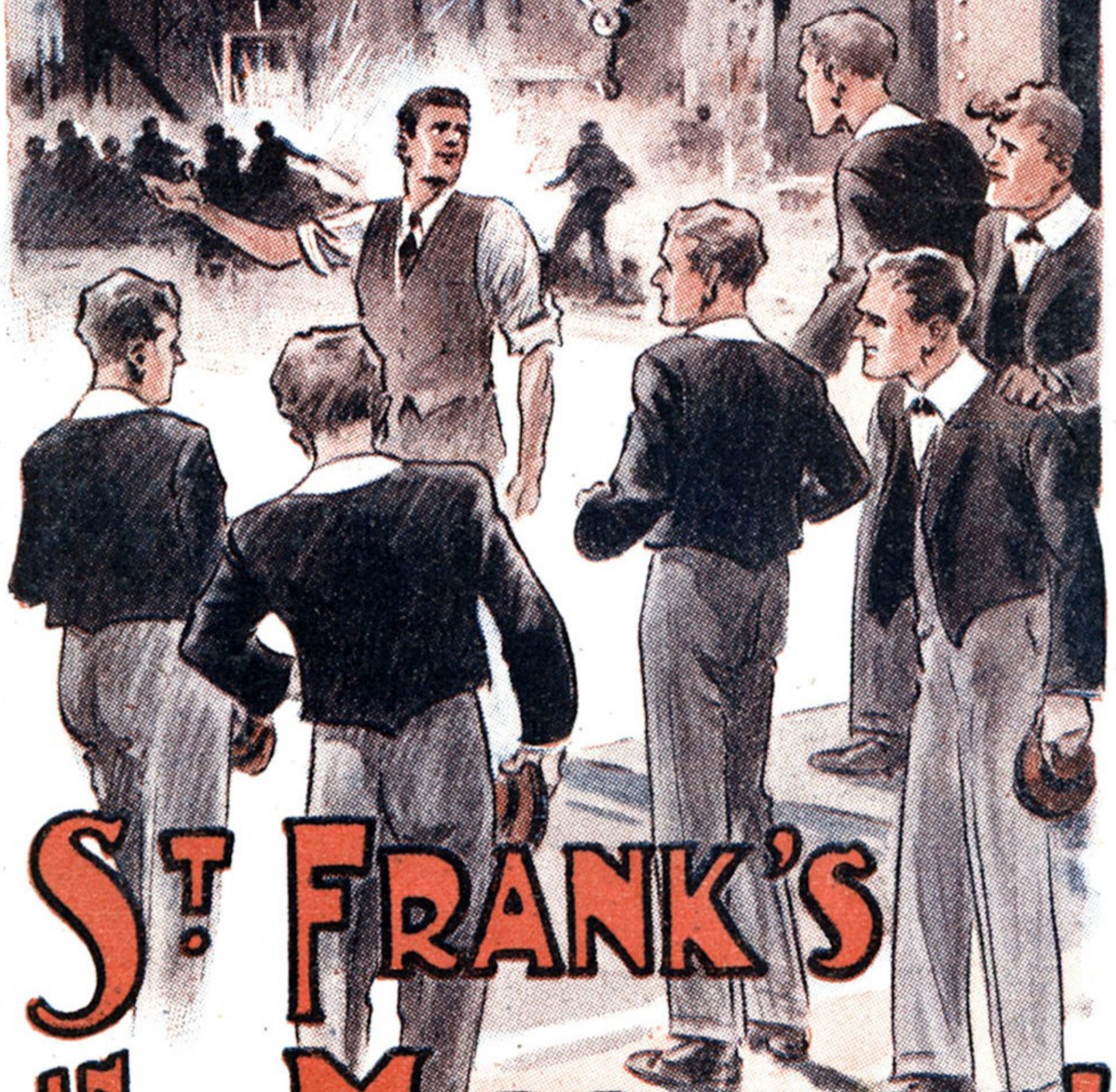


THE NELSON LEE

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ST. FRANK'S IN THE MIDLANDS!

A stirring long complete yarn of schoolboy adventure featuring the famous chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 161.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

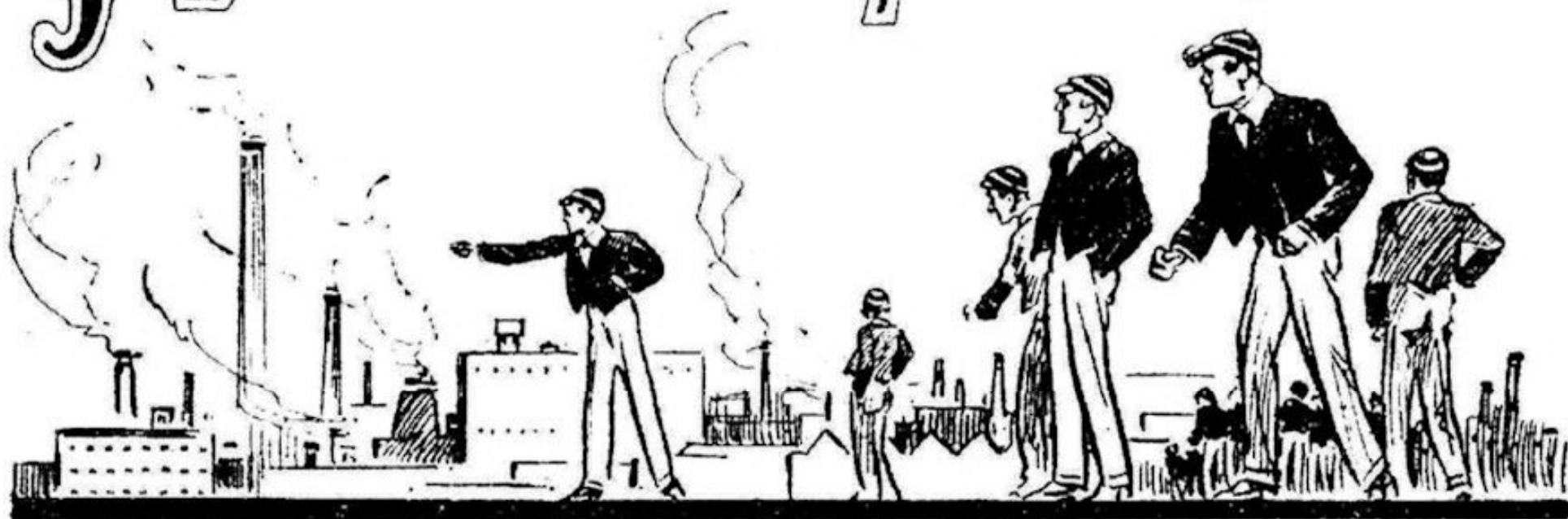
June 1st, 1929.



Half suffocated by the choking, acrid fumes, the St. Frank's boys grasped at the beam which pinned down Martin Reeve. It moved, and Handforth, seizing his chance, dragged out the almost unconscious man.

Are the St. Frank's Boys in YOUR District This Week, Chums?

ST. FRANK'S IN THE MIDLANDS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

First Norwich, and then Sheffield. The School Train is whizzing on its way round Great Britain—and the St. Frank's juniors are meeting with plenty of adventure and excitement all along the route. Settle yourselves down for hours of enjoyment in this rattling fine yarn, chums!—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

The School Train in Norwich!

“REMARKABLE, Brother Horace—without question, remarkable!” William Napoleon Browne, the long, lanky skipper of the Fifth Form of St. Frank's, gazed interestedly at the little object which Horace Stevens held between his fingers.

“Never seen anything like it,” said Stevens.

“Neither,” agreed Browne, “have I. At the same time, brother, let me deprecate this questionable habit of picking up objects from the roadway, and fingering them with such careless abandon. It is a habit, Brother Horace, that you must check. I have heard on the best authority that the practice is fraught with unknown dangers—”

“Chuck it!” interrupted Stevens impatiently. “Really, Browne, there's something amazing about this. Look at it!”

The two Fifth-Formers halted in the road, and Browne condescended to gaze more closely at the object in question. The sunshine of the early summer evening gleamed through the near-by trees. The lane was quiet and secluded— notwithstanding the fact that the City of Norwich was only a mile or two away.

“It's metal,” said Stevens. “Yet it isn't enamelled or painted. If it wasn't impossible, I'd say that the metal itself is red.”

“A rash statement, brother,” replied Browne, shaking his head. “It appears to me that a kind of dye has been used.”

Stevens turned the oddly shaped object over in his hand. He had picked it up a minute earlier, attracted by its brilliant colour. It had the feeling of a piece of metal, but it was crimson in colour—a clear, bright crimson.

“Feel it,” said Stevens. “It's just like a piece of iron or steel. I can't chip it—the surface I mean. Wait a minute! Let's try something else.”

He remembered that he had a pocket-knife with a file in it. He took it out, opened the file, and commenced vigorously to apply it to the strange metal.

“Well I'm hanged!” said Stevens blankly.

"I must agree that this is indeed astonishing," said Browne with mild amazement. "Without exaggeration, I can safely say that I have never seen anything like it in the whole course of my puff. Let me have it, Brother Horace. I am intrigued."

"This colour is in the metal—right inside!" said Stevens, as he closely examined the spot that he had been filing. "And it's as hard as steel, too. It's nearly ruined this file."

"Which, of course, means nothing," observed Browne. "These cheap knives, brother, are worse than useless."

"Cheap knives!" grinned Stevens. "It's the one you gave me on my last birthday!"

"In that case," said Browne smoothly, "there can be no doubt that the metal is indeed steel-like in its tenacity. It even resists the application of this highly tempered file. Let me see, Brother Horace."

There was something very strange about this piece of metal. The tiny red filings themselves were gleaming and glinting—scintillating in the most fascinating manner. And where the metal had been scored, it was just as red as on the surface. Without question, the colour was the same throughout.

"But it's beyond belief," said Stevens incredulously. "I've never seen any coloured metal before. At least, not a deep red colour like this. And where did it come from? Look at it! It hasn't been cut or moulded. It's just like a fused lump of stuff—By Jove!"

"Something has stirred?"

"I'll bet this is a meteorite!" said Stevens excitedly. "It must be, Browne! There's no metal like this on earth. It must have fallen out of space."

"A plausible enough theory, but I doubt its soundness," said Browne. "For, unless I am greatly mistaken, our seedy friend in the offing is not entirely unconnected with that chunk of metal—and I doubt if he dropped from outer space."

Stevens did not hear Browne's final words. For a stranger came running up, shouting loudly and anxiously.

HE was not so elderly as he appeared at first sight. But he was so shabby, and his hair was so tousled and untidy, that one gained a wrong impression at first sight. The man was probably no more than fifty—a queer-looking specimen, with wild, prominent eyes behind thick spectacles.

"Give that to me!" he exclaimed shrilly. "It is mine! That piece of metal is mine! Give it to me I say!"

"Just a minute!" said Stevens, backing away. "Don't snatch like that! If it's yours you shall have it. But how do I know—"

"I tell you it's mine!" shouted the stranger. "I made it! Don't you think I know what I'm talking about? I tell you I made it! I dropped it by accident not five minutes ago. A hole in my pocket. I've been searching— Give it to me!"

He held out a trembling hand, and there was almost a note of pleading in his voice. William Napoleon Browne stepped forward. He had been examining the queer old fellow with interest, and now he felt that it was time for him to take a hand in the proceedings. He gently lifted the piece of strange metal out of Stevens' hand, and turned to the newcomer.

"Before we go any further, Mr—Mr.— I regret, sir, that we have not had the pleasure of hearing your name—"

"My name is Reeve—Martin Reeve," said the other impatiently. "What does it matter? You are strangers to me, and I am a stranger to you. We are not likely to meet again."

"I trust, Brother Reeve, that you have no foundation for this pessimistic attitude," said Browne smoothly. "I readily believe that this piece of metal is your property. I accept without question your statement that you manufactured it yourself. But you must forgive us for having a pardonable curiosity. Never before have Brother Horace or myself seen metal of this kind."

"I can well believe it!" said Mr. Martin Reeve with a triumphant ring in his voice. "There is no other metal like it—not in the whole world—except the samples I have made. Red—green—blue—I have them all!"

He cackled to himself in a strange way, and he fairly snatched the little knob of red metal as Browne handed it to him. Stevens gave his elegant chum a significant glance. He was inclined to believe that Mr. Reeve was "off his rocker." Browne had a mild suspicion to the same effect—but there was always that piece of red metal to substantiate the old fellow's surprising statement.

"If it is indeed true, Brother Reeve, that you can manufacture such brilliantly coloured metal, I marvel at your apparent neediness," said Browne. "Surely there is a fortune in this singular invention. Think of the possibilities! Coloured metal! Enamelling unnecessary!"

"You have hit it!" said Mr. Reeve excitedly. "Think of the permanence of such metal! It is untarnishable, remember! It is as strong as steel—as tough as the finest known metal! Anything can be made by this process. Bicycles—motor-cars—household utensils—window frames—I could mention a thousand different uses. And I can make it in any colour, all as bright and as rustless as the finest stainless steel. You understand? Coloured! Not merely on the surface, but all through."

He suddenly seemed to recall himself. He gave the two St. Frank's seniors a sharp, suspicious look, and he nodded curtly.

"Thank you," he said, breathing hard. "Good day!"

He walked off; and Browne and Stevens exchanged glances, and followed him. Stevens felt that the incident was over, and that nothing further could be done. But Browne was of a different opinion. Old

Reeve had interested him even more than the coloured metal.

SOME little distance up the lane there was a quaint old house. It was rather bigger than a cottage, and it was in a surprisingly dilapidated condition. Mr. Martin Reeve turned in at the gateway, pausing for a moment to look at that small object in his hand.

"Excellent," murmured Browne. "Brother Reeve appears to live in this somewhat mouldy habitation. Let us pursue this matter."

"Why bother?" asked Stevens. "We're nearly home now, Browne. The train's only just down the next lane."

But Browne did not listen. Just at the moment he was not interested in the St. Frank's School Train—which, as Stevens had said, was comparatively near by, tucked away on a quiet, almost forgotten siding, some little distance from any station, and well on the outskirts of Norwich.

The famous School Train had really only just started on its travels, and it was due to leave Norwich that very night. Everybody understood that Sheffield was to be the next stop. It was Saturday afternoon now, and although the train would travel during the night, it was probable that Sheffield would not be reached until midday to-morrow. For Sheffield was a longish trip, and it was impossible for the School Train to run to any schedule. It was run from place to place at the convenience of the railway companies, and sometimes it would be obliged to make long detours in order to avoid the ordinary traffic. By night travelling, however, many of the difficulties were overcome. And from the point of view of the St. Frank's authorities, too, night travelling was best—except on a Sunday. For lessons were in progress on every weekday, and travelling would not be conducive to concentrated study.

