were deliberately planted in the court with their female companions. I demand a continuation of the case. And I call Joseph Salter into the witness-box."

The whole court was humming with excitement. Sir Donald Bance was unquestionably sincere. He was no party to Roger Barton's fresh villainy. The rascal, desperate by reason of his danger, had resorted to a final masterstroke. And he had succeeded in convincing his counsel. The tale was a plausible one—and Sir Donald had seen no reason to doubt it.

Everybody in the court, from the judge downwards, was jumpy. They had thought the case to be practically over. But now there was the suggestion of a new witness—a hitherto unsuspected witness!

Joseph Salter entered the box.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOMBSHELL.

ALL eyes were turned upon the witness. He was nothing much to look at. A rather shabby man, weedy and pale. A straggling moustache drooped over his mouth, and his eyes were restless and shifty. He was nervous in the extreme, and clutched at the rail of the witness-box, and fought hard to control himself.

Sir Donald Bance rose, and fixed the witness with a steady eye. There was an air of triumph about him.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Joseph Salter, sir," muttered the man.

"Where do you work?"

"I'm a scene-shifter at the Emperor Theatre, sir."

"Speak up, my man—speak up!" commanded the judge sharply. "You mustn't mumble like that. Repeat those last words."

"I'm a scene-shifter at the Emperor Theatre, sir," said Salter, gaining courage, and steadying his voice.

"Now, Salter, I want you to answer my questions carefully and truthfully," went on Sir Donald. "You must remember that you are giving evidence on oath."

"Yes, sir," said the witness.

"Is there any boy in this court whom you have met before?" asked Sir Donald. "Look round carefully, and answer my question."

Salter looked round, and the court held its breath. All the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were startled and amazed. They hadn't the faintest idea what this all meant.

William Napoleon Browne became frigid when he noticed that Salter was concentrating his gaze upon him.

"I can see him, sir," said Salter.

"Point to the boy."

The stage hand pointed to Browne.

"Indeed?" said William Napoleon. "I must confess that I was not aware of the honour. Alas, the penalty of fame! So many people know me, and yet I do not know them!"

"You must not make comments!" said the judge testily.

"Now, Salter, what has passed between you and this boy?"

"Fifty pounds, sir," said the witness.

"No, no! I don't mean that," snapped Sir Donald. "When did you first meet the boy?"

"He came to the theatre four days ago, sir, and got into conversation with me just inside the stage door," replied Salter glibly. "He offered me twenty pounds if I would do something for him."

"What did he want you to do?"

"Get him a copy of the play, sir."

"Which play?"

"The play we're showing, sir."

"Come, come!" snapped Sir Donald. "You must answer the question. Which play did he want you to get him?"

"Why, 'The Whirlpool,' sir," said Salter, in surprise.

Sir Donald paused, and consulted his notes. William Napoleon Browne found everybody looking at him, and the sensation was a most uncomfortable one. There could be no misunderstanding the witness' imputation.

Browne had bribed him to secure a copy of "The Whirlpool"! The Remove fellows were simply boiling with fury—for something seemed to tell them that this was a piece of trickery on Barton's part. The girls were flushed and hot with anger, too.

Not one of them believed a syllable of this man's testimony. To think that Browne was capable of such rascality was utterly impossible. For if Browne had done this thing, it meant that he had deliberately attempted to cheat the court. And it wasn't necessary for him to cheat the court, anyhow!

All the fellows and girls knew that they had spoken the lines of Stevens' play, and they also knew, automatically, that this evidence was utterly false. The one went with the other.

And their indignation was supreme. Even Handforth, who was not much given to quick thinking, could tell that Roger Barton had faked this up on the spur of the moment—in order to defeat that crucial test.

Mrs. Stevens had gone deathly pale, and Horace was almost breathless with amazed surprise. He was looking at Browne dazedly.

Perhaps Browne was the coolest person in the court. He hadn't turned a hair, and was as self-possessed as ever.

"This is a refreshing interlude," he said smoothly. "It is as well for you, Brother Salter, that you are protected by the barriers of the witness-box. Otherwise, I might be strongly tempted to exercise the muscles of my leg, and kick you through the nearest doorway."

"Silence, sir!" thundered the judge.

"That man's a liar!" roared Handforth excitedly.

His lordship leapt to his feet.

"One more sound, and I shall clear the court!" he stormed. "Sir Donald, proceed with your examination of this witness," he added ominously. "By heaven! If there has been any attempt to conspire against justice there shall be a full penalty!"

Sir Donald bowed

"I will grant you, my lord, that there has been some treacherous work," he said quietly. "Salter, you have told the Court that this boy, Browne, offered you twenty pounds to secure him a copy of 'The Whirlpool.' What did you do in the matter?"

"I told him it was impossible, sir."

"And what was his reply?"

"He increased his offer to fifty pounds, sir."

"Did you still refuse?" asked Sir Donald. "Remember, Salter, you are on oath. You must answer my questions truthfully."

"I told him I'd do my best, sir," muttered the witness, with an anxious glance in Browne's direction. "He went away, and said he would come back at the same time next night. We arranged to meet in a back street."

"Did you obtain a copy of the play?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you obtain it?"

"I do a bit of cleaning, sir, in the offices, and I can walk in and out as I like," replied Salter. "On the next morning, I saw my chance, and took a copy of the play from the acting manager's desk."

"Was the play lying there openly?"

"Yes, sir," said Salter. "It's a private office, sir."

"Did you give this play to the boy that night?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did he pay you anything?"

"The fifty pounds, sir."

"Has he returned the play to you?"

"He returned it two nights after, sir, and I put it back where I had found it," replied Salter. "I don't think it was missed, sir. Anyhow, there haven't been any inquiries——"

"That will do," said Sir Donald sharply. "My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I suggest that this boy prepared in advance for to-day's proceedings, and induced his companions to participate in this trick. I suggest that they learned the first act of 'The Whirlpool,' and have spoken those lines before you, and not the lines of 'The Third Chance.'"

"The suggestion is obvious, Sir Donald, without your help," put in Sir Rufus Browne quietly. "I desire to cross-examine this witness."

There was another brief lull.

The whole aspect of the case had changed. The air of the Court had become electrical, and it was felt that something drastic was going to happen. William Napoleon Browne was the unfortunate victim of this move of Roger Barton's—and it spoke well for his composure that he kept his temper.