Everybody aboard the School Train had been pleased with the Norwich location. It was better to be out here, on this rural siding—better than being backed into some coal-yard in the vicinity of a noisy station. Indeed, whenever possible, the School Train was to be always side-tracked on the outskirts of a big town.

"One moment, Brother Reeve," said Browne smoothly.

He had advanced with long strides while Mr. Reeve paused in the gateway of that dilapidated old house.

"What is it?" asked the old man, turning.

"Without wishing to appear unduly inquisitive, might I inquire if there is any possibility of this invention of yours being utilised for the general good?" asked Browne. "I am greatly struck by the possibilities, and—"

He broke off as he observed that Mr. Reeve was regarding him searchingly. Indeed, it was such a close inspection that even the great William Napoleon felt em-

barrassed. Stevens came in for that inspection, too.

"I trust we pass muster?" asked Browne politely.

"You are boys from the travelling school, eh?" asked Mr. Reeve. "I have heard of it. Indeed, I have seen the train. You are St. Frank's scholars?"

"Yes, of course," said Stevens.

"I feel that I owe you an apology for my recent rudeness," said Mr. Reeve quietly. "I was excited, I was very upset. Please forgive me. If you will come inside I will show you something very interesting—if only in justification of my own statement."

Nothing was more in keeping with Browne's desires. He unhesitatingly ac-



cepted the invitation, and a moment later he and Stevens were being ushered into a musty-smelling hall. From this they passed into an amazingly untidy sitting-room. It was furnished well enough, although the furniture was old. But every corner of the room was littered with piles of papers, stacks of metal, biscuit-tins, and a hundred and one other articles of rubbish.

"Come in—come in," invited Mr. Reeve. "Don't take any notice of my untidiness. I am a lonely old man. I don't bother with appearances. There is no time in this life for such trifles."

He took out a key and unlocked a cupboard. Then he turned and placed two or three lumps of metal on the table.

"See!" he said gloatingly. "I wasn't boasting, was I? This is my metal. Red—green—blue—purple! Do you see them? These are merely samples. I can make any quantity—just as cheaply as the common-place stainless steel."

The two seniors gazed with interest at those pieces of metal, which gleamed and glistened on the table. Each piece of metal was highly burnished, and each was of a distinctive colour. There was something fascinating in all this.

CHAPTER 2.

Martin Reeve's Secret!

MR. MARTIN REEVE watched his visitors closely and eagerly as they picked up the strange pieces of metal, and examined them.

"Let me tell you that I should not have invited you into this house, and I should

not have shown you these specimens, but for the accident of your finding that red metal," he said suddenly. "But it has occurred to me that I shall be safer if I take you into my confidence."

"Safer?" repeated Stevens. "What do you mean, sir? You didn't think you'd be in any danger, did you?"

"Danger—no," replied the old man. "But you belong to this School Train, and it is highly probable that you would have talked. Why not? You saw something very remarkable in that piece of red metal, and it is natural to assume that you would discuss the matter—not merely with your schoolfellows, but perhaps with the townspeople. And I do not want that. I urge you, my young friends, to keep this secret to yourselves. It is my earnest desire that you should respect my wishes."

"But what harm would it do?" asked Stevens.

"I can see that I was wise in inviting you in," replied Mr. Reeve grimly. "You *would* have talked. My own carelessness is responsible for this situation, and now I can only do my best to make you hold your tongues."

"Then you might as well save yourself the trouble, sir," said Stevens. "It's all right as far as I'm concerned, but Browne's tongue has been out of hand for years. Once he starts, he can't stop."

"A slanderous statement, utterly devoid of truth," said Browne severely. "I'm astonished, Brother Stevens, that you should give me such a character. Let me suggest, Brother Reeve, that you should ignore this youth. Your secret is safe with me. I imagine, from what you have said, that this process of yours is a new one, and that it is not yet officially protected?"

"If you mean that it is not patented, yes," said Mr. Reeve slowly. "I do not want a lot of talk about it. Neither do I want to be bothered with people who will do their utmost to steal my invention. I know the world too well! There are plenty of men who will be only too ready to rob me."

There was bitterness in his tone, and he suddenly leaned over the dusty old table; a fierce light came into his eyes.

"I have had plenty of experience," he said tensely. "No sooner do I hint at my invention to the great financiers than they want to entrap me. I can see through their games. They will finance me, yes. Oh, yes! But they want me to sign contracts which will mean millions for them and nothing for me."

"Unfortunately, Brother Reeve, there is a great deal of truth in what you say," said Browne, shaking his head. "It is seldom that an inventor benefits from his invention. It is the man with the money who rakes in the shekles. I can well understand your reluctance to have any dealings with the financiers—particularly as your patent is not yet protected. Might I suggest that you have been somewhat lax in neglecting

this all-important item. Would it not have been wiser to patent your process?"

"And what of the money?" demanded Mr. Reeve angrily. "It requires money to have a thing patented. I am poor. My income is slender, and every farthing of it has been spent on my experiments. I have no money for patents."

"A point, brother—a distinct point," murmured Browne. "I must confess that I had overlooked it. However, in this world of crooks and sharks it is essential that you should take every care. Neither Brother Horace nor myself will take advantage of your confidence—"

"Do not misunderstand me," said Mr. Reeve. "I have taken you into my confidence purely in my own interests. You saw that piece of metal by accident, and if I had let you go, you would have talked. I am not ready for publicity yet. Therefore, I thought it wise to give you a few details and to ask you, as a matter of honour, to respect my wishes."

"Well, of course," said Stevens. "If you don't want us to say anything, we won't. You can take our word for that, sir."

"One moment—one moment!" said Browne smoothly. "Before giving any such personal assurance, Brother Reeve, might I suggest a scheme? I take it that your process is perfect—although unprotected?"

"No process is perfect," said the old man, frowning. "There are always improvements to be made. However, my process is certainly commercially possible. This metal can be produced in any quantity at a reasonable cost. It will revolutionise the entire steel trade. But you must remember that there are other interests which will be wholeheartedly opposed to the introduction of any such metal. To tell you the truth, I don't know what to do. I am sick and tired of the financiers. They want everything—they want to buy me body and soul. And for next to nothing!"

"I fear that you have approached the wrong people," said Browne, shaking his head. "Have you, by any chance, approached the great steel manufacturers of Sheffield?"

"And allow them to steal my process?" retorted Mr. Reeve.

"These are harsh words—"

"I am justified in using them," interrupted the old man bitterly. "Don't misunderstand me. Perhaps I am too blunt. I do not mean that the Sheffield steel manufacturers would be deliberate in their thieving methods. Oh, no! It would be purely business. Contracts would be prepared—which I should be required to sign—and, believe me, those contracts would be one-sided. The steel manufacturers would get all the fat."

"Alas, I am afraid this is only too true," said Browne sadly. "But there is one steel manufacturer, Brother Reeve, who, I can assure you, would give you a square deal. If you will take my tip, and approach Sir Gilman Browne, of the Apex Steel Manu-

facturing Company, Limited, you will be certain of the fairest of fair treatment."

Stevens looked at his lanky friend with sharp inquiry. He wondered if Browne was attempting to pull the old man's leg. Rarely could William Napoleon resist the temptation to bring off a hoax. And it was quite profitless to look at his expression, for he was always solemn. Indeed, the more outrageous the hoax, the more solemn he was.

"Sir Gilman Browne?" repeated Mr. Reeve. "I wonder! I have heard of him, of course. One of the greatest names in the Sheffield trade."

"My uncle," said Browne, with a careless wave of his hand.

"Oh!" said Stevens.

He remembered now, vaguely, that Browne had an uncle in the manufacturing business. But it was the first time that Stevens had known that this uncle was a steel magnate.

"I would point out," continued Browne, "that my father is Mr. Justice Browne—the famous K.C. and Judge. So you will see, Brother Reeve, that I am not attempting to hoodwink you. I will confess that I have a tendency to act the giddy ox on occasions, but at the present moment I am in deadly earnest."

For the first time, Martin Reeve flushed. A gleam of animation came into his eyes, and he took a turn or two about the room, rattling two or three knobs of his amazing metal in his hand.

"Yes, I believe you are sincere," he said. "It is curious, indeed, that you, of all people, should accidentally find that piece of metal. You—the nephew of a great Sheffield iron-master."

"It is even more singular that our School Train travels to Sheffield to-night," said Browne smoothly. "Fate, Brother Reeve, is a caution. One never knows how it will hit one in the waistcoat. And when opportunity knocks at the door, let there be no hesitation in opening the portal."

"You mean—"

"Is it not obvious?" asked Browne. "Come with me to Sheffield, brother! I will introduce you to my uncle. He, I can safely say, will treat you fairly. There will be no shark-like methods with him. I will personally guarantee that you get a sound percentage."

"How can you give any such guarantee?" asked Mr. Reeve, shaking his head. "I am tempted, young man—and I am grateful to you for your offer of help. But what if your uncle should prove unworthy of your high opinion? Why should he be different from the others?"

"There are many reasons why—but one will suffice," said Browne promptly. "My uncle

is a Browne. Need I say more? Pack your grip, Brother Reeve, and present yourself at the School Train to-night. Be good enough to consider yourself my guest until Monday morning."

"Here, I say," protested Stevens. "Mr. Lee might not like it! Strangers aren't allowed on the School Train—"

"Hush, brother," said Browne. "As my guest, Brother Reeve will be perfectly safe. However, it might be advisable to arrive at the train after lights out. There can then be no questions asked until the journey has been started. A word from me, later, will be sufficient. This scheme has the advantage, Brother Reeve, of providing you with a free railway journey—to say nothing of provisions ad lib until Monday."

"I must think!" said the old man tensely. "I am not prepared for such a journey—at such short notice. And I am required to take your word as it stands—without any corroboration. How do I know that you are honest with me? Perhaps you think it's a good joke to hoodwink me, eh? How do I know that your uncle is the man you describe him to be?"

Browne shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot, of course, give your proofs—beyond the honesty that shines in my eyes," he said modestly. "Look closely, brother. Do you detect any gleam of evil? I give you my word of honour that there is absolutely no thought of trickery in my mind. If I can help you, I should like to. That is all there is in it."

Mr. Martin Reeve looked at Browne closely and searchingly, and something in Browne's personality did the trick. It was almost impossible to be in William Napoleon Browne's presence without being influenced by that magnetic force. No further words were necessary. Mr. Reeve was convinced.

"Yes!" he said tremulously. "I will go! I will accept your offer, young

man. It is a chance in a million—a chance I never hoped for!"

He fumbled with his keys, opened a drawer, and produced some neatly folded sheets of paper.

"This is my process," he continued. "You see? Carefully written out—carefully prepared. Here, on these pages, is the secret of my colour process. Perhaps you would care to come into my laboratory? I can show you some wonderful specimens there."

He tucked the sheets into his breast pocket, and buttoned up his coat. He was very excited now. If he had been told that he would make this decision because of two schoolboys, he would have laughed at the idea. But there was that something in William Napoleon Browne's personality which wrought the miracle.



BROWNE and Stevens found themselves in a quaint laboratory, with a stone floor and low ceiling. At one time, no doubt, the place had been a sort of dairy. Inside, there was a huge brick furnace—which, originally, had possibly been the receptacle for an old-fashioned oven. But Mr. Reeve had converted it, and now the furnace was of a totally different type. It was a fearsome-looking arrangement, and it was in this, no doubt, that he made his experiments.

Mr. Reeve showed the two seniors some of his earlier samples—and they became more and more interested. He insisted upon them staying to a meal, and it was a most interesting experience.

For the old man, becoming more and more friendly, grew confidential. It seemed that his wife had died eight or nine years earlier, and since then he had lived on in the house, utterly alone, devoting all his time and energy to his experiments.

In his earlier days he had been a chemist, and it was owing to his abundant knowledge of chemistry that he had conceived the idea for the manufacturing of coloured metal. It was something absolutely revolutionary—something which had hitherto been considered impossible. Years of research work had led Mr. Reeve to the right path—to be followed by years of experiments. Such discoveries are seldom made in a day.

When Browne and Stevens left, their new friend was wholeheartedly converted. He promised to be at the School Train by ten-thirty, and Browne assured him that he would be on the look-out. And on the Monday Browne would take him to his uncle.

But Fate hadn't done with Mr. Martin Reeve yet!

CHAPTER 3.

Seeing the Sights!

“WE shall have to be getting back,” said Nipper, looking at his watch.

“Just what I was thinking, dear old boy,” agreed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. “If we don't hurry, we shall be late for calling-over—and that would be frightful. I am very much afraid that Mr. Pycraft is a vindictive sort of blighter, and he'll be only too glad to jump on us.”

“Yes, let's be going,” said Tommy Watson.

The chums of Study C, of the Remove, were sauntering in the Haymarket, in the very centre of Norwich. They had been having a look at the hundred and one stalls which, being a Saturday evening, were doing great business.

They had spent the afternoon in the famous Castle Museum, and had had an interesting time. Earlier, they had been over the cathedral, and the boys of the Grammar School—which was situated just within the Erpingham Gateway—had given them a great welcome. They were only too sorry that the St. Frank's crowd was leaving so soon, or they would probably have fixed up a cricket match.

There had been plenty to see in Norwich—whose history goes back a thousand years—back to the time when Athelstan founded a mint. It is considered likely that the Danes had a great deal to do with the early history of Norwich, for King Alfred's famous enemy, Guthrum, was once the King of East Anglia. And the Danes have left their mark very clearly in this part of the country.

At one time Norwich was actually the largest city in the Realm—even greater than London. To-day, Norwich is a great, thriving manufacturing city.

“Hallo, you chaps!” said a well-known voice.

Handforth & Co. came along, looking bright and cheery.

“Just going back to the train,” said Nipper.

“Good!” said Edward Oswald Handforth. “We'll all go together. We've been to the pictures. Just come out of the show.”

He indicated the Haymarket Picture Theatre, near by.

“These talkies are pretty wonderful,” he went on. “They've got one there that beats everything I've ever seen. The only drawback is, the voices are so loud that they don't sound at all human.”

Church coughed.

“That's a rummy thing,” he remarked. “Your voice, Handy, is exactly the same as that chap's who played the villain. Of course, it was a bit distorted, but that's what made it like yours.”

“You silly ass——”

“Come along!” chuckled Nipper. “We don't want any argument here. I'm rather sorry we're leaving Norwich to-night. We haven't seen half enough of the city.”

“That's what I've been saying,” granted Handforth. “To-morrow's Sunday, and I wanted to take a trip out to the Broads. Instead of that we shall be travelling!”

“You've jolly soon started grumbling about the School Train,” remarked McClure. “We ought to be only too glad we're travelling about.”

“We stand corrected,” said Nipper humbly. “You're right, Mac, old man. We're booked to travel all over the country this term, so we can't stay too long in each town. And think of the delights of Sheffield for the beginning of next week!”

“I'm not keen on Sheffield,” said Handforth, with a sniff.

“Ever been there?”

“No.”

“Well, I have,” said Nipper. “Don't judge a place before you see it, Handy. Sheffield is a wonderful town. But I'll let it speak for itself.”

They were soon joined by Vivian Travers and Harry Gresham and two or three Fourth-Formers. The city seemed to be full of St. Frank's juniors and seniors, and now they were all drifting off towards the School Train.

The first step was to get on a bus. This carried them to the outskirts, after which a pleasant walk brought them to the railway



Mr. Reeve placed two or three lumps of metal on the table. "See!" he gloated. "I wasn't boasting. This is my metal—my invention. Red—green—blue—purple!" Browne and Stevens looked in fascinated wonder. Coloured steel! It was certainly amazing!

siding on which the School Train was standing.

There was something very splendid about this special train—gaily painted in two colours of blue, and decorated with gold. All the coaches were of the Pullman type, although they were bigger and longer than the ordinary Pullman cars. In every respect the School Train was a novelty.

IT had been presented by Lord Dorrimore, the famous sporting peer—who happened, incidentally, to be a millionaire, too. So, costly as this train had been, the price of it was a mere trifle to a man like his lordship. And the St. Frank's Governors had not hesitated to accept the train, and to use it for the benefit of the St. Frank's boys.

Mr. Nelson Lee, normally the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was in full charge. The juniors—Removites and Fourth-Formers—were lumped together as one class for this tour, and they were presided over by Mr. Horace Pycraft. In all, there were a hundred and twenty fellows on the train. A strong representative throng, for all the tourists had earned their places on the train by passing stiff exams, at the beginning of the term.

To-night the School Train would leave East Anglia, and the morrow would find it in the Midlands. School work was going on just

as usual, without the slightest deviation from routine.

"We shall have to be thinking about cricket," said Nipper thoughtfully, as he and the others approached the train. "Of course, we've hardly got settled down yet; but unless we make some arrangements we shan't get any good matches."

"Fenton of the Sixth is fixing up a Sheffield match, isn't he?" asked Gresham.

"I believe so—but that's only for the seniors," said Nipper.

"Well, you're the Junior skipper, and it's up to you to get busy," said Handforth sternly. "We've got a ripping Junior team this season—and all on board, too! Even that chap Bangs, from New South Wales, is with us. Why can't we have a match next Wednesday?"

"We can—if it's fine," said Nipper. "As soon as we get to Sheffield, I'll organise something."

If the fellows were feeling any hardship at all, it was in connection with cricket. They sadly missed the playing fields. Schools en route had offered them the use of their own grounds, but this was not quite the same thing. However, as Nipper had remarked, they couldn't have everything. The school authorities had done their best to make the train into a perfect travelling school, but it was hardly possible to carry the playing fields on board.

AND while calling-over was taking place, while the School Train was settling down for the night, Mr. Martin Reeve was feverishly active.

After Browne and Stevens had gone he had felt a few doubts. With Browne's personality absent, the project seemed less alluring. Yet Mr. Reeve knew that such an opportunity was not likely to occur again.

He had thought it all out, and he had decided that he would take the risk—if there was any risk. Browne was a St. Frank's senior, the rich son of a rich father—the son of a famous judge. It was hardly possible that he would lend himself to any trickery.

Mr. Reeve might wait twenty years before such a chance came his way again. To add to the significance of the whole thing, the School Train was moving on to Sheffield that very night. And it suddenly occurred to Mr. Reeve that he would stand more chance if he were better equipped.

Then and there he came to a decision.

For a week or two he had been preparing for a new experiment—for testing a new theory. It would be all to his advantage if he could take with him a further specimen of his secret process. His materials were ready. His plans were made. He would have to put that new experiment into operation now or it would be too late.

So less than an hour after Browne and Stevens had gone, the old man, stripped of his coat and waistcoat, was building a roaring fire in his crude furnace. He had his own forced-draught appliance, and this, in itself, was almost as crude as the actual furnace. But it served.

Before long the laboratory was stiflingly hot, and there was a fierce roaring noise in the air. Now and again, when Mr. Reeve opened the furnace door with a long iron bar, a lurid glare shot out.

He had his crucibles ready, but he required more heat than ever for this particular experiment. Before long he was perspiring heavily, and breathing hard. It was grim work. The laboratory itself became superheated, but still Mr. Reeve persevered.

Fiercer and fiercer grew the glare in the furnace. Once, indeed, there sounded an ominous crack in the old stonework, but the queer old man took no notice. He was determined to get this experiment over, so that he could triumphantly take the results of it with him to Sheffield. He was confident that it would be a success.

In his earlier experiments there had always been a doubt. Now it was different. The secret was his; and once the process was perfected, the variations of it were endless. It was his desire to produce something bigger this time—a specimen that would be really impressive.

So the fire was blown hotter and hotter—until the roar was quite fearsome, and until the laboratory reeked of hot bricks.

"This will be the best yet!" muttered Reeve, as he prepared to insert the crucible.

"And on Monday, when I place my metal in front of—"

He was interrupted by a startling occurrence. Without warning, the door of the furnace flew open, and a white-hot flame, awful in its intensity, shot out clean across the laboratory. It was accompanied by strange puffing noises, which arose even above the roar of the fire.

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Reeve.

That flame had come perilously close to him, and he grabbed for the long iron bar so that he could close the furnace door. Then came another series of gigantic puffs, to be followed this time by an alarming phenomenon.

The great furnace itself cracked from top to bottom and from side to side, and flames shot out with appalling ferocity through the crevices.

"The furnace has burst!" panted the old man, aghast.

In a flash he realised what he had done. In his enthusiasm to produce a triumphant specimen he had created too much heat. On all other occasions he had been careful—he had realised the shortcomings of his plant—but this evening he had become reckless without even knowing it. He was to go to Sheffield to-night—and he badly wanted to take with him the results of his latest research.

He backed away, dumbfounded at the extent of this catastrophe—and by taking that action he undoubtedly saved his life. For he backed until he was brought up by the farther wall; until he could back no farther. At the same second the furnace seemed to explode.

There was a tremendous roar, a blinding, devastating shower of fire, and then it seemed that the whole world was coming to an end.

The ceiling fell, and one beam, plunging downwards, caught Mr. Reeve on the shoulder and bore him to the stone floor. He was knocked unconscious on the spot, and he was pinned there—held down by that massive beam. Mercifully, only a fragment of its weight actually rested upon him. Otherwise he would have been crushed to death.

And the fire, scattered over the farther end of the laboratory—screened from the helpless old man by a pile of material that had crashed down—leapt upwards with ever-increasing fury.

CHAPTER 4.

St. Frank's to the Rescue!

"LIGHTS out!" said Morrow, of the Sixth.

He had just arrived in the Junior dormitory of the School Train. The great coach was gleaming with electric lights, and the fellows were piling into their beds on either side. There were upper and lower berths, and the beds themselves were quite comfortable, if a little cramped. Most of the windows were open, for the night was warm.

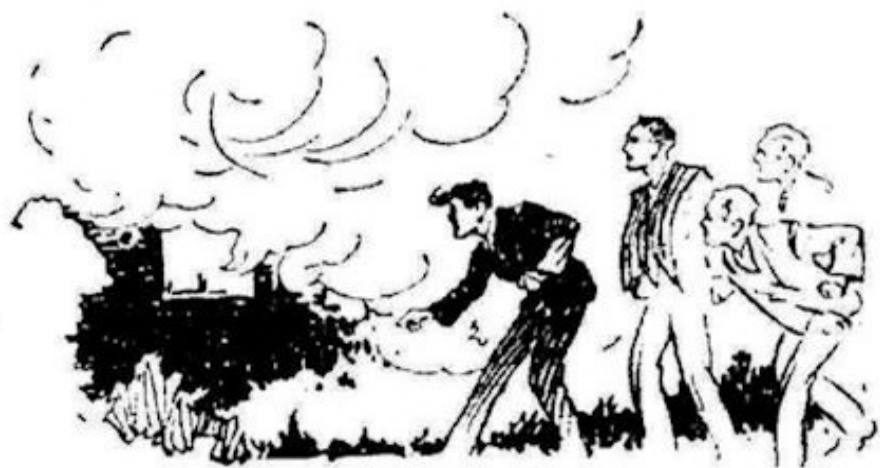
Electric fans were whirring round, too, at either end of the coach. There were no partitions or curtains here, as in the ordinary type of sleeping-car.

"What time do we start, Morrow?" asked one of the juniors.

"I don't know," replied the prefect. "About eleven o'clock, I should think. But what does it matter? You'll be asleep by then."

"We naturally like to know when we're going," said Handforth. "I suppose we shall be shunted out of this siding, and messed about for an hour or two before we really start."

The others grinned. The School Train was never in any hurry, and it was an understood thing that it could be shunted about and pushed into sidings, so that all the normal



traffic of the railway should be unhindered. Any other arrangement would have been prohibitively costly.

At first some of the fellows had been keen on keeping awake until the train started, but they had soon got over this phase. The waits had proved too wearisome, with nothing to see at the end of them. So now they went to sleep as soon as the lights were put out, and they seldom awoke until the rising-bell sounded, notwithstanding the occasional jolts.

"Buck up, you fellows in that corner," said Morrow impatiently.

He waited until they hopped into bed, then switched the lights off, and passed into the fags' coach at the end of the train—to repeat the performance.

The juniors settled themselves down for the night, and, except for an occasional yelp as someone kicked somebody else, or as an elbow was dug into somebody else's back, there was peace. At St. Frank's, of course, the fellows had their own beds; but here they were obliged to sleep in pairs.

A particularly wild and anguished howl sounded up and down the long coach. The voice was McClure's, and nobody took any notice. It was obvious that McClure was Handforth's bed-fellow for to-night.

Sometimes it was Church who gave these agonised cries. Handforth's chums took it in turns; so they each had one peaceful night and one disturbed night alternately.

"Why the dickens can't you keep your feet to yourself?" demanded McClure indignantly, as he sat up. "You caught me

an awful crack just then, Handy. I've never known such a restless ass! Why can't you keep still?"

"Oh, go to sleep!" retorted Handforth. "How do you think I can keep still while you—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Mac, in a different voice. "Look out there, Handy! What's that glare?"

"Glare?" said Handforth. "If you try to spoof me—"

"It's a fire!" declared Mac excitedly.

He was sitting up, staring out of the open window quite close to him. The night was quite dark, and very quiet in this secluded spot. Norwich lay in the other direction, and no glimpse of the city could be seen from this side of the train. Less than half a mile away there was a ruddy glow, flickering and dancing, and causing its reflection to spread in the sky.

"By George!" said Handforth. "It's a fire, right enough! We'd better get dressed, you chaps! Perhaps we can help!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" came Boots' voice, from another bed. "No need to make a fuss over nothing. I expect it's a bonfire—"

"It isn't!" yelled somebody else. "No bonfire could make a glare like that! Handy's right! We ought to do something!"

By this time everybody was out of bed, and every available window was crowded. The glare was becoming more aggressive.

"Slip something on, you fellows!" said Nipper briskly. "We can't allow a thing like this to be ignored. It might be some cottage where there are lots of children. Anyhow, it won't do any harm to have a look. We shan't get into any trouble with Mr. Lee."

It was no time for argument. Everybody started dressing at full speed, and Nipper himself, who was first, dashed off along the train to give the warning to some of the prefects—so that reinforcements could come along after a brief interval.

"IT'S risky, you know," said Stevens, shaking his head.

He and William Napoleon Browne were in their little study further along the train. So far, they had heard nothing of the commotion that was going on in the Junior coach.

"Leave it to me, Brother Horace," said Browne smoothly. "If you are in any way dubious regarding the outcome of this project, then let me remind you that I am at the helm."

"I am not likely to forget it," said Stevens, with a grin. "It isn't the project I'm worried about. I dare say you'll be able to manage it all right. You've got nerve enough for anything. And I believe that old Reeve is genuine, too. But how the dickens are you going to smuggle him on board?"

"There," said Browne, "is where you are wrong. I'm not going to smuggle him on board, brother. I shall bring him on the

train openly. If there are any inquisitive comments or inquiries, you may rely upon me to deal with them. In the meantime, am I right in assuming that a sort of riot is in progress somewhere near by?"

"Riot?" repeated Stevens, staring.

"Correct me if I am at fault, Brother Horace, but it seems to me that there is a considerable din in the offing," said Browne. "The voice I can hear chiefly is that of Brother Handforth. Let us investigate."

They went out of their study, and soon discovered that half the train was in a state of intense excitement. The Removites and Fourth-Formers were dashing out, and prefects were excitedly ordering them back. Other prefects were shouting to them to make all haste. There was a good deal of confusion.

"One moment, Brother Wilson," said Browne, as the Sixth-Former tried to push past. "What is all this commotion?"

"Those silly juniors have all got dressed, and they're dashing over the fields like maniacs," said Wilson, with a snort. "Somebody saw a glare in the sky. There's a fire over—"

"I say!" broke in Stevens, running up and clutching at Browne's arm. "I've just had a look out! It's old Reeve's house! Burning like a torch!"

Browne jumped.

"And we knew nothing!" he ejaculated. "Come, Brother Horace! It is essential that we shall be on the spot."

They were both fully dressed, and they hurried out without any delay. Browne, knowing the direction of Mr. Reeve's dwelling, was convinced that Stevens' assumption was correct.

AND Browne quickly formed a theory. The old chap, knowing he was to go to Sheffield that night, was making another experiment. It occurred to Browne that there was no fire at all, and that the glare was merely the ordinary glow from Mr. Reeves' furnace. But when he saw the flickering flames, leaping up beyond the trees, there could be no doubt that the building itself was well alight.

"Wonder what's happened?" panted Stevens, as they ran.

"It's no good wondering, brother," said Browne. "Let us waste no time in idle conjecture. Within two or three minutes we can know the actual truth. But, without being too pessimistic, I imagine that Brother Reeve is in the soup."

They found themselves at the tail-end of a stream of Removites and Fourth-Formers. After crossing a meadow and a ploughed field they came upon a narrow country lane. Speeding down this, they turned into a better road, and the blazing building was now only twenty yards further on.

Nipper and Handforth and a crowd of other fellows had approached as close as

possible. The glow from the fire illuminated their faces, and there were one or two scared-looking local inhabitants on the spot, too.

"Well, aren't we going to do something?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Where's the fire brigade? And why wait for it to come, anyhow? Let's do something on our own!"