He knew perfectly well that Salter had deliberately committed perjury—that he had entered the witness-box and lied from first to last. There was not a word of truth in his statement, for Browne had never seen him before. But, unhappily, his story bore the ring of truth—although it was utterly false.

"One moment, Sir Rufus," said the judge quietly. "I do not want you to cross-examine this witness. It is obvious to me that there has been grave perjury on one side or the other."

The judge was so solemn that everybody in the Court held their breath.

"I will agree with you there, my lord," said Sir Rufus. "I venture to suggest there is no question as to the nature of the perjury——"

"The matter is altogether too serious for me to allow this hearing to continue," went on the judge. "I must have time to consider what action I shall take. But one thing is certain. At the conclusion of the case, all the papers will be handed to the Public Prosecutor."

There was another breathless pause.

"I shall adjourn the Court at once," added Lord Riggindale grimly. "And let me warn the parties that I shall inquire deeply and fully into this matter. Until to-morrow the case is adjourned, and the jury will not be allowed beyond the walls of this Court!"

CHAPTER XVI.

SUSPENSE.

"OH, my hat!"

"Adjourned!"

"And — and everything left in a state of chaos!"

The St. Frank's fellows were all talking at once. The legal gentlemen were consulting in knots, and the judge had left the Court.

"Of course, he couldn't do anything else," said Nipper gravely. "He couldn't possibly let the thing go on after what's happened."

"Absolutely not, old thing," agreed Archie Glenthorne. "Good gad! I mean to say, what a perfectly poisonous thing! Where is the bally insect who just crawled out of the box? It seems to me a distinct occasion, laddies, for a somewhat drastic rag."

"Here's Browne!"

"Browne, old man, what a rotten shame!"

"Do not worry, brothers," said William Napoleon Browne coolly. "I am cool, so why should you not be cool. I will grant there has been work of the dirtiest description at the cross-roads, but I am indifferent to such methods. We Brownes laugh at slander."

"You're taking it jolly well, old son," said Nipper. "But it's a serious matter. Unless you can upset Salter's evidence, you're in for a pretty hot time with the Public Prosecutor."

Browne sighed.

"Will it be Wormwood Scrubbs, or Portland?" he murmured. "Personally, I am rather hankering for Portland. The seaside is so robust! And the name of Wormwood Scrubbs appalls me. Yes, Brother Hamilton, let it be Portland by all means."

"You silly ass——"

"I trust you will come and see me on visitors' day?" went on Browne. "A slice

of ham, or a doughnut, will be a welcome change from the daily skilly."

"You—you hopeless idiot!" gasped Stevens. "Why can't you be serious? Don't you realise what this means?"

"I realise, Brother Horace, that Brother Barton is in a state of considerable agitation," replied Browne. "I will grant that his brain has moved swiftly. We could not be prepared for this murky move. But let us not worry. To-morrow will witness his downfall. Picture the vision of Brother Barton descending slowly, but surely, into the ox-tail. I fancy I can see his feet already splashing about in it!"

Somehow, they managed to get out of the Law Courts, and later, Sir Rufus Browne was with Mrs. Stevens and her son.

"The case has gone very strangely, Mrs. Stevens," he was saying. "Don't worry too much. Barton has not only perjured himself, but bribed others to copy his example. There is practically no chance that we shall lose the action."

"But what if this witness maintains his evidence?" asked Mrs. Stevens anxiously. "How can we prove that he is wrong?"

"They are clever—but their move was a desperate one," replied Sir Rufus, pursing his lips. "If only we could produce some concrete evidence to-morrow — something which would definitely prove your husband's authorship——"

"But we did produce it, sir," broke in Stevens. "We all played our parts in Court—and proved as clear as daylight that Barton's a thief. But what's the good? He replies by producing bribed witnesses?"

"He cannot maintain such tactics," replied Sir Rufus. "There will possibly be a different complexion on the case by to-morrow."

"I don't know what your son's going to do about it, either," went on Mrs. Stevens, in alarm. "Oh, Sir Rufus! How terrible! What can you do? Those accusations against poor Billy!"

Sir Rufus was looking grim.

"I am disappointed in Sir Donald Bance," he said quietly. "I think he is sincere enough, but what short-sightedness! How could he have believed such a tissue of utter falsehood? Upon my soul! Barton must be a plausible rascal if he can throw such dust into Sir Donald's eyes!"

Soon afterwards Browne's pater left—promising to come round for another consultation in the evening. Mrs. Stevens and her son were left alone.

"Oh, Horace!" murmured the poor lady. "What can we do? And I was thinking that everything was so wonderful, too! I wish we had never started the action at all! The money seems to be a curse!"

Horace took her by the shoulders.

"You mustn't say that, mother," he said quietly. "Money's only a curse when it's used in the wrong way—as Barton's using it. We're not going to lose this case. We can't lose it! There isn't such injustice in the world!"

"I wish I could believe you, Horace—but you don't know the world as I do," murmured his mother. "Oh, I wish to-morrow was over! I wish——"

She broke off, for the bell had sounded. A few moments later, Nipper came in, with William Napoleon Browne.

"I hope we're not intruding?" asked Dick uncomfortably.

"No, no," said Mrs. Stevens. "Oh, Billy! I'm so sorry for what has happened. I feel that I am partly responsible——"

"In that case, dear lady, let me urge you to dismiss all such fantastic notions," interrupted Browne kindly "Truth to tell, I am enjoying this experience. It is a novelty to be in the public eye. Ere long, I shall emerge triumphant, and Burglar Barton will sink into his native mire."

"Look here, Mrs. Stevens," said Nipper briskly. "I've come round because I've thought of something. The only way to dish Barton is to produce some positive evidence of Mr. Stevens' authorship of that play."

"But we haven't got it, Dick," said Mrs. Stevens.

"You must have," insisted Nipper. "Somewhere or other—in some odd corner—there must be the evidence we want. Why, it's impossible to think anything else. You haven't looked in the right place—that's all. Or you haven't made the right inquiries. And I'm going to get the guv'nor on to it."

"You mean Mr. Lee?" asked Stevens eagerly.

"Yes," replied Nipper grimly. "He's been away for a few days—or I'd have dragged him in before. He's back now, and I'm going to get him on to this case to-day. I've come here to get your permission to bring him round."

Mrs. Stevens was rather flushed.