"Afraid we can't do much, old man," said Nipper. "There's no water about here that I know of. I don't think the City's mains come as far as this, and there's no river—"

"But can't we break in and see if there's anybody in danger?" asked Handforth excitedly. "Great Scott! The place is burning at a terrific rate! We've got to do something!"

The fire was certainly gaining ground with appalling speed. The heart of it appeared to be at the rear of the building. Flames and sparks were shooting upwards, and a mighty roar was filling the air. The crowd had gathered at the point where the angle of the building could be clearly seen.

Nipper had already been informed by a couple of men that they had dashed into the building in search of its solitary owner. He was apparently out. They had received no answer in reply to their frantic shouts.

"No need to worry, young gents," said one of these men, approaching. "The old boy isn't at home, and there's nothing we can do. If he was here, he would have heard us, and would have come out."

"Isn't there a chance of somebody else being in the place?" asked Handforth.

"No; the old boy has always lived alone—ever since his wife died, leastways," replied the man. "I dare say he was out—"

"I venture to suggest, brother, that you are quite wrong," interrupted Browne, striding up. "If Brother Reeve has failed to appear it is because he has been trapped by the fire. I'm beginning to fear the worst. Let us dash round the building and see what we can do."

"What do you know about the old man who lives here, Browne?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Very little—but I do happen to know that he was at home," replied Browne. "But come! All hands to the pumps!"

He was beginning to feel alarmed for Mr. Martin Reeve's safety. It seemed only too certain that the old man had perished.

However, there was just a chance.

Crowds of fellows swarmed round to the side of the old house, trampling over the garden; and now they could see that the rear of the house was so thoroughly alight that even if the firemen came well supplied with water, there would be very little hope of saving the building.

"We can't do anything!" said Stevens huskily. "It looks pretty ugly to me, Browne. I believe the old fellow was making another of his experiments. There must have been an accident—"

(Continued on page 14.)

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(Continued from page 12.)

"Hush!" broke in Browne. "What was that just now? Listen!"

He held up his hand, and everybody took heed. In the momentary silence, above the crackle and roar of the flames, a faint, anguished cry came to the ears of the schoolboys.

"There's somebody in there!" ejaculated Handforth, aghast.

"The old man they were talking about!" said Nipper. "He must be trapped somewhere—upstairs, perhaps. Oh, my hat! This is awful!"

Browne was dashing round the house, away from the worst of the fire. It seemed to him that the shouts had come from that direction. Now he came to a halt, and looked at the building with added interest.

He could see that the wind was carrying the flames away. Half the rear of the house was like a furnace, but just here, where he stood, there was comparatively no danger—and the wall, just in front of him, was not only cracked, but there were gaping holes in it.

"This way, brothers!" he sang out urgently.

It occurred to Browne that there must have been an explosion of some kind. The furnace, perhaps, had blown up. That would account for this cracked and broken wall. A glance upwards, too, showed him that the roof was practically off. If old Mr. Reeve was pinned down by some of the wreckage in this part of the building, there was a chance that he might yet be rescued.

AS a matter of fact, the old man was still alive—still untouched by the worst of the fire.

The wind was carrying the flames in the other direction, and Mr. Reeve was protected also by the barrier of debris which had accidentally fallen between him and the flames. Notwithstanding the wind, however, the flames were now spreading in this direction, too.

Browne unhesitatingly forced his way through a jagged opening in the old brickwork. He encountered a blast of super-heated air which fairly took him in the throat and nearly drove him out again. Undeterred, he broke through and groped in the darkness. His ears were filled with the appalling roar of the fire, and there were other sounds, too—ominous crackings and strainings. He knew that at any moment the whole building might collapse over his head.

"Hallo!" he yelled, at the top of his voice. "Anybody here?"

He thought he heard a faint sound in reply. And just then Stevens came in—with Nipper and Handforth and Travers and a few others in close attendance.

"Come back, you idiots!" somebody was shouting. "You'll all get killed!"

But they took no notice. The rays from an electric torch cut into the smoke-laden air. Nipper pushed his way forward.

"Excellent, Brother Nipper!" said Browne urgently. "A light is what we need. Now, let us proceed— But wait! What is this?"

Unexpectedly, they came upon the old man. He was only three or four feet away from them—pinned down against a wall, held by a massive beam which seemed to be crushing the life out of him.

It was only luck which had brought Browne through this particular opening—combined, perhaps, with a certain amount of judgment. If the investigations had been made elsewhere, there would have been no time to effect any rescue.

"We can't do anything for him!" said Stevens, horrified. "If we shift that beam, the whole place will fall on us."

"We must make a try!" panted Handforth.

They were all half-suffocated by the choking, acrid fumes. There was not a moment to be lost. Browne had already grasped at the beam, and now there were many other willing hands.

"I don't think we'll be able to do it—but let's try!" panted Nipper.

They exerted all their strength—and the beam moved.

CHAPTER 5.

Browne Carries On!

EASY—easy!" urged Nipper. "By jingo! She's moved, you chaps! Can't somebody pull the old chap out while we give another heave?"

"Go ahead!" gulped Handforth. "I've got his legs!"

They never quite knew how they did it. The beam was evidently balanced somehow, so that only a small portion of its weight was felt. It moved again, and this time Handforth succeeded in dragging the old man clear.

But the danger for the rescuers was more acute than ever.

As they eased the beam down, there came a tremendous shower of plaster and bricks and other debris. One or two fellows received nasty knocks, but there were no real injuries. Not that they would have taken much notice, in any case, for they were half-unconscious from the effects of the smoke and the heat. The conditions were growing worse every second.

"Are we all here?" croaked Nipper. "Let's get out of this while we're safe! Where's the old man? Who's got him?"

Nobody answered. Handforth had succeeded in dragging old Reeve out, assisted

by Browne and Church and McClure. And as Nipper and the others went staggering out, a fearsome gush of scorching air came rushing past them—air that was filled with flames and sparks. The fire was forcing a way through. It was like an inferno.

"Back—back!" shouted Nipper. "The whole place is going to collapse! Get back, you chaps!"

"Look out!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Everybody was shouting, and by this time the rescued man had been carried well clear of the danger zone. Fellows had sprung forward to the assistance of the dazed rescuers, and were helping them to a safe distance.

"Look!" breathed Harry Gresham.

Through that jagged gap in the wall came a solid mass of flames. The fire had broken through absolutely on the heels of the rescue party. It was certainly one of the nearest things imaginable. The other side of the house, of course, was now flaring like a gigantic torch.

"Oh! Look out! She's going!"

"Stand clear, everybody!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

These yells were drowned by the shattering din which arose. All the walls of the building burst, and collapsed like so much cardboard. Millions of sparks shot up, and the air was filled with choking smoke and dust. But Browne, who had led the rescue party into that danger zone, was satisfied that all of them had got clear. And Browne's first task was to make sure that old Mr. Reeve received immediate attention.

"He's in a bad way!" said Handforth hoarsely. "He's unconscious, and he seems to be seriously injured. We ought to get him to hospital."

Nipper and Browne were about to make an examination when Nelson Lee appeared out of the crowd.

"All you boys will move back from this spot!" he was shouting. "Fenton! Morrow! See if you can't gain some sort of control——"

"Guv'nor!" yelled Nipper. "Here, just a minute, sir! You're wanted! Come and have a look at this old fellow!"

Nelson Lee was anxious and worried. He had been away from the School Train at the time of the alarm, and when he had returned he had found nearly everybody absent.

Arriving at the fire, he had heard that a number of the schoolboys had been trapped in the fire and killed. This, fortunately, turned out to be a mere rumour. But Lee was still worried.

However, when he saw old Reeve he forgot everything else. He made a quick, careful examination.

"The man's still alive—but he's in a very bad way," he said at length. "The only chance for him is to be taken straight to hospital. Bring him to the road—as gently as you can. We'll see what can be done."

TEN minutes later the unfortunate Mr. Martin Reeve was being conveyed to the Norwich Great Hospital in an ambulance. Fire-engines and ambulances had turned up almost as soon as the fellows had got old Reeve into the road. The firemen, however, took one look at the fire, and knew that they could do nothing to save the building.

"This is pretty rotten, Browne," said Stevens soberly.

He was standing apart from the other crowds, and by this time he and Browne had practically recovered. The cool air had revived them wonderfully, and they stood watching the awe-inspiring spectacle as the rest of the old house was consumed by the leaping flames.

"A regrettable affair, Brother Horace," said Browne. "Yet not so grave as it might have been. There are comforting features."

"I don't know what you mean," said Stevens. "Old Reeve is injured—probably badly. All his property is being burned, and I expect his precious specimens will be lost for ever. And if he dies his secret will die with him. So where are the comforting features? Poor old boy! It was his big chance, too."

"You appear to overlook the fact, brother, that I am here," said Browne coldly. "Whilst our inventive friend must necessarily languish in hospital, I am nevertheless at large. And that, I venture to say, makes a difference."

"What can you do without old Reeve?"

"A great deal," replied Browne. "In fact, without any desire to boast, I think I can say that I can get along just as well without Brother Reeve as with him. It might even be to the good."

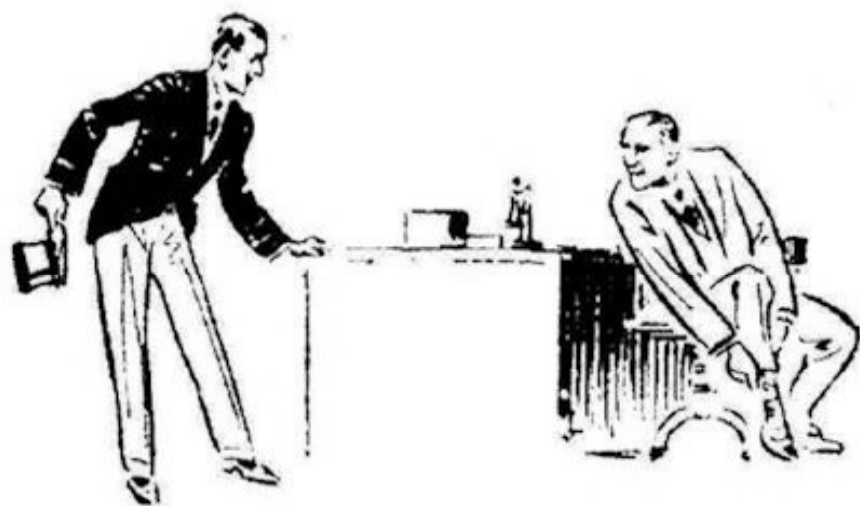
"You're mad," said Stevens bluntly. "You haven't got any specimens of the old boy's coloured metal, have you?"

"That, I confess, is a snag," said Browne thoughtfully.

"And what about another snag?" said Stevens. "How about the process? What can you do without Reeve? The idea was to take Reeve to your uncle, introduce him, and let it go at that. Now the whole thing's gone phut!"

"I will admit that it has side-slipped to an extent, but I deny that it has gone phut," said Browne stoutly. "Observe, Brother Horace!"

He produced some folded papers, and Stevens stared at them.



"What have you got there?" he asked.

"Reeve's secret process, neatly written out in Brother Reeve's neat, if crabbed, handwriting," replied Browne coolly. "I have surprised you, I take it?"

"Where did you get them from?" demanded Stevens.

"Owing to my singularly acute vision, we are now in a position to proceed with the doings," said Browne smoothly. "Before we departed from the inferno, I spotted Brother Reeve's jacket. Doubtless he discarded it owing to the heated condition of his laboratory. But there it was, and you may remember that Brother Reeve showed us these papers and then put them into his pocket. When, therefore, I saw this jacket, I thought it might be advisable to remove it before the flames did their worst."

"That was jolly smart of you, Browne," said Stevens admiringly.

The Fifth-Former shrugged his shoulders.

"In any ordinary fellow it would have been smart—in a Browne it was commonplace," he replied. "However, let us consider the possibilities. Brother Reeve is laid low, but I have his papers. And that, I think, places me in a position of advantage."

"But you can't touch them," said Stevens. "They're his."

"I regret to observe a note of suspicion in your voice, Brother Horace," said Browne, pained. "Are you daring to question the Browne integrity? Do you imply that I have sinister intentions with regard to Brother Reeve's unpatented process?"

"Of course not, but you oughtn't to touch those papers," said Stevens. "Naturally, the whole thing is postponed now. You can't do anything until Reeve comes out of hospital. This fire has changed everything."

"On the contrary, the fire has altered nothing," said Browne. "We leave for Sheffield to-night. To-morrow I shall interview Uncle Gilman, and secure excellent terms for Brother Reeve. When he comes out of hospital he will find himself a rich man."

"Well I'm hanged!"

"I was sorry for the old chap previously, but now I am doubly sorry," continued Browne. "It behoves us to put our best efforts forward, and to go ahead with the good work while Brother Reeve is recuperating."

Stevens did not argue. If William Napoleon Browne had made up his mind, the matter was settled. And Stevens did not want to argue, anyhow. When he came to think of it, Browne's wheeze wasn't at all bad.

It would certainly be a pleasant surprise for old Reeve if, when he came out of hospital, he found that Browne had negotiated for him, and that his steel-colouring process was on the point of reaping him a fortune.

"There is one stipulation, of course," continued Browne. "Whatever contract is drawn up it must necessarily be tentative."

"What do you mean?" asked Stevens.

"In order that your simple intelligence may understand, I will put it into easier words," said Browne gracefully. "The contract must

be provisional. That is to say, nothing definite shall be settled until Brother Reeve has had the opportunity of giving the agreement the once over. However, these are business details which naturally do not appeal to you, Brother Horace."

They moved off a minute later, Browne having had an idea.

In the meantime, the St. Frank's fellows had been ordered back to the School Train. Nelson Lee was greatly relieved to find that nobody was missing, and he warmly complimented those fellows who had acted with such pluck and resource.

"It was really Browne's doing, sir," said Nipper. "It was he who led the way in, and who called for volunteers."

"I must have a word with Browne later," said Nelson Lee, nodding.

BUT Browne was conspicuous by his absence. Stevens, when questioned, was vague. He had last seen Browne in the darkness, some little distance from the burning house—and that was all he knew. And after everybody else had been accounted for, and had gone back to bed, Browne was still absent.

There was really nothing mysterious about his movements. He had induced a motorist to drive him into Norwich. Arriving there, Browne had gone straight to the Great Hospital, and had made inquiries concerning the unfortunate Mr. Reeve. So successful were Browne's efforts that he was speaking with the house surgeon in less than twenty minutes. As a matter of fact, nobody had been able to get rid of him, and in despair the house surgeon had finally agreed to see him.