"Mr. Nelson Lee!" she murmured. "Oh, if there is one man who can help us now, it is Mr. Lee! But I don't like to trouble him——. I am doing nothing else but loading my worries on to other shoulders! Please, Dick, you mustn't——"

"That's good enough," interrupted Nipper crisply. "I'm going straight back to Gray's Inn Road, and I'll tell the guv'nor everything. If he isn't on the trail of something solid by this evening, I shall be jolly surprised."

William Napoleon Browne beamed.

"Congratulations, Brother Hamilton," he said, patting Nipper on the shoulder. "You

have indeed placed your finger upon the correct button. Mr. Nelson Lee! Two words of six letters and three letters, which will undoubtedly provide the key to this cross-word puzzle."

"By Jove!" breathed Horace Stevens. "Things are going to move now, with a vengeance!"

And, undoubtedly, he was right.

At the moment, it seemed that Roger Barton was to emerge triumphant. But there was another episode to be played in this grim game. And Nelson Lee was to take a hand in it!

There was certainly a prospect of excitement.

THE END.

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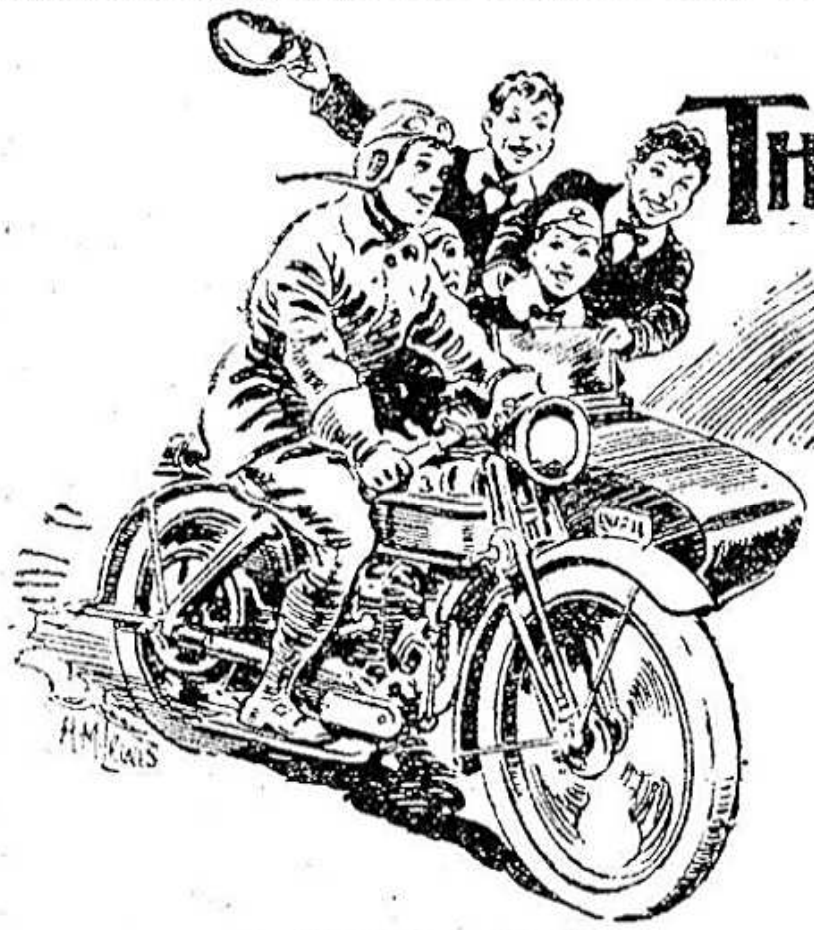


THE CALCROFT CASE.

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

By

SIDNEY DREW

A NEAT CAPTURE!

"ARE you there, young 'un?" asked Sexton Blake.

"Yes, I'm here, but I don't know what's got me, guv'nor," answered Tinker. "The flashlamp is somewhere near you, if it's not bust."

Sexton Blake wiped the dirt out of his smarting eyes, struck a match, and found the flashlamp. He came forward to where Tinker was sitting, and the light explained the mystery. A cord to which three round balls of lead were fastened had wound itself round Tinker's legs, and it took Blake some time to free his assistant.

"Well, I've had some queer things shied at me, but this gadget is the queerest," said Tinker. "Bolas, they call 'em, don't they, guv'nor? A South American contraption, isn't it? The things the gauchos and cattle-raiders use for dropping horses and steers instead of the lasso the Yankee cow boys use. This marks the locality those two guys came from. Gee! I fancy they were too good for us. What did you get?"

"A lump of turf in the face, and very cleverly thrown, too," said Blake, with a laugh. "I was too busy to make sure, but I think the two of them made for Calcroft. We could get one of them, I suppose, if we went to the police."

"I don't know what for," said Tinker. "If the little chap was trespassing on Roath's land, so were we; and, besides, he wasn't the guy who heaved that chunk of grass at you and wrapped this contraption round my legs. They want Roath jolly badly for something. Funny nobody in the house appears to have heard that shot. You'd think it would have fetched the servants out."

"There's something stirring now," said Blake. "Get into the ditch, young 'un. Higher up, I mean. Sprint for it!"

A car was coming down the carriage-drive. The chauffeur stopped it, and got down to open the gate, and then drove through. The car was the Rolls-Royce, and contained only one occupant, Sir Guy Rossover, the famous surgeon.

"I don't think there'll be much more doing to-night, unless Roath tries to make a bolt for it," said Tinker. "The other two aren't likely to come back. I expect they took us for a a couple of fellows Roath had hired to watch the show."

"I don't think Roath will run away unless the boy is dead," said Sexton Blake. "If the surgeon at the hospital knows anything about his job, that isn't probable, for it would be jolly uncomfortable if the youngster did happen to die after he'd given Roath permission to move him. It would be uncomfortable for me, too, although the accident wasn't of my making."

"And rotten for the school, too, if we have to prove that Roath killed Aggsby, and that young Martin knew all about it," said Tinker. "You don't see any more mystery in the whole ghastly business now, do you, guv'nor?"

"Not an atom, except just for the details," said Blake. "It was the little man with the beard, or who has since grown the beard, Roath wanted to kill. I had a good look at him, and imagined him without the beard. He's undoubtedly the man with the lost memory who escaped from the hospital, unless I'm much mistaken. He has either some big claim on Roath, or else some desperate grudge against him. Perhaps he followed Roath to England from South America, traced him, and wrote him a threatening letter, and Roath arranged to meet him at the school gates, which would be a good mark, as we saw, for a motorist who did not know the road, and offer terms. I hold no brief for Roath, but if the man

had not come alone, there would have been no shooting."