"While knowing full well that I am regarded as an appalling nuisance, I must insist upon a few inquiries," said Browne smoothly. "It happens that I am leaving for Sheffield to-night, and it is essential that I should know the exact condition of Brother Reeve."

"Brother Reeve?" said the house surgeon, staring.

"The poor fellow who was brought in some time ago from a fire on the outskirts," explained Browne. "I might mention that my name is William Napoleon Browne, and that I am the son of Mr. Justice Browne."

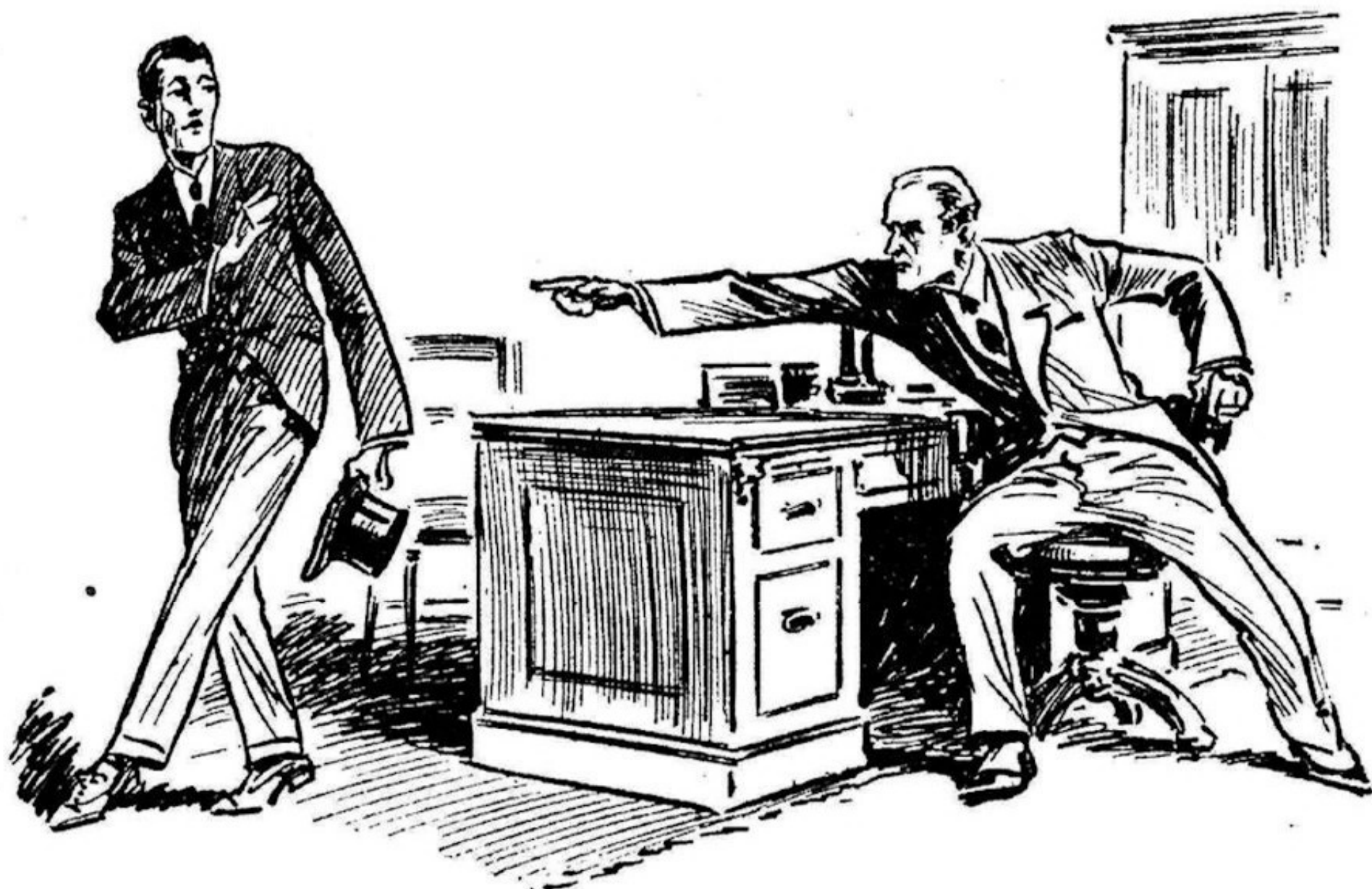
The house surgeon was slightly impressed.

"All I can tell you about Reeve is that he is badly injured," he replied gravely. "Three ribs are broken, and there may be serious internal injuries. The man is unconscious, and is likely to remain so for some days."

"You think he has a chance of recovery?"

"A very good chance, I should imagine," said the doctor. "Unless some serious complications set in, I do not fear anything acute. But it will be some weeks before he can leave the hospital."

Browne was satisfied. He felt sure that Mr. Martin Reeve would recover, and he considered it his duty, therefore, to go ahead with the original plan. The fact that Mr. Reeve himself was incapacitated might be all



“I’m not going to look at these papers. I’ll have nothing to do with this man Reeve!” roared the great steel manufacturer. “And if you have the audacity to approach me again on the subject I’ll have you thrown out of the building. Now go!” William Napoleon Browne went, smiling urbanely. He had a feeling that Sir Gilman **WOULD** see him again!

to the advantage. Browne always enjoyed playing a lone hand.

He was essentially a fellow of action, and he returned to the School Train enthusiastically determined to throw himself wholeheartedly into this project.

There was something pleasant in the thought of achieving his triumph during the old man’s period in the hospital. Reeve, of course, would believe that everything had failed. Thus, Browne would be able to spring a nice little surprise—and springing surprises was one of Browne’s chief amusements.

The one thing which made it possible for him to go ahead was the possession of those papers. And as Browne had saved these from certain destruction he considered that he had a perfect right to proceed.

CHAPTER 6.

The City of Steel!

NEXT day, during the forenoon, Sheffield was reached.

The School Train had been very leisurely on its journey; but it was by no means an ordinary journey, and most of the fellows considered themselves lucky to be at their new location on a Sunday. They would be able to go for walks during the afternoon and evening.

As at Norwich, the School Train did not actually enter Sheffield. There was too much traffic within the city; and there was no siding, in any case, on which the School Train could be comfortably left

So the St. Frank’s fellows found themselves a mile or two out, tucked away on a siding on a line that was not excessively busy. It was important, of course, that a train of this type should not be located anywhere in the neighbourhood of a busy goods yard.

Even on this quiet siding, all the boys were strictly prohibited from venturing anywhere near the railway lines, which were completely out of bounds. Permission was granted for the boys to go for walks during the afternoon, but they could only leave the railway by a certain prescribed route. If there had been any laxity on these points, more than one tragedy might have happened.

Everybody had expected Sheffield to be a grimy, smoky neighbourhood, with drab scenes and mournful surroundings—that is, everybody who had not been to Sheffield before. Thus, they were pleasantly surprised to find some of the most pleasant country they had ever seen, with woods and valleys, and any amount of delightfully green scenery.

It was difficult to imagine that they were so near to the City of Sheffield. Dressed in their Sunday best, the fellows wandered through woodlands, and some of them went boating on the River Don. Altogether, the occupants of the School Train were highly pleased with their new quarters.

William Napoleon Browne met with a check at the very start.

His first move, on arrival, was to pay a visit to Sir Gilman Browne’s mansion, situated just over the Derbyshire border. Although so near to Sheffield, the mansion

was situated amidst the most charming scenery—which was looking its best on this early summer day, with the sun shining brilliantly, and with the air as clear as crystal.

Sheffield's geographical position, indeed, is rather unique. For, although it is such a great centre of the steel industry, with busy factories and belching foundries, it has a setting of wonderful national scenic beauty.

The ordinary citizens can get on a tram, and in far less than an hour they can be right away from the noise and smoke of the works and factories, and they can be breathing the pure air of the countryside—enjoying the glory and beauty of hills, woods, and streams. The Yorkshire and Derbyshire moorlands, indeed, can be reached without even crossing the boundaries of the city. Even the world-famous Peak District of Derbyshire is comparatively close.

Browne's uncle lived in one of the most charming scenic spots near Sheffield. And Browne, who believed in doing things thoroughly, chartered a private car from a big garage, and drove out in style—only to discover, to his mortification, that his uncle was away from home. Indeed, nobody was in residence at Barton Manor but the domestic staff.

For a brief moment, Browne had a sinking sensation. He feared that Sir Gilman was abroad; but he was reassured when he was informed that his uncle had only paid a flying trip to his London residence. He would be back on the morrow—back in his office at the great establishment of the Apex Steel Manufacturing Co., Ltd.

Browne went away, disappointed, but not discouraged.

HE got back to the School Train in time for tea, and Stevens could not help grinning when he heard the result of that fruitless visit to Barton Manor.

"What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Naturally, I shall beard the great man in his den to-morrow morning," replied Browne promptly.

"To-morrow morning?"

"Yes."

"I hate to remind you of it, but there are such things as lessons."

"A trifle!" said Browne, with a wave of his hand. "Lessons, Brother Horace, shall not be permitted to interfere with my worthy project. Remember Brother Reeve in the Norwich hospital, unconscious and helpless. I must prove faithful to my trust, and convince Uncle Gilman of the sterling worth of this new invention. Time is money, and so I must hustle."

Later on, he casually dropped into Nelson Lee's study and mentioned that important business was liable to take him into the City during the morning. How about a small spot of special leave?

"Is this business so very urgent, then, Browne?" asked Lee.

"I can safely assure you, sir, that it is the most important business I have ever had

to perform," replied Browne. "I take it, then, that there will be no official objection? Allow me to express my thanks——"

"One moment, Browne. This isn't by any chance a joke of yours?"

"On my word, sir, no," replied Browne. "While admitting that I have a tendency towards the lighter vein, let me reassure you that on this occasion I am in deadly earnest. I might mention that I desire to visit my uncle, Sir Gilman Browne. My business touches upon a certain steel process, invented by the poor old gentleman who was nearly killed in last night's fire."

"Oh," said Lee slowly. "So that is why you went to the Norwich hospital last night? I wondered why you were so interested in the old fellow. Trying to do him a good turn, eh?"

"We Brownes' are ever good-natured, sir," said the Fifth Form skipper deprecatingly. "It is a family characteristic—as you may have observed."

"That'll do, Browne," chuckled Nelson Lee. "Providing you don't start until morning break, you can have the rest of the morning for your business."

"All is settled, Brother Horace," said Browne when he got back to his study. "To-morrow morning I enter the steel business!"

EVERYBODY else had completely forgotten old Martin Reeve by that evening. The exciting incidents of the fire were overshadowed by the interest in the school's new surroundings. And this was quite natural. There was plenty to see and do in and around Sheffield.

Browne pondered over the problem that lay ahead of him. He juggled with the idea of writing a long explanatory letter to his uncle that night, so that Sir Gilman would be primed when Browne arrived. Eventually he decided he wouldn't. The letter might defeat its own object. Far better spring the thing on the great man and take him by storm. Browne was confident that his own personality would leave its mark. A cold statement in black and white would be futile.

So the lanky Fifth-Former took no action at all—except to ring up the hospital in Norwich to inquire as to Brother Reeve's health. He was gratified to learn that Brother Reeve was showing signs of improvement, although consciousness had not yet returned.

"Splendid," said Browne, as he reported to Stevens.

"Splendid to hear that the old man is still unconscious?" asked Stevens.

"Assuredly!"

"You heartless rotter!"

"You misjudge me, brother," sighed Browne. "Alas! I thought you knew me better. When Brother Reeve returns once more to the torments of this existence, I want him to learn that he has been miraculously transported from poverty to affluence."

"Oh!"

"I want him to have no agonised moments," continued Browne, leaning back in his chair. "Picture—if you can—the anguish of the old boy if he recovered consciousness to learn that his home had been destroyed—his all scattered in ashes. Imagine—if your brain is capable of the strain—the torture of learning that his dream had been shattered. No, Brother Horace, I do not desire our bespectacled friend to awaken to such a blow."

"That's why you're speeding things up, eh?" asked Stevens. "You want to nail your uncle down and get the contract signed?"

"I shall not be content by merely nailing him down," replied Browne. "I shall see to it that he is screwed down—and bolted. And I shall further be certain that the contract is entirely in Brother Reeve's favour. Never for a moment do I suppose that Uncle Gilman would suggest any other proposal. Perish the thought! We Brownes are so honest that we are in constant danger of poverty."

"I rather thought your uncle was a millionaire," said Stevens dryly.

But Browne waved the insinuation aside.

"I must get this thing fixed to-morrow," he declared. "I have the process—the formula, so beloved of film serials—and there I think I shall have Uncle Gilman by the short hair. There is nothing like delivering the goods."

"You haven't got any specimens to show him, though."

"That, as I have already admitted, is a snag," said Browne. "But I have seen the specimens, and, being a Browne—and, therefore, truthful—my uncle will naturally take my word. The rest will be simple."

NEXT morning, therefore, Browne was confident. He took the precaution to ring up his uncle's office first thing—so that he could learn at precisely what hour Sir Gilman would turn up. The School Train was provided with its own telephones, connections being easily made at each stopping-place.

At eleven-thirty to the minute, Browne strode briskly into the vast building of the Apex Steel Manufacturing Co., Ltd.

It was situated in the heart of the city—amidst the busiest of the great steel works. The offices of the company were attached to the Apex Works themselves. Browne went straight up in the lift to his uncle's office on the first floor.

Pushing open some swing-doors, he found himself in a big outer office, where scores of clerks were at work. Ignoring the heavier barrier and a desk marked "Inquiries," he

lifted a thick mahogany flap and strode into the body of the office.

"One moment, sir!" said one of the clerks, hurrying up. "Will you be good enough to state your business?"

Browne waved an airy hand.

"I am invariably good, but this time I am certainly not good enough," he replied. "I state my business only to Brother Browne. I take it that his office is immediately ahead? Splendid!"

He brushed the surprised clerk out of the way and strode on. He had spotted a glass-topped door marked "Private," with the words "Managing Director" discreetly inscribed in the corner.

"Really!" ejaculated the clerk, running after him. "You must not disturb——"

Browne thrust open the door, closed it politely but firmly in the clerk's face, and was astonished to find himself alone with a

charming young lady. She occupied a desk in the centre of the carpeted floor. All round, the room was tastefully furnished.

"I really beg your pardon," said Browne, removing his glossy topper. "I was under the impression that this office harboured Sir Gilman Browne——" He broke off. "Ha!" he added. "Perhaps

his lair is yonder?"

He pointed with his stick, having just noticed a further inner door. This one was also glass-topped, but was quite barren of any inscription.

"You are here by appointment?" asked the girl, eyeing this lanky youth with some interest—and rather impressed by his extraordinary air of assurance.