"Yes, it requires a bit of nerve to shoot two men," said Tinker. "Gosh! I wonder how Roath felt when he'd put a bullet into the wrong man. I wish we could put the handcuffs on him and finish it, for I'm getting fed-up."

"It's narrowing down, young 'un," said Sexton Blake, "but I can't quite see yet how it's going to end, though I think I could form a fairly accurate opinion. Will you watch for an hour while I go back to the lodging-house and see if Nathan Smith has gone back to his doss. By gentle persuasion I might get something out of him."

"All serene, guv'nor; but if Roath gets a move on and looks like going, what am I to do?"

"Do your best, for that's generally good enough, Tinker. If I'm not back within the hour, turn it up and go home."

It was Sexton Blake's fate, the moment he turned into the High Street, to encounter Sergeant Siler.

"Good egg!" said the smiling sergeant. "We were just too late to get Blagg on the 'phone, for we wanted him to fetch you. We've got a couple of those chaps who set about you at the Sloop, one with his arm and the other with his head in a sling, so to speak. The others can be had for the asking, I reckon."

Sexton Blake had not wished for this.

"Have they been talking?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, they've been talking fast enough, sir," grinned Sergeant Siler. "Most apologetic, too, they are. They all belong to Mr. Roath's yacht, and Mr. Roath had a horse running at that little race-meeting at Applegate on Tuesday. They got leave, and went over and backed the horse. They say they backed it with you, though I didn't know you made a book, sir," added Siler, with another grin. "The horse won, and when they went to draw the cash, feeling merry and bright, there was no bookie, for he'd faded away, and you can bet they just loved him for it."

"Oh, I can guess the rest," said Blake. "When the yacht came round to Calcroft one of the welshed ones saw me go into the Sloop, and, mistaking me for the missing bookie, he went aboard the yacht and fetched the other victims. Rather flattering to know I have a double in the bookmaking line with a habit of absconding when he loses. I suppose you want me to go to the police-station to identify these fellows. What would have happened if you hadn't found me?"

"Of course, we'd have kept them inside, sir, till we had got you. We don't stand law-breaking like that in Calcroft."

"Dedgard is in this, too," said Blake, "though it appears it was only his bad luck. Keep them till to-morrow, and I'll see Dedgard about it, and decide what to do. It's rather awkward for me to have to charge them, as I'm flying false colours. And what about Roath? As he's a bit of a magnate here, it won't be pleasant for him to have a bunch of his crew charged with a murderous assault like a lot of hooligans."

"That's up to you and Mr. Dedgard, sir. If you don't want to charge 'em, we can't make you. And no doubt it wouldn't be too cheerful for Calcroft School to have it advertised that their gymnastic instructor spent his evenings playing billiards in a pub down by the harbour. In the ordinary way the inspector would want an example made of 'em, but as they're Roath's men, perhaps he'll wink the other eye. If I'd been Mr. Dedgard, and got that bump on the noddle, I'd have charged 'em quick enough. Very good, sir. We'll keep 'em safely out of mischief till you've made up your mind about it."

"Good-night, sergeant."

"Good-morning, sir!" corrected the sergeant.

Blake could see Roath behind the plausible but lying story the two arrested men had told. The private detective had no intention of charging them, and though Dedgard's head would be still sore in the morning, he was sure that the man from Scotland Yard would not wish for a police-court advertisement of that kind. Probably the inspector would like it, for he objected to the private detective and his assistant poaching on what he considered to be his private preserves, but as Roath's great wealth was beginning to make him an influential person in the district, the inspector would not care to offend him.

Blake stopped at the door of a dingy house in a dingy street through which a chilly wind blew from the harbour, and put his hand to the rusty old knocker. Exactly opposite the house there was a slipway running down to the edge of the water. A vessel was moving down-stream towards the sea, and even through the haze and fog Sexton Blake was certain that it was Roath's yacht.

His hand fell from the rusty knocker, and he peered at the vessel as it faded into the haze. Suddenly, guessing what had happened, he gave a quiet laugh; and then, after filling and lighting his pipe, he walked briskly away.

. . . . . .

"That you, Tinker?"

"What's left of me, guv'nor," answered Tinker's voice. "The awful excitement is killing me. It's the loneliest, slowest, dreariest, place I was ever stuck in. Not even an owl about. Done any good?"

"No, but Roath has, young 'un," said Sexton Blake. "That was all bluff about waiting for coal. The yacht has gone."

"Gone?" asked Tinker, in amazement. "Even if the yacht's gone, Roath can't have gone unless he's abandoned the boy."

"Let's go and see, young 'un," said Blake. "I've got an idea, and not a very flattering one, that he's made us look like a couple

of fools. Though he's gone, it doesn't mean that he's gone for good, for in this age of wireless the world has grown small, and a criminal hasn't much chance of getting far away. 'Ware the dog if it's loose. Keep that bolas thing handy if I have to tackle him, for it will do to tie him up with."

Luckily, they did not meet the mastiff. Tinker rang the bell, and the moment the butler opened the door Blake slipped past his assistant and entered the hall.

"There's nothing to make a noise about," said Blake, as the butler opened his mouth as if to shout. "I'm Sexton Blake, the private detective, and I'm looking for Sir Guy Rossover. He was brought to attend to young Mr. Roath. Is he still here?"

"Good gracious, no!" said the butler. "The chauffeur took him away long ago in the Rolls-Royce. It's the chauffeur I'm waiting up for, as he was to bring back medicine or something for Master Martin. Everybody else is in bed."

"Including your master?"

"Of course."

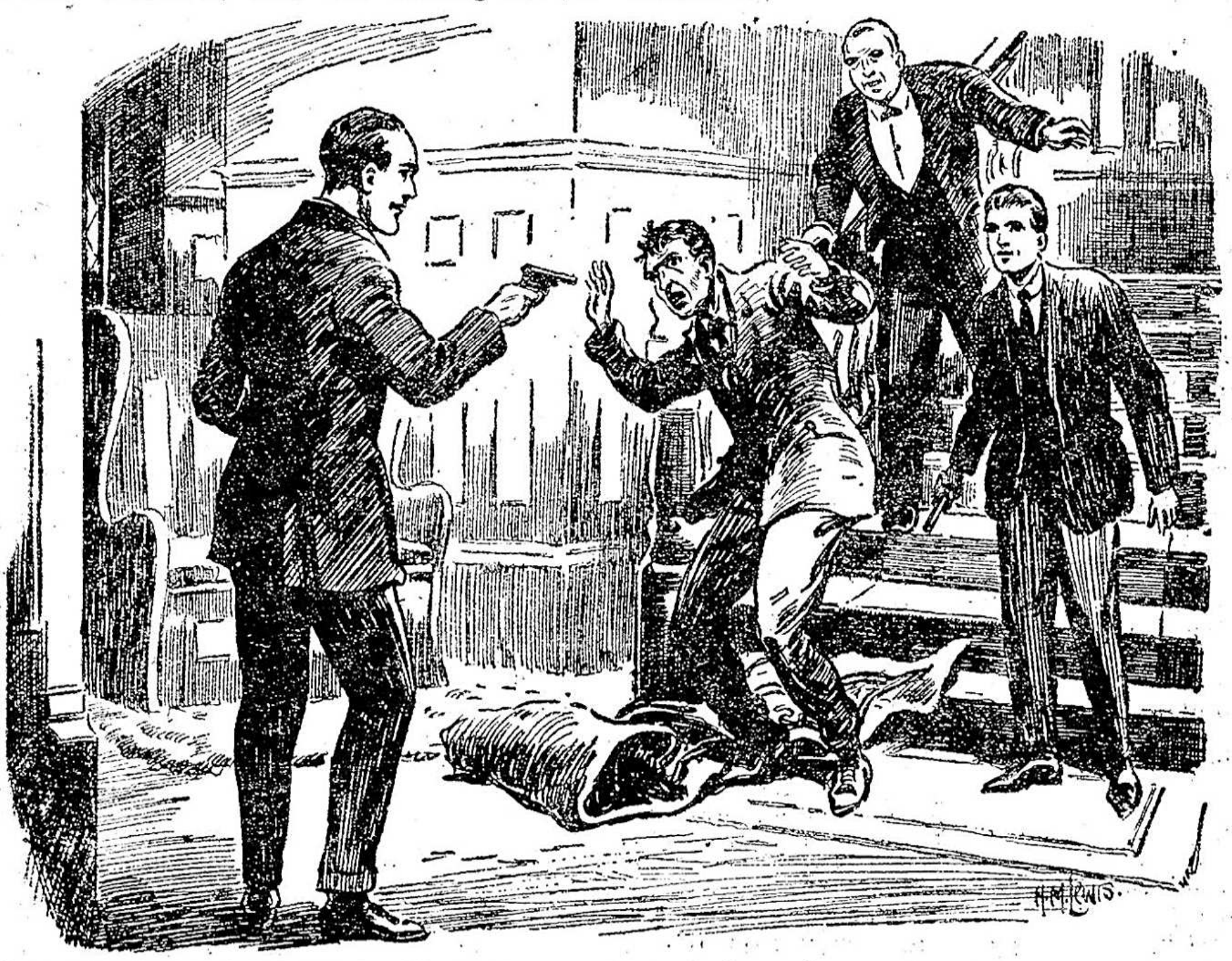
"Did you see Sir Guy Rossover leave the house."

"No, sir, I didn't!" answered the butler; "but I know he's gone. Young Mr. Martin fancied some grapes, and as there was nobody else for it, I had to go to the hot-house and cut a bunch. When I got back there was a note on the table from Mr. Roath saying that Master Martin was asleep, and that Mr. Roath himself had gone to bed, and was not to be disturbed."

"Gee!" exclaimed Tinker, "you were right, guv'nor! The birds have flown. We saw one of 'em, and never guessed it!"

"But what's the matter? What's wrong? What's it all about? What's the game?" asked the perplexed and startled butler.

"Show us up to your master's bed-room," said Blake, "and if that's empty, to young Martin's."



Blowing and ruffled, Nathan rose to his feet—and saw the automatic pistol in Sexton Blake's hand!

They followed the butler upstairs. As there was no reply to their knocks, Blake opened the door and switched on the light. It was a large and beautifully furnished room, but it had no occupant, and the bed had not been slept in.

"Goodness gracious me!" said the astonished butler.

Young Martin's room was a little further down the corridor. The door was locked, and the key had been taken away.

"Anybody in there?" cried Sexton Blake.

There was a bumping sound, as if some heavy body had fallen to the floor from a

considerable height, and little beads of perspiration gathered on the forehead of the frightened butler. Sexton Blake backed across the passage, and then flung himself at the door, and a kick from Tinker did the rest. The private detective pressed down the electric switch, flooding the room with light, and the terrified butler uttered a choked cry as he saw what appeared to be the dead body of a man lying on the floor, half hidden under a heap of tumbled bed-clothes.

"My stars!" said Tinker, grinning in spite of this set-back. "We've been beautifully japed!"

Sexton Blake pulled away the bedclothes, revealing that eminent surgeon, Sir Guy Rossover, with a gag in his mouth and his wrists and ankles neatly tied. Naturally he was in a furious temper, and Blake sent the butler for brandy-and-soda, warning him not to disturb the other servants, who seemed to be sound sleepers, for the forcing of the door had made considerable noise.

"Lured here, and compelled to submit to be gagged and bound at pistol's point, Mr. Blake," said Sir Guy, when the private detective had made himself known. "I examined the boy, and found nothing seriously wrong with him, except that he was badly bruised, and then the man Roath paid me my fee, which, I admit, was a very generous one. Then he told me I must remain here for the night; and when I explained that it was quite unnecessary, and equally impossible, as I had other duties, he pointed a revolver at my head. At that moment his chauffeur came into the room with a rope and gag. They were not rough, and that demon of a man, Roath, was apologetic, and I had to submit. They got the young fellow out of bed, dressed him, and put me in his place, and there I lay until I heard your voice. And—and what does it mean?"

Tinker, who was sitting on the bed, ventured a remark.

"It means, Sir Guy," he said, "that you're not the only person who got twisted to-night. Roath jolly well knew that we were watching, so he made himself up as you and got clean away with it before our very eyes. We only saw one person in the car when it passed us, and, of course, we didn't suspect such a bilk as that. Young Roath was there, too, of course, lying on the floor of the 'bus with a rug or something over him. Oh, what a lovely twist! One in the eye for us, guv'nor! And here's your brandy, Sir Guy."