"Not precisely by appointment," confessed Browne. "However, we need not haggle over such a trivial detail, Miss—Miss——"

"My name is Miss Hale," said the girl. "I am Sir Gilman's secretary."

"I can only remark," said Browne, "that my already high opinion of Sir Gilman's judgment is considerably enhanced. Without question, he is a great chooser. Seldom have I beheld a more charming secretary—if you will forgive the liberty."

"I am afraid you don't understand," said Miss Hale. "Unless you have an appointment you cannot possibly——"

"While I hate to interrupt, I should like to mention that my name is Browne, too," said William Napoleon. "Allow me—my card! William Napoleon Browne. Incidentally, Sir Gilman is my uncle. You will already have observed the family characteristics—the forceful nature—the bold eye—the confident ease of address."

The girl looked at the card.

"Of course, if you are Sir Gilman's nephew that makes it easier," she said,



smiling. "At the same time, I think I had better see Sir Gilman——"

"No! With your permission I should prefer to spring myself as a surprise," said Browne smoothly. "Why deny Uncle Gilman the pleasure of this unexpected treat? We all enjoy a little thrill once in a while."

And Browne walked across to the inner door, opened it, and strode through before the young lady could make any attempt to stop him.

CHAPTER 7.

Not So Successful

SIR GILMAN BROWNE was engaged in the somewhat undignified task of adjusting one of his sock-suspenders. He had felt perfectly safe in performing this operation, for never in history had his privacy been invaded unannounced. A knock invariably preceded the entry of the privileged.

It was an unfortunate moment. Browne's luck was generally good, but this time it apparently struck a bad patch.

Sir Gilman dropped the suspender as though it had become red-hot, and he allowed his trouser leg to fall into place as he swung his foot from his swivel chair and stood upright. The glare that he bestowed upon his visitor was so baleful that Browne instinctively halted.

"How dare you?" rapped out the great man. "Who are you? What do you mean by bursting in here—— Oh, so it's you, is it?" he added, as he took a closer look. "William, eh?"

"William Napoleon, sir," said Browne.

"Napoleon nothing!" snorted his uncle. "Your parents never christened you 'Napoleon,' and I refuse to recognise the name as yours. What are you doing here, anyhow? If it had been anybody else——"

He broke off ominously, and he took Browne's hand rather stiffly as the latter thrust it into his grip.

"Sit down—sit down!" he said gruffly. "I shall have a sharp word with Miss Hale after you have gone. She had no right to admit you without previously informing me of your presence. What are you doing in Sheffield, young man?"

"I may be wrong, but do I detect a note of peevishness in your voice, sir?" said Browne inquiringly. "Pray do not blame Miss Hale——"

"Peevishness be hanged!" stormed his uncle. "What do you mean, William, by making such an assertion. I'll give you just three minutes," he added. "I am busy this morning, and I cannot be bothered with schoolboys. Even my own nephew must——"

"Important as your work is, Brother Gilman—that is to say, Uncle Gilman—I venture to suggest that it is trivial in comparison with the subject I have come to discuss," interrupted Browne smoothly. "But before broaching this subject, let me urge you to

complete the task you were engaged upon when I entered."

He indicated his uncle's shoe. The end of the suspender was showing, Sir Gilman having failed to secure it.

"Confound you!" snapped the great man.

He evidently disliked being taken unawares. It was rather unfortunate that he should be in such a "paddy," for it handicapped Browne considerably. But William Napoleon relied upon his own inimitable personality to smooth the troubled waters. It wouldn't take him long to iron out those frowns.

Sir Gilman adjusted his suspender at last, and sat down in his big chair. He was an imposing-looking man—tall, clean-shaven, hard-jawed, and with keen, intelligent, piercing eyes.

He had been cast in a harder mould than his brother—yet in many respects he resembled Browne's father. He had the same forceful personality, the same brilliant wit. In the business world, Sir Gilman was every bit as prominent as was Mr. Justice Browne in the legal sphere. And both had earned knighthoods in the service of their country.

"Now!" said Sir Gilman, giving Browne a stern look. "Nephew or no nephew, I ought to order you straight out. Impertinent young puppy! Bursting in upon me as though I were one of your confounded schoolfellows! What is it? I dare say you've come to touch me for a fiver, eh?"

"A harsh suspicion, uncle," said Browne sadly. "Whilst admitting that the suggestion is by no means unripe, I really came on a much more important matter. However, in case this question of the fiver gets overlooked, it might be as well to dispense with it at once."

"It is dispensed with—you don't get it!" said Sir Gilman promptly.

"Somehow I thought I shouldn't," murmured Browne. "But perhaps you will be more kindly after you have discovered that I am here to put thousands into your pocket."

"Thousands of fivers?"

"Thousands of fivers!" insisted Browne. "I have the secret of a steel process which is unquestionably the greatest sensation of the age. The firm that secures the exclusive rights for its manufacture will become the most famous firm in the whole world. Naturally, Uncle Gilman, I have selected you as the lucky man."

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded his uncle suspiciously. "What do you know about steel? It's like your impudence to come here, bursting upon my privacy, and——"

"There are some circumstances which justify drastic measures," interrupted the Fifth Form skipper. "On former occasions, uncle, I have always found it rather difficult to approach you. I remember one memorable morning in London when I attempted to beard you in your den. You appear to surround yourself with hosts of guardians, and one is lucky to get anywhere within a hundred yards of you. So this morning, profiting by my former

experiences, I took the bull by the horns. And here I am."

"Is that a polite way of calling me a bull?" asked his uncle dryly.

He was sitting back in his chair now, and regarding Browne with humorous eyes. His anger was subsiding. There was, after all, something indescribably magnetic about William Napoleon. His very coolness, his calm air of assurance, had the effect of producing coolness in the other.

Sir Gilman, of course, knew his nephew well—but not half so well as St. Frank's knew him. He had met William Napoleon, usually at Christmas parties, or weddings, or other family gatherings. This was the very first time that Browne had ever invaded his business premises.

"You know, my boy, you've a wonderful future before you," said Sir Gilman, taking a cigar from a big box on the desk and lighting it. "You have your father's amazing gift of the gab; but in a boy they are apt to be a nuisance. You mustn't come to me, talking of things that you don't understand."

Browne had been prepared for this "uncle-ish" tone.

"Look at these, sir," he said briefly.

He produced old Martin Reeve's papers, and planked them down with a triumphant swish in front of Sir Gilman. The managing director of the Apex Steel Manufacturing Co., Ltd., picked them up, turned them over, and then glanced at his nephew.

"I cannot truthfully say that I admire your handwriting," he remarked. "I should have thought that a famous school like St. Frank's would have taught you better than this. Appalling!" he went on, eyeing it again. "This is the crabbed handwriting of an old man."

"You have hit it in one go," agreed Browne, nodding. "That, sir, is the handwriting of Mr. Martin Reeve, the most famous man in the whole steel industry."

"I've never heard of him."

"No; but you'll hear of him soon," said Browne. "Before long his name will ring through the length and breadth of the world. Steel magnates will whisper it with awe."

"What an extraordinary boy you are, William!" said Sir Gilman, rather startled. "Come down to brass tacks! Who is this man, Reeve? And what are these papers?"

Browne drew his chair closer.

"Those papers contain the secret of a new process for manufacturing coloured steel," he said impressively. "In placing them in your hands, I do so in the full knowledge that you will treat them honestly. I would mention that this process is not protected in any way.

It is therefore a matter of honour that you should—"

"One moment—one moment!" broke in his uncle. "Upon my word! Give me air, boy! Let me have time to think. Coloured steel? Do you mean enamelled steel?"

"I mean coloured—through and through," said Browne. "Steel that looks like rubies and sapphires—coloured brilliantly in red, green, blue, purple! Steel that glints and sparkles—not merely on the surface, but to its very core. This process will enable you to make steel that is rustless, stainless, and—"

"Rubbish!" said Sir Gilman bluntly.

"I regret this note of scepticism, uncle," said Browne, pained.

"I think I have wasted enough time on you already," said his uncle. "Who put all this nonsense into your head? I have never heard of such an absurdity! Coloured steel, indeed! Let me tell you, young man, that such a thing is absolutely impossible!"

"That's just where I've got you," said Browne complacently. "You say that such

steel is impossible—and you, being a steel magnate, ought to know. But you don't know. I've seen this steel, brother."

"I'm not your brother!" roared Sir Gilman. "What do you mean by this absurd familiarity?"

"A mere slip, sir, for which I crave indulgence," said Browne gently. "A mere habit of mine.

I tell you I've seen this steel, and I can give you my word that it is the most remarkable stuff imaginable. The inventor is at present in hospital."

"A mental hospital, I take it?" asked Sir Gilman caustically.

"I am grieved by this persistent exhibition of scepticism," said Browne. "I do not ask you to take my unsupported word. Read these papers—"

"I have no time to waste on them!"

"Perhaps you do not realise that you are losing the chance of a fortune—"

"I realise that you are wasting my time," said the great man. "Before I even glance at these papers I want to know who this man Reeve is, and how you met him. As far as I can see, you have been fooled."

Browne was beginning to feel slightly discouraged—a novel sensation for him. He was accustomed to winning people over in a very short time. Or perhaps it would be more exact to say that he wore them down until, on the point of exhaustion, they succumbed.

But Sir Gilman Browne was of harder fibre. William Napoleon's only consolation was that his non-success was due to the fact that he was dealing with a Browne. It was a case of Greek meeting Greek. How could

THE ST. FRANK'S BOYS

are coming to

LEEDS AND NEWCASTLE!

Look out for them

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

“Throw him out!” ordered Sir Gilman. Three men rushed forward, seized the protesting William Napoleon Browne, and he was speedily borne to the nearest exit.



he expect to win Sir Gilman over without a supreme struggle. If it had been any other man, he would have been alarmed. But Sir Gilman was a Browne, and that consoled him. It steeled him, too. He would have to put his best efforts forward.

AS briefly as possible—and this, for Browne, was a sheer ordeal—he told of the curious events of Saturday afternoon and evening. He explained to his uncle how he had found the curious scrap of coloured metal; how he had met Mr. Martin Reeve; and how Reeve had been injured in the disaster at the house.

At last Sir Gilman rose to his feet, frowning with impatience and incredulity.

"I daresay you mean well, young man, and perhaps you think that this old fellow has invented something that is noteworthy," he said. "But I know perfectly well that coloured steel is impossible—at least, the kind of coloured steel you speak of. This man was obviously pulling wool over your eyes."

"I would remind you, sir, that I am a Browne!" said William Napoleon coldly. "And I am not exaggerating when I say that—"

"You have been exaggerating ever since you came into this room!" broke in Sir Gilman. "Indeed, if you spoke more like a normal human being, I might take some notice of you. You know nothing about steel and its manufacture. I don't definitely say that this Reeve is a swindler, but I haven't the slightest doubt that he is a crank. There are plenty of them about, believe me. And this so-called discovery of his is probably of no value whatsoever."

"But I have seen this metal—"

"And knowing nothing of metals, you were easily fooled," said Sir Gilman. "No, William. It won't do. I simply haven't the time to waste on this wild-goose chase. You'd better forget all about it."

Browne rose to his feet.

"Do you want me to go to one of your rivals?" he asked sternly.

His uncle laughed.

"Go to them, and welcome," he replied. "Do you think I care? They'll turn you out without giving you such a hearing as this. It's only because I'm your uncle that I have consented to this gross wastage of time. I think it's necessary for you to go now, my boy. I have work to do."

"I can only say that I am astonished," said

Browne painfully. "Indeed, not only astonished, but astounded. Alas, that an uncle of mine should display such a lack of business acumen."

"Confound your cheek—"

"Here you have the opportunity of securing the sole rights to manufacture this amazing new steel," said Browne. "And what do you do? You show me the door! In the words of our American cousins, you give me the air! I could understand such methods in a lesser

"Throw him out!" ordered Sir Gilman. Three men rushed forward, seized the protesting William Napoleon Browne, and he was speedily borne to the nearest exit.



man, but in you, sir—no! I warn you that you had better read these papers—"

"I will do nothing of the sort!" shouted Sir Gilman, exasperated into another show of anger. "I tell you, there's nothing in it. This unfortunate old man has bluffed you. The sooner you come to your senses, the better. And now, William, I must bid you good morning."

"I cannot consent to leave until——"

"Good morning, William!" insisted Sir Gilman, shaking Browne by the hand, and propelling him towards the door.

CHAPTER 8.

Browne, the Undaunted!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE found himself literally pushed out of his uncle's private sanctum.



There were no half measures about Sir Gilman. Having said "Good-morning," he meant it.

Browne found himself in the secretary's office, and the door was closed after him with a sharp, businesslike snap. For a moment, Browne felt his gorge rising. It was a novelty for him to be treated like this. He thought of striding back and renewing the attack with

intensified force, but it occurred to him that it might be better to let his uncle cool down first.

With dignity, he stuffed the papers back into his own pocket. His uncle had handed them to him without giving them more than one cursory glance. Sir Gilman did not think it worth while to peruse them carefully. He had made up his mind that the lanky school-boy had been bluffed.

"This way out, Mr. Browne," said Miss Hale sweetly.

"Am I to understand that you, too, are hostile?" asked Browne reproachfully. "Much as I hate to say it, sister, I fear that my uncle is not the man he is reputed to be. I had imagined his head to be filled with the soundest grey matter in his branch of the family. To my overwhelming sorrow, I now find that it is composed of solid concrete."

"You should not speak of Sir Gilman's head in that fashion," said Miss Hale indignantly.

"I speak as I find," replied Browne, with a sigh. "Without fear of contradiction I can say that I have found my uncle to be a chump. It grieves me to say it, but he is undoubtedly a chump."

At this moment the outer door opened, and a scrupulously attired middle-aged gentleman came in. He glanced at Miss Hale, and then he glanced at Browne.

"I trust I am not too early?" he asked, looking at the girl again.

"No, Mr. Rogers," she said. "You are exactly right for the appointment. Sir Gilman is expecting you. I will take you to him at once. Do you mind waiting a moment, though?"

"Certainly," said the visitor, taking a seat.

Miss Hale went to the inner sanctum, tapped on the door, and entered. Browne fixed a contemplative eye upon the new arrival.

"Let me introduce myself," he said, lounging forward. "My name is William Napoleon Browne. I am Sir Gilman's nephew."

Mr. Rogers jumped up.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Browne," he said cordially, extending a hand.

"If it will give you any satisfaction," continued Browne, "I can assure you that my uncle is giving the matter under consideration his very close attention. I might hint that it would be inadvisable to see him this morning, since he is in a mood that somewhat resembles that of a disappointed mule. Indeed, were you to enter his sanctum, it might mean the crashing of all your hopes. I suggest that it would be a strategic move

be at school. Sir Gilman looks upon you as a mere kid. I'm afraid you were lacking in your famous diplomacy."

Browne was looking grim.

"It is a challenge," he said, his eyes glinting. "Do you understand, Brother Horace? A direct challenge! Brother Gilman has definitely and positively stated that he will not admit me into his office again—that he will not give the slightest attention to Brother Reeve's process. Am I going to admit defeat? No! I accept this challenge, and I venture to predict that my uncle will shortly wish that he had never crossed swords with such a redoubtable opponent."

"You're mad!" said Stevens frankly. "Mad as a hatter! You won't stand an earthly chance against your uncle. If he says he won't pay any attention to this coloured steel stuff, there's an end of it."

"You'll pardon me, brother, it's only the beginning," said Browne. "Am I—a Browne—going to knuckle under after the first encounter? Never let it be breathed! I am like a prodded tiger, Brother Horace. I am in the mood to turn and rend my tormentor. Let Brother Gilman beware! Little does he realise what he is up against!"

"But why all this fuss?" demanded Stevens. "Why on earth don't you take Reeve's papers to another firm? There are plenty in Sheffield. Steel manufacturers are two a penny here."

"My uncle does not even come within that category," said Browne bitterly. "He is given away in exchange for coupons!"

"There's no need to talk like that——"

"As regards your inane suggestion that I should take Brother Reeve's paper to another firm, what has become of your sense of honour?" asked Browne accusingly.

"Did we not undertake to present Brother Reeve to Brother Gilman? Did I not assure Brother Reeve that he would be given a square deal? It was only when he learned that Sir Gilman was my uncle that he consented to take the risk. You must remember that his process is not patented—not protected in any way."

"H'm! I'd forgotten that, I'll admit."

"Without casting any aspersions upon the honesty of Sheffield steel manufacturers in general, it cannot be denied that there are black sheep in every fold," said Browne. "And it would be in accordance with the rules and regulations of Fate for me to link up with the blackest sheep of all. One cannot tell off hand, Brother Horace. In my uncle I know I have a man of absolute honesty. Do not forget that he is a Browne."

"You're right, of course," admitted Stevens. "After what you told old Reeve, you couldn't possibly approach any other firm. I'm not even sure that you're right in approaching your uncle. That coloured steel is almost unbelievably marvellous. In fact, if I hadn't seen it, I should have laughed at the very idea."

"Brother Gilman did more than laugh—he practically called me a half-wit," mur-

mured Browne sorrowfully. "Have no fears regarding the ultimate outcome, however. I am determined to make Brother Reeve's awakening a happy one—in that far-off hospital ward. When he returns to consciousness he shall learn that his agent—to wit, myself—has brought off the scoop of the century."

"It's all very well to talk about scoops—but what are you going to do?" asked Stevens. "I mean, if your uncle has definitely forbidden you to go to his office, or even to his private home, how are you going to get near him? You daren't send him those papers by post. He might burn them, or tear them up. Besides, they're not yours, in any case."

"You can rely upon me to guard them as though they were this week's crossword solutions," replied Browne stoutly. "When it comes to getting in touch with my uncle again, I would remind you that I am William Napoleon Browne."

"Do I need reminding?" murmured Stevens. "Can I ever forget it?"

"I trust not," replied Browne. "I, at least, shall always do my utmost to keep myself in big type on the front page. Publicity, Brother Horace, is the spice of success. I have accepted this challenge from my uncle, and I shall now make my own plans. Needless to say, strategy will be essential. I shall probably need your assistance," he added casually.

"Look here!" said Stevens, in alarm. "I'm blowed if you're going to drag me into your wild and woolly wheezes! By what I've heard of your uncle, he'll half skin you if you go near him again. And if he does that to you, what is he liable to do to me?"

"Always remember, Brother Horace, that you will be under my protection," said Browne kindly.

"Which means nothing," said Stevens. "You'll need just as much protection as me, you—you talkie! They must have forgotten to stop the mechanism in you!"

They evidently had, for Browne continued to talk, and in the end Horace Stevens was worn down—as always.

CHAPTER 9.

At the Steelworks!

"SILENCE!" said Mr. Pycraft curtly. The juniors were just settling down for afternoon lessons in the Class-room Coach. Mr. Pycraft was irritable, as usual. He was more than usually irritable, in fact, because he had only just had an encounter with Willy Handforth, and had come off second best. And Mr. Pycraft had decided to "take it out" of his own boys.

Nosing about, after his usual custom, he had been horrified to discover that most of Willy's pets were housed in the guard's van, at the end of the train. With gleaming eyes, and thinking he had found a legitimate cause for making a report, he had grabbed

Willy and forced him into Nelson Lee's presence.

So Mr. Horace Pycraft had been completely taken aback when Nelson Lee quietly informed him that Willy's pets were on the train by his—Lee's—permission. And since Mr. Pycraft could not truthfully say that the pets were neglected, or a nuisance, he had retired in a bad temper.

"In this Form, at least, there shall be no laxity!" he snapped, as he glared down the long coach. "Handforth, take your hands out of your pockets! Gore-Pearce, don't lounge like that! Glenthorne, wake yourself up!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "At the same time, old thing, I rather thought I was pretty sprightly."

"What did you call me, Glenthorne?"

"Oh, rather, sir," said Archie. "I mean, what?"

"Take twenty lines for impertinence!" snapped Mr. Pycraft unreasonably. "You Remove boys are particularly irritating. I shall be heartily glad when this trip is over—and when you can go back into Mr. Crowell's care."

"It's a pity he didn't come, sir," said Handforth.

"It is!" agreed Mr. Pycraft. "It is too much responsibility for one man—Indeed, Handforth!" he added, with a start. "I have just noticed the implication in your remark! Are you daring to suggest that

you are not satisfied with me as your Form-master?"

"We'd naturally rather have our own Form-master, sir," replied Handforth boldly. "He understands us better. He isn't always dropping on us, and spying on things that don't concern him—I mean, he minds his own business—That is to say, he isn't so nosy—"

He paused, realising that at each fresh attempt he was making things worse. And Mr. Pycraft got ready to explode with some violence. Unfortunately for him, the door at the end of the coach opened at that moment. Nelson Lee appeared, smiling good-naturedly.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Pycraft, I want to take half your boys away," he said, getting straight to the point.

"I shall not mind in the least," retorted Mr. Pycraft tartly. "I shall be particularly glad if you will remove Handforth. He has just had the studied impertinence to inform me that I do not mind my own business."

Nelson Lee frowned.

"Handforth! Stand up!" he commanded.

"What do you mean by—"

"But I didn't say it, sir!" protested Handforth indignantly.

"How dare you?" stormed Mr. Pycraft.

"You distinctly said—"

"I only said that Mr. Crowell always minds his own business," broke in Handforth triumphantly. "I didn't mention your name



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at all, sir. Surely I can give Mr. Crowell a good word, can't I?" he added, looking at Nelson Lee.

"Ahem!" murmured Lee. "It seems, Mr. Pycraft, that there has been some little misunderstanding. Perhaps we had better let the matter drop."

"Very well!" breathed Mr. Pycraft. "As you say, sir! My authority in this Form is flouted so much that a little extra can make no difference."

And he turned away, seething like an over-filled kettle.

"All you Remove boys will follow me out," said Nelson Lee, hastening to change the subject. "I have decided that while we are in Sheffield, parties of boys shall visit some of the great steel-manufacturing plants—so many boys a day. I consider that the experience will be of great educational value."

"Hurrah!" yelled the Removites excitedly.

"Good egg!"

"Bravo, sir!"

"Good old Mr. Lee!"

"Now, you needn't get so animated about it," smiled Lee. "Unless you behave yourselves, the experiment will not be repeated in any other town. So it is entirely up to you. Now, come along."

"What about us, sir?" asked Corcoran, of the Fourth.

"Yes, where do we come in, sir?" demanded Boots indignantly.

"You shall have your turn to-morrow morning, directly after first lesson," replied Lee. "The other Forms will go in their turn."

The Fourth was utterly disgusted. In fact, the Fourth was positively wild with jealousy.

It was an outrage that the Removites should be given precedence over them.

THE Removites, of course, considered that everything was as it should be. It was natural that they should have an advantage over the Fourth. Wasn't the Remove a lot more important than the Fourth, anyway?

The trip was all the more enjoyable because it was unexpected.

It was a gloriously warm afternoon, and everybody had been rather fed up with the thought of sticking in the class-room at lessons. A trip to Sheffield, and a tour through one of the great engineering plants, was miles better. And since it would rank as work, it was better still. In a very short time the juniors were ready. They only required to fetch their caps and to line up alongside the train.

While this was going on, William Napoleon Browne happened to come along the corridor—having been sent on a mission by Mr. Pagett, of the Fifth.

"And what," asked Browne interestedly, "is this?"

He was leaning out of one of the doors, watching the Removites as they lined up.

"You're not on in this act, Browne, old man," grinned Nipper. "You've got to stick at lessons all the afternoon. We're going into Sheffield to see how the steel is manufactured."

Browne winced. Steel was a sore subject with him just now.

"Indeed!" he said. "Why have I not heard of this before? And why, incidentally, are you going on this trip in advance of the Fifth?"

"Because we're more important than the Fifth, of course!" sang out Handforth.

Morrow, of the Sixth, who was one of the prefects in charge of the party, grinned.

"Don't you believe it, young 'un," he said. "Mr. Lee is sending you first because he believes in the policy of getting the worst over as soon as possible."

There was a united yell of wrath from the Removites.

"Ah, now I understand," said Browne, nodding. "And which particular steel works is to be pestered?"

"The Apex, I think," said Morrow.

A gleam came into Browne's eyes. Quick as a flash, he saw the possibilities. Nelson Lee happened to come along just then, ready for the start. Browne leapt to the ground and accosted him.

"Is it a fact, sir, that these trouble manufacturers are to be initiated into the mysteries of steelcraft at the Apex Works?" he asked politely.

"Yes, Browne. Why?"

"May I ask, brother—that is to say, sir—when the Fifth is going?"

"To-morrow."

"Let me suggest, sir, that an exception should be made in my case," urged Browne. "Whilst I am the captain of the Fifth, I cannot truthfully say that I am greatly impressed with the Fifth's mental prowess. It would please me, therefore, to mingle with the infants."

"I am afraid you can't go this afternoon, Browne," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "There is no reason why an exception should be made, as you suggest—"

"I would mention that the Apex Works is controlled by my uncle, Sir Gilman Browne," continued William Napoleon smoothly. "That, I take it, is something, sir? Needless to add, I shall be able to conduct these simple souls round with some show of authority. My uncle, I might add, will doubtless be particularly interested to see me."

"Of course, that's different, Browne," said Lee. "I did not know that the Apex Works was controlled by one of your relatives. Perhaps it would be as well for you to accompany us. You had better tell Mr. Pagett, and join us as quickly as possible."

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE was particularly pleased with himself.

He had not expected to get an opportunity of visiting the Apex Steel Manufacturing Co., Ltd., again until the next

day, at the earliest. In fact, he had already made plans for the next day, and these plans still held good. But that was no reason why he should not have another shot at Sir Gilman this afternoon.

Any excuse to get in was welcome, and here he would officially enter with the crowd. It would be easy enough to dodge off once the works had been entered. He relied upon his ingenuity to do the rest.

The juniors found a well-equipped motor-coach waiting for them on the road, a short distance from the School Train, and they drove into Sheffield in fine style. As a sort of preliminary, the coach went through the business section of the town—through Fargate and into the High Street. The St. Frank's fellows were impressed by Fitzalan Square, by the town hall, and by many of the other public buildings. From their point of view the theatres and picture theatres, perhaps, were the most interesting of all.

And then they went on to the Apex Works.

Leaving their motor-coach outside, they were taken in tow by a genial under-manager, who divided the whole party up into groups, and placed them in sub-charge of various underlings.

They all entered, and were soon greatly interested in the mighty wonders of the vast plant.

They saw the blast furnaces, and they beheld molten metal in the converters. It was all fascinating and bewildering. The cranes carrying the immense ladles, with the sparks flying in thousands, and with men operating gigantic pieces of mechanism as though by magic. It was awe-inspiring to see these huge pieces of machinery obeying the touch of the puny-looking controllers.

But the most interesting sights of all were those within the machine shops—where tools of every kind and description were manufactured.

Sheffield, as everybody knows, is world-famous for its fine tools. The steel that Sheffield manufactures is not so much the kind that is used for building great bridges, but the finer sort from which knives and tools are made. The hardening and tempering processes are, in a way, peculiar to Sheffield craftsmen—whose skill has been transmitted from generations of ancestors.

Crucible steel was first made by Huntsman, in the year 1743. It is used for the manufacture of cutlery, woodworking tools, lathes, farm implements, and so forth. In the Apex Works, tools of every kind and description were turned out, and the various methods of manufacture were watched with great interest by the schoolboy visitors.

Even Browne found himself growing attentive, although his mind was on quite another matter. He was wondering how he could break away, and get to his uncle's office. Now that he was on the spot, he was beginning to realise that it couldn't be done. He almost feared that his trip had been for nothing. The works were vast. He was about half a mile from the offices now, and he would never be able to find his way through the machine shops unaided. But he

was gratified to observe—just when he was on the point of resigning himself to another disappointment—the tall, imposing figure of Sir Gilman Browne himself.

This was an unexpected opportunity.

"I trust you will have no objection, sir, if I have a word with my uncle as a preliminary?" asked Browne, turning swiftly to Nelson Lee. "I think, perhaps, a few friendly overtures——"

"By all means, Browne," nodded Lee.

Browne strode off, his intention being to buttonhole his uncle and nail him down to something definite on the spot. Browne considered it very unlikely that Sir Gilman would resort to anything violent in front of others.

"Ah, Brother Gilman—that is to say, uncle!" exclaimed Browne, giving his relative a friendly clap on the back from sheer force of habit. "Once more we meet! I would suggest a brief perusal of the documents we already know of. Little do you realise the tremendous importance——"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Sir Gilman, spinning round. "So you're here again, are you? How did you get into these works? I gave strict orders that you were to be excluded."

"It would be as profitable to attempt to exclude an incoming tide," declared Browne. "Let me urge you to resign yourself to the fact that I am inevitable. Having made up my mind to gain a hearing, I shall gain one. Rebuffs are merely a stimulus to me. In fact, the sooner you knuckle under, the better. It will be to our mutual benefit."

"Of all the impertinent young jackanapes!" roared Sir Gilman.