After bringing the brandy-and-soda, the butler stood in the doorway, with round, wondering eyes and distended ears, till Blake, who wished to say something privately to Sir Guy Rossover, told him to go down and telephone for a car, for even in sleepy Calcroft one or two of the garages maintained an all-night service.

"What I want is this, Sir Guy," said Blake, when the butler had gone on his errand. "We suspect this man Roath of a very serious crime, but we have as yet no actual proof, though his flight seems to prove his guilt. It would be impertinence to suggest to you that you should keep silent about this outrage because you have received a handsome fee, but if you would do so for a few days it might help me out. Besides," he added, smiling, "we saved you from spending a very uncomfortable night."

Sir Guy, who intended to drive to the police-station the moment the car arrived, took a good deal of winning over.

"It looks like being beastly for the school," said Tinker casually. "They can do without chaps like young Roath."

"Was Roath at Calcroft?" asked the great surgeon, starting.

"Yes, his first term, I think," answered Tinker. "He was a Fifth-Former, and had a study in Pycroft's house, and he wasn't popular."

"Dear me! I'm an old Calcroftian myself," said the famous surgeon. "That was before the present Head's time, of course, but I know Mr. Pycroft intimately. The happiest days of my life! Oh, very well, Mr. Blake. I'll endeavour to swallow my wrath. You haye not told me Roath's crime, but I trust you will soon bring him to book, and that the brute will receive an adequate punishment."

The butler returned and announced that a car was on its way. Sir Guy opened the bulky envelope in which Roath had placed his fee, and, after satisfying himself that the notes were genuine ones, he shook hands with Sexton Blake and Tinker and went down to the car.

"Where's that mastiff?" asked Blake.

"Chained up, sir," answered the butler. "But aren't you going to tell me what it's all about, sir?"

Sexton Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"I fancy your master and his nephew have gone for a sea-voyage," he said. "Probably you will get a letter in the morning explaining things. Better wait for that before you ring up the police. Do what you like, of course, but I'd wait for the second post, for Mr. Roath probably posted the letter too late to catch the first one. And, by the way, if you can handle that mastiff I'd give him the run of the grounds till daylight. Now, young 'un, if you're fit we'll step out."

At that moment the door-bell rang, making the nervous butler give a backward jump.

"More visitors even later than ourselves," said Tinker. "Do we want to meet them, guv'nor?"

"Not until we know who they are," said Blake. "You cut upstairs, young 'un, and I'll squeeze up behind the grandfather's clock."

Again the bell rang, and at a nod from the private detective the butler pulled back

the spring catch of the lock. A little man stepped into the hall and took off his cap. In the fairly short time that elapsed since Blake and the visitor had faced each other with levelled weapons at the bottom of the carriage, the little man had managed to shave off his beard. The skin of his chin and cheeks looked a shade lighter than the upper portion of his face, and a scratch and cut here and there showed that he had used the razor hastily.

"I want to see Mr. Roath," he said. "It don't matter if he's in bed, he'll see me. Tell him it's Nathan, amigo, just Nathan come on business. And tell him there's another amigo outside, a friend, see? Tell him it's Diaz Vargas, or just Diaz will do. He knows Nathan and he knows Diaz, too, does your boss. Come, amigo, and hustle! Wake him out of his beauty sleep and tell him Nathan and Diaz Vargas, amigos both, and that'll fetch him."

With such a redoubtable person as Sexton Blake within three yards of him, the butler felt courageous.

"It is utterly preposterous and impossible," he said, looking down haughtily at the shabby little man. "I refuse to do anything, or would do so if Mr. Roath was at home, which he isn't, so will you please repeat your call at a reasonable hour."

"Then you won't go and tell him?"

"I've already informed you that Mr. Roath is not in the house," said the butler.

"Then I'll tell him myself, and you'll show me the way, amigo," said the visitor. "Up with 'em, amigo, as high as you like."

Finding himself menaced by a revolver, the butler raised his shaking hands above his head and began to walk backwards towards the stairs. Fear seemed to have petrified his tongue, for he made no sound. Step by step, his knees shaking, he moved upwards, the little man following. Drawing his automatic pistol, Tinker looked over the banister, saw Blake dart from his hiding-place, close the door, and make some quick gestures with his hands. The next moment he was rolling up the thick Persian rug on which he had been standing.

"Take your time, amigo, and play no tricks," said the little man. "I've come to kill your master or get my rights, so it don't matter if I kill two, does it? Still, amigo, if you don't want your wife widowed suddenly, no shouts!"

Tinker balanced the roll on the edge of the banister. Tinker timed himself, and, gripping the ends, he slid the roll over the smooth top of the mahogany rail. The roll was still thick and weighty, and Tinker had managed so well, that it dropped exactly between the two men, just missing Nathan, knocking down his pistol-hand, and striking his right knee, which he had just bent and lifted in order to place his foot on the next stair.

There was a muffled yell as Tinker let go the slack, and the descending rug blanketed the victim. Rug and man rolled down the staircase together and lay in a writhing heap at the bottom. Swinging over the banisters, Tinker dropped lightly on his feet in front of the astonished butler, picked up the revolver, just as the visitor crawled out, and joined Sexton Blake.

"Just as effective as that sod of grass they barged at you, guv'nor, and a lot cleaner," grinned Tinker. "Hallo, Nathan! How goes it, amigo? Put 'em up, Nathan, and keep 'em up!"

Blowing and ruffled, Nathan rose to his feet and saw the automatic pistol in Sexton Blake's hand. As he sullenly raised his hands above his head, Tinker went through his pockets in search of weapons.

"All clear, guv'nor!" he said. "Only a handkerchief and some cash, and a ticket for a bed at No. 18, Quay Street."

Sexton Blake dropped his slim, sinewy hand on the little man's shoulder, and gripped it.

"So you got your memory back after your motor-car smash, Nathan," he said; "and you didn't get drowned when you drowned that suit of pyjamas they lent you at the hospital? Roath didn't even manage to crack your skull when you tried to throw him from his horse, so you seem to be both tough and lucky. Perhaps your luck is out this time, Nathan. Whether my name means anything or nothing to you, you may have it—I'm Sexton Blake."

"Well, take your hands off me, for I don't like your grip," said the little man. "Sexton Blake, are you? Of course, I've heard lots of yarns about Sexton Blake, and whether you're that big sleuth, or only a big liar posing as Sexton Blake, will you answer me this question? Are you in Roath's pay?"

"Thank goodness, I'm not!"

"Then what in thunder have you got against me except that I scared that old fool with my gun?"

"I have quite enough against you to put you in a place where they'll keep you safely till we find out more," said the private detective. "I have only to telephone for the police, and they'll be only too glad to take care of you for the time being."

"Also Amigo Diaz Vargas, guv'nor," said Tinker. "He may catch cold waiting in the grounds. Can't we have him in?"

"Or leave him to the police," said Blake. "Telephone through, Tinker, and ask the inspector if he can fix up a flying squad and send them over here without delay, to search the grounds. Say there are two of them, and that we've captured one who forced his way into the house with a loaded revolver, threatening to murder Mr. Roath."

It was bluff, but it was effective.

"You needn't do that, amigo," said the little man hastily. "You listen to what I have to say first, and then, if you're the real Sexton Blake I've heard the yarns about, you can send for the police. If you are Sexton Blake, you'll be more likely to

send the police after that black dog of a liar and thief, Roath, than after me. I'll fetch in Vargas, and no treachery and no stunts."

"I'll watch that!" said Tinker. "Stand easy a bit, Nathan."

Tinker fixed the end of the bolas to the man's arm before he allowed him to open the door. The prisoner whistled, the whistle was answered, and a second man came up the steps. He stood blinking in the light, his jet-black eyes and hair and dark skin announcing him to be a half-breed, Spanish and Indian; and Tinker closed the door behind him, while Sexton Blake jerked out a swift:

"Hands up!"

Five minutes later Sexton Blake, Diaz Vargas, and Nathan were seated at a table with a decanter of Roath's choice whisky and a box of his excellent cigars in front of them. The bewildered butler had collapsed in an easy-chair, and Tinker sat on the bottom stair, whistling softly, making what he could of the conversation, which changed swiftly from English to voluble and excited Spanish when the half-breed was speaking.

At last Sexton Blake knocked the ash from his cigar, and rose.

"Clear out!" he said. "Of course, I've only heard your side of the yarn. I'm not suggesting that it isn't true, and it doesn't concern me. We were both too late. You can take it from me that Roath and the boy are on the yacht, and getting away from this country as fast as her propellers will churn the water. As far as I'm concerned, you're welcome to go. I might have needed one of you to prove my case, but till I can lay hands on Roath, the case isn't worth proving."

The little man also rose to his feet.

"I drink your health," he said; "for now that I have spoken to you, I am sure that you are the real Sexton Blake and not an impostor. I don't know why you want to arrest that hound, Roath, though I know he's capable of any crime. Get him quickly, then, or all you'll get will be his dead body, for I shall find him, and when I have found him, I'll shoot him like the dog he is!"

"Very well," said Blake, with another shrug of his shoulders. "That will be his funeral, and probably yours. Come, it's time to go, and I'd like to see you off the premises."

The two men went out, the half-breed pausing to give a low bow, and Tinker yawned. The butler was snoring in the chair, and dawn was breaking. As they walked towards the school, Tinker gave another yawn.

"What was it all about, guv'nor?" he asked. "With that dago butting in with his Spanish, I couldn't get the hang of it."

"Oh, a queer sort of rigmarole about land-stealing, young 'un," said Blake, "and probably true. They say Roath has cheated them out of hundreds and hundreds of square miles of ranch land, and thousands of head of cattle. They say their titles were good and valid, but Roath being the richer and cleverer and more unscrupulous man, forged documents and bribed the witnesses, and even the judges, and won his case. Diaz Vargas wasn't much of a fighting man, but Nathan threatened to take the law into his own hands and kill Roath. Their yarn is that Roath bribed a gang of Indians to seize Nathan, take him into the forest, and murder him there. He was captured by the Indians, but not murdered, but he was nothing but a slave, and lived a life of torture."

"When at last he got away, he found that Roath had sold his estates and stock to a big meat combine and realised an enormous fortune. The land and stocks Nathan and Vargas had claimed had, of course, gone with the rest."

"So, as he could get nothing out of the law courts, he thought he'd get Roath, guv'nor?"

"I think he meant to kill Roath, if Roath wouldn't pay up, young 'un," said Blake. "They say they have new evidence to prove that the whole thing was corruption and swindling. I've heard that the laws over there are shamefully corrupt, and that the rich man always wins. The moment Nathan Smith got to England and found out where Roath was, he starting writing letters demanding large sums of money, uttering threats to expose Roath, and all the usual folly that an uneducated man can perpetrate when he has a grievance."

"As Roath didn't go to the police, there must have been some truth in it, guv'nor," said Tinker.

"Yes, that seems obvious, young 'un. Anyhow, from what I can gather, Roath wrote to Nathan Smith at the Headmaster's House, Calcroft."

Tinker stopped dead.

"At the headmaster's house, guv'nor? Not at his own house?" he asked. "Whew! Then it was to be an assassination?"

"It looked like it. Roath said he'd have a solicitor there and try to fix on some payment. Well, there's the gate, young 'un. If it was shut the driver of a car would have to stop, and if open he'd have to slow and take the corner carefully, which would give anyone in hiding across there a fine chance of potting him. And you may be very sure that person would close the gate."

Tinker pondered till they reached the bridge.

"I know without telling that Vargas came down and got Nathan Smith out of hospital and found him clothes and that," he said. "Saw the photo in the newspapers, I expect. But what about the murder of Aggsby? Smith must have guessed it was himself Roath meant to kill, not Aggsby. A secret like that would have dragged bushels of money out of Roath."

"The extraordinary thing is, young 'un, that Smith never associated Roath with the crime. He did lose his memory for a time, and he was hazy in the head when Vargas got him away and was ill in some lodgings at Hapfleet. I asked him where he got the car, but he couldn't remember, but thinks he stole it. Vargas was away when Roath's letter came trying to borrow money from friends, and Smith had not enough cash to pay his train fare. He was determined to keep the appointment with Roath, and as he could drive a car he stole one. He thinks he took off the number plate, but he said he couldn't remember, and I think he spoke the truth. Good-morning, young 'un. Come over about twelve, for I think we shall have news by the second post."

Sexton Blake was right. The second post brought a bulky letter addressed "Basil Strong, Esq.," but on the envelope inside was written "Mr. Sexton Blake." The private detective read the letter over to Tinker.