He had come to a halt, and was facing Browne squarely. They were standing in the very centre of one of the machine shops, with Sir Gilman's host of attendants fluttering round him in alarm—and with hundreds of workpeople listening to every word that was being said. This was more than Browne had bargained for. He had never dreamed that his uncle would publicly go for him.

"Hush, brother!" he whispered. "Let me suggest a slightly less bull-like attitude. This is a matter between ourselves, and one in which your workpeople cannot possibly have any interest——"

"I can see I have made a mistake," said Sir Gilman fiercely. "I gave orders that you should be excluded from my offices, but I neglected to give any specific instructions regarding the works. Mansell! Couldrey! Powell! Seize this young man and throw him off the premises!"

"While being grateful for this escort, I deplore the necessity to have me thrown off," said Browne sadly. "Might I suggest that I shall resist——"

"You may treat him as roughly as you wish!" continued his uncle, turning to the three startled men who hastened to his side. "He is my nephew, and I give you full permission to use whatever force is necessary. Make no mistake about it. Throw him out!"



Sir Gilman didn't want to listen to Browne, but he simply had to. The Removites saw to that! And then, as Browne produced the scintillating piece of metal, an excited expression came into the great man's eyes. "Desist, brothers!" murmured William Napoleon. "The battle is won!"

"One moment!" said Browne, looking round in desperation.

"Don't listen to him!" roared Sir Gilman.

"If necessary, gag him!"

William Napoleon Browne was seized, and the Removites watched in amazement and concern. Knowing nothing of the previous incidents, they were naturally dumbfounded. And Nelson Lee himself resolved that he would have a word with Browne later on—and probably a word with Sir Gilman in advance.

As for Browne himself, he was borne speedily to the nearest exit.

CHAPTER 10.

The Challenge!

THERE was no actual throwing out. Browne knew when he was beaten, and he remained docile. He submitted to this gross indignity with that stoicism and courage for which the Brownes were famous.

But only outwardly was he calm. Within he boiled. His blood was up. It was bad enough to be ordered out of his uncle's office, but it was beyond all endurance to be thrown out of the works in full view of the Remove. And without any justifiable cause!

That was the worst of it. Browne knew perfectly well that his uncle would be only too eager to secure the sole rights for the manufacture of that coloured steel if only he would seriously consider the process. After what had just happened, it seemed that there was not one chance in a million that Sir Gilman would ever reverse his decision.

Browne set his teeth. Sir Gilman had asked for a fight, and he should have one! Was he—William Napoleon—to tuck his tail between his legs and run? Never! The Browne blood rebelled against such a thought. There was only one thing to do—continue the struggle with intensified fire.

And as Browne strode off round the works he completely threw overboard his plans for the morrow, in which Stevens was supposed to help. There was no time like the present.

ARRIVING at the main office building, he strode in and was immediately colared by the commissionaire.

"Sorry, sir—you can't go up," said the man uncomfortably.

"No?" asked Browne, with an ominous glint in his eye. "Be good enough to realise that I am William Napoleon Browne——"

"That's just it, sir," said the commissionaire. "Sir Gilman has given strict orders that you mustn't be allowed in."

"Alas!" sighed Browne. "While hating to take this step, I find that there is no alternative."

He neatly hooked his foot round the commissionaire's ankle, gave a heave, and the commissionaire—a heavy man—went down with such a thud that he nearly cracked the mosaic flooring. Browne gave him one glance, dashed to the lift, and thrust half-a-crown into the lift attendant's hand.

"Up!" he said briskly.

He reached the offices in triumph, and such was the swiftness of his action that he was completely across the outer office before any of the clerks became aware of his presence.

"One moment!" shouted somebody, running up.

Browne took no notice. He opened the glass-top door, strode through, and closed the door behind him. He found Miss Hale eyeing him in wonder.

"How did you get up?" she asked. "Sir Gilman gave orders—"

"Pardon me, sister, but this is no time for frivolous inquiries," said Browne briskly. "I am here—and, being here, I must make the best of my time. I can see, by glancing into your eyes, that you are of a kindly disposition. I can detect a friendly nature. Am I right?"

The girl laughed.

"What an extraordinary fellow you are!" she said frankly. "You deserve to get on—if only because of your enterprise. But I'm afraid you've miscalculated this time. Sir Gilman is not in his office—and won't be for another hour."

"That," explained Browne, "is why I am here."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"You will in a moment," continued Browne. "Might I ask if my uncle has any appointments for this afternoon?"

"Why, yes."

"What are they?"

"There is one for four o'clock with Mr. Huxley Moore, the great building constructor," said the girl, consulting her notes. "Then, at four-thirty, Sir Gilman has an appointment with Herr Kessler, the big German magnate. And there is a chance that Lord Kendrick will come in—"

"Enough," said Browne. "I do not think we shall get as far as Lord Kendrick, sister. I am greatly indebted to you."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Miss Hale, alarmed. "I hope you will not take advantage of— Oh, perhaps I ought not to have told you—"

"Have no fear," said Browne kindly. "I will see that you get into no scrapes with Sir Gilman. Now, as time presses, I must away."

He was gone before Miss Hale could even begin to protest.

BROWNE was out of the building before the commissionaire knew of it. In the circumstances it was better, perhaps, that a further meeting with the com-

missionaire should be avoided. Browne was a determined fellow, and a stout fighter, but there was no sense in actually looking for trouble.

He had glanced at the clock as he went out. Five minutes to three. This was better than he had expected. He would be able to get much done in the hour at his disposal.

He ventured into Fargate, and West Street, and Norfolk Street, and Pinstone Street—searching the city, in fact, for a likely establishment. At last he found what he wanted—a theatrical costumiers. It was a second-hand clothes shop, too, and was not much to look at from outside.

COMING NEXT WEEK!



missionaire quickly and fluently explained his needs. He was playing a practical joke, and wished to adopt a disguise. The proprietor, recognising Browne as a St. Frank's fellow, entered into the spirit of the thing. As he remarked, one never knew what these schoolboys would be up to next.

At twenty minutes to four Browne emerged, completely transformed. He now wore a bristling moustache, iron-grey and impressive. He looked thirty years older, and his own ability as an actor came to his aid. Horace Stevens was to have done some of the acting, but Stevens wasn't here, and Browne considered that he was, after all, unnecessary.

At seven minutes to four, Browne left a taxi in front of the Apex offices, and he passed the commissionaire's scrutiny with success.

He reached the private office, and gave Miss Hale a careless glance.

"I have an appointment with Sir Gilman," he said, in a deep voice. "I believe he is expecting me—Mr. Huxley Moore."

"Why, yes," said the girl, looking at him closely.

But she did not question him—and Browne's heart beat more evenly. His one fear was that Mr. Huxley Moore was well known here. In that case, his scheme would fail, and he would have to bolt. But Browne was always a fellow to take a chance.

"Mr. Huxley Moore to see you, Sir Gilman," said the secretary, opening the

Reeve's documents in front of his uncle. Sir Gilman picked them up with a slight start. They somehow seemed familiar. He glanced at his visitor closely.

"Where did you get these, Mr. Moore?" he asked.

"Read them!" commanded Browne.

Sir Gilman was not accustomed to this tone, and for a moment he nearly succumbed. He sat back in his chair, took the papers, and commenced reading them. Browne, in the meantime, sat down in the other chair.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Sir Gilman suddenly. "These are the papers that my nephew——"

He broke off, stared at Browne more closely, and suddenly went fiery red. He rose to his feet like an angry bull.

"William!" he thundered. "How—how dare you?"

Browne sighed. He had hoped to rush his uncle into reading those papers—knowing full well that once he had started on them he would be impressed. And after he had read them through he would undoubtedly forgive the whole procedure.

"One moment, brother!" urged Browne, dodging round the big desk. "Let me point out that unless this matter was of vital importance I should never have approached you in this way. I took a chance——"

"You—you young nuisance!" stormed Sir Gilman, picking up the papers and thrusting them into Browne's hand. "You may be my brother's son, but I never wish to see you again. Your impertinence is beyond all endurance. Your persistence is outrageous."

"But at least you must give me the credit for being enterprising," said William Napoleon, as he dodged adroitly. "No, uncle, be calm! Be cool! Always remember that you are a Browne! It is the tradition of we Brownes that we never become ruffled."

Sir Gilman looked positively fiendish.

"I am not ruffled!" he hooted. "I am perfectly calm! But, by heaven, I'm going to throw you out of this office with my own hands!"

"If you will only read those papers——"

It was fatal for Browne to persist any longer. Sir Gilman took advantage of the momentary pause, and he seized his nephew firmly by the scruff of the neck. Luckily the door opened just then—Miss Hale coming in to find what all the noise was about.

"Stand clear!" roared Sir Gilman.

He ran Browne through the doorway, through the secretary's office, and then clean through the outer office. The more Browne resisted, the more his uncle exerted himself. The amazed Mr. Huxley Moore, who had just arrived, watched the scene with no little concern. If this was the way Sir Gilman Browne treated his visitors, it was evidently a perilous proceeding to interview him.

The whole outer office was dumbfounded. Everybody knew about Browne, of course, and everybody was quietly chuckling over him. But they did not connect this fresh incident with their employer's nephew. He

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inner door and ushering the impostor in.

"Ah, Sir Gilman, this is a delightful pleasure!" said Browne, striding forward and grasping his uncle's hand warmly. "You must forgive me if I appear hurried, but I can stay for no longer than five minutes."

"Really?" said Sir Gilman, looking at his visitor very closely, but without suspicion. "I understood that you wished to go into the matter of the big Westminster contract?"

"That can wait," said Browne promptly. "There is a much more important matter. Some papers have come into my hands—some papers dealing with a new steel process which is likely to revolutionise the industry. Before I go any farther, I should like you to read these papers."

And Browne boldly placed Mr. Martin

was apparently an elderly man. Never before had Sir Gilman acted so strangely.

"Now!" panted Sir Gilman, when he reached the main doors. "Get out of here, and keep out! If necessary, I'll employ detectives to watch the doors! I'll show you, William, whether I'm to be defied or not! If you ever get in this building again, you'll be a clever fellow."

"I shall get in again!" replied Browne promptly.

CHAPTER 11.

Rallying Round Old Browne!

"WELL, it was jolly interesting," said Handforth condescendingly. "Not so good as a cricket match, of course, but this is supposed to be educational. Fancy a giddy huntsman inventing steel, though!"

"A huntsman?" asked Church, staring.

"That's what one of those men told me," replied Handforth defensively. "I don't believe it, of course."

"You hopeless ass!" grinned Church. "The man's name was Huntsman—Benjamin Huntsman. You couldn't have been listening properly."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth. "So that's it!"

"Benjamin Huntsman lived in the eighteenth century. Although he was an Englishman, his parents were really Germans. He got fed-up with the steel they supplied him with, so he made some of his own—"

"I don't want to hear all this!" interrupted Handforth hastily. "I've had facts and figures dinned into me for the last hour—and I'm fed-up. Any more about it, my lad, and I'll squash you!"

The Removites were lounging against the motor-coach—which was all ready to take them back to the School Train. All the fellows were on hand—with the solitary exception of Browne. The coach was awaiting Mr. Nelson Lee, who had gone to say goodbye to Sir Gilman.

"Why not go and have a look round the town while we're waiting?" suggested Travers. "Mr. Lee might be half an hour yet—"

"And he might be only two minutes," interrupted Morrow of the Sixth. "You chaps had better get into the coach. I can keep a better eye on you there. No dodging away, my sons! You're as hard to look after as a vanload of monkeys."

Some of the juniors protested, but it was useless. The prefect meant what he said, and the Removites were bundled into the coach to await Nelson Lee's coming.

"Hallo!" said Nipper. "Old Browne's in here! And we wondered what had become of him! By Jove! What's up with him?"

William Napoleon Browne, who had sat in the coach unnoticed, was a changed individual. Gone was his customary pep; gone was his calm, contemplative eye. He posi-

tively drooped as he sat, and his eye was forlorn and weary.

"What on earth have you been doing, Browne?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Alas, brothers, you behold a saddened—not to say sore—mortal," replied Browne, shaking his head. "Much as I respect Uncle Gilman for his devotion to physical culture, I wish he had not used the dumb-bells so frequently. His muscles, I regret to say, are as powerful as the steel cables which he manufactures. I am tempted to believe, indeed, that he has incorporated steel in his own anatomy."

"But what's happened?" insisted Nipper. "We saw you chucked out of the works, but Sir Gilman himself didn't do it."

"That was a mere trifle," said Browne. "Listen, brothers, and I will a tale unfold."

The juniors gathered round, grinning. They didn't mind waiting for Nelson Lee now. Browne was generally entertaining, and just now he promised to be particularly so. And everybody noticed, with some surprise, that he had completely changed within the last minute.

From some cause which was quite obscure, he had recovered all his old zip and energy. He had braced himself up, and his eyes were gleaming with a purposeful light. Seldom, indeed, had he looked so resolute. The coming of the juniors had wrought a miraculous transformation.

AS a matter of fact, Browne saw fresh hope in the Removites. If only he could enlist their help, all might yet be well. There were twenty-four of them here—a formidable force.

With surprising brevity and lucidity—for Browne—the Fifth Form skipper gave all the details of his recent interview with his uncle. He explained the reason for those interviews, describing exactly how he and Stevens had found that remarkable piece of coloured metal on the road, and how they had promised old Martin Reeve that they would get Sir Gilman Browne interested.

"You know the rest, brothers," said Browne. "You know that my uncle has proved himself to be a man of Handforthian pigheadedness—"

"Here, I say!" protested Handforth.

"Not," continued Browne, "that you need fear any competition, Brother Handforth. When it comes to obstinacy in its raw state, you undoubtedly hold the world's record. You need not fear that your laurels will be wrested from you."

"You silly, longwinded ass—"

"Here we have an acute position," pursued Browne. "As I have said, it is my desire to fix this contract up before Brother Reeve recovers consciousness. It is now or never, as it were. I have attempted the thing single-handed, and the opposing forces are too formidable. With reinforcements, however, I fancy that I can turn the tables on Brother Gilman."

"I don't know!" said Nipper dubiously. "What can we do, anyhow?"

"You can do much," replied Browne. "My uncle has asked for trouble. Be good enough to remember that he has laid hands upon the leading light of St. Frank's—the most important fellow in the school."

"Ahem!" coughed Nipper.

"My uncle has brought ridicule upon the fair name of our school," continued Browne, waxing indignant. "He has ordered me out of his office, he has thrown me out of his office. Indeed—to be frank—he has kicked me out of his office. Are you to hear this, and remain unmoved?"

"We shouldn't remain unmoved long if we helped you, dear old fellow," said Travers, shaking his head. "In fact, we should stand a very good chance of getting moved pretty quickly."

"A weak admission, Brother Vivian," said