"It was written by the elder Roath, and gave his version of the law-suit about the land claimed by the two men Smith and Vargas. He denounced Smith as a blackmailer and blood-sucker of the worst type, and made the best of his case.

"It sounds a bit thin," said Tinker. "If that's that, why did he bunk?"

"Perhaps he did, young 'un, and if I'm not mistaken this other letter will explain."

The second letter was in lead pencil and so shakily written that Blake had to go to the window to read it.

"Dear Mr. Sexton Blake,—If you want to know who shot that wretched man, James Burton Aggsby, I did. I suppose, being such an expert, you are well on the trail, but this confession may save you trouble. It was a pure accident. I did not know until the last moment that my uncle, driven to desperation by the ruffian, intended to kill the man Smith, who was either to kill or disgrace both of us. I thought that when we arranged to meet him some effort was to be made to silence him and Vargas by a heavy monetary payment once and for good and all.

"It was only when the car came along that I saw the weapon in my uncle's hand and realised that he meant murder. I struggled to get the thing away from him and it exploded, with the dreadful result you know. On the top of that horror came the news that Smith had escaped from the hospital and was probably drowned. That gave us some little hope, in spite of the other tragedy, until you and your assistant appeared on the scene, and we recognised you. Your movements at Wisthorpe and Aperling made us abandon all hope, for we knew you suspected us of the murder of Aggsby.

"Now you may do your worst. If my uncle is a murderer at heart, you cannot convict him for that. It was in endeavouring to save the life of our bitterest and cruellest enemy that I killed Aggsby. I wish now that I had been killed when the sudden sight of you on Wisthorpe Bridge made me run into your car. If you want us, get the wireless to work and take us.—MARTIN ROATH, junior."

"P.S.—Arrangements have been completed to purchase an annuity of six pounds per week for the widow of James Burton Aggsby."

Sexton Blake folded up the letter and put it in his pocket-book.

"What about it, guv'nor?" asked Tinker, after a long pause. "Is it true, or is he only screening Roath?"

"I think it's true, young 'un."

"If it's true, then, guv'nor, it's no good dragging dear old Calcroft School through the mud," said Tinker. "You can't hang old Roath for intending to murder, and if young Roath was really trying to stop him the poor chap is more to be pitied than blamed. We'll pack up and leave Roath to Smith and Vargas—and my hat! There the little worm is."

Tinker had sighted Beilby, and remembering his half sovereign, he went down the stairs like a hurricane. Next day, when Tinker and Sexton Blake vanished from Calcroft School, leaving several people there just as puzzled as were the local police and Detective Dedgard of Scotland Yard, Tinker was still without his half sovereign.

Once Beilby handled any cash it was nearly as easy to get it away from him as to knock dust out of a live jelly-fish.

THE END.

CAREERS FOR BOYS

By A. C. HORTH

GAS FITTING

ALTHOUGH once a definite part of the work of the plumber, gas-fitting has developed into a separate trade, especially in the large towns, and it is not uncommon to see a tradesman advertising as a plumber and gas-fitter. The fully-qualified and registered plumber should be well acquainted with gas-fitting, but in large towns to-day the plumber-apprentice has little opportunity of obtaining practical training in gas-fitting unless he attends a trade class in the subject. The principal reason for the separation of gas-fitting from plumbing is due to developments of the gas industry in establishing departments for the supply and fixing of all kinds of gas-lighting and heating appliances, and the supply and maintenance of automatic pre-payment meters, known as penny-in-the-slot and shilling-in-the-slot meters.

THE OPENINGS FOR GAS-FITTERS.

A certain number of gas-fitters are recruited from the ranks of the plumbers, brass finishers, and other branches of the engineering trades; but the modern practice in the gas industry is to take on apprentices or learners, who spend a portion of their time in the workshops, but who are mainly engaged in helping a qualified fitter. Some of the larger gas undertakings have a definite scheme of apprenticeship, which provides the boy with a thorough training and an opportunity of obtaining regular employment on the completion of his period of training, the latter being usually five years. Many of the large gas companies maintain a department for the overhauling and re-fitting of gas cookers and heaters, and this provides an excellent opportunity for the apprentice to gain workshop experience. There are a number of manufacturers of gas cookers and heaters who undertake to supply their own fitters, and who also undertake the training of apprentices. This provides another method by which gas-fitters are trained, although the actual manufacturing of gas cookers and heaters cannot be considered as directly connected with the building trades.

THE TRAINING OF A GAS-FITTER.

The Department of Technology of the City and Guilds of London Institute conducts an annual examination in gas-fitting, and the syllabus indicates the kind of training required. The first grade examination requires that a candidate for examination be not less than 16 years, that he has attended from the time of leaving the elementary school at 14 a part-time general technical course, and that he has attended a course of instruction in the work of the grade for 100 hours during the year. The Department will accept on certain conditions a candidate for the examination who has not been able to attend a class of instruction owing to his residing in a district where no classes have been arranged. For the first grade examination the candidate should have a good elementary knowledge of mathematics, geometrical drawing and physical science; he should know all the tools used by gas-fitters, the uses of iron, lead, copper and brass piping and pipe fittings, and blown, screwed and flanged joints; the description, fixing and care of meters, and the kinds of burners for lighting and cooking. The second grade requires a much wider knowledge of the processes, and the practical examination calls for ability to make joints. The final examination includes a knowledge of pipes and fixures, mantles, high-pressure gas, shop, street and distance lighting and heating appliances, as well as the apparatus used for industrial fuel purposes, gas engines, and the maintenance of fittings and apparatus, together with the regulations affecting the supply of gas to premises.

THE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TRADE.

It is difficult to disassociate the gas-fitter from the many branches of the gas industry open to him, and for this reason the trade is one in which regular employment is generally the rule. It is the custom for the large gas undertakings to contract for the installation of gas fittings in new buildings. This enables the companies to maintain a large staff. The popularity of slot-meters calls for a regular system of inspection of fittings, as also the system of hiring gas fires and cookers, which are kept in good condition by the companies owning them. On the whole, the rate of pay is good, and compares well with occupations requiring even a greater amount of skill. Positions as foreman are open to gas-fitters who have undergone a definite course of training, and it should be the ambition of every apprentice to obtain the final certificate of the City and Guilds of London and the endorsement of the Institution of Gas Engineers. The latter institution, although connected with gas-fitting, is concerned mainly with the gas industry as a whole.

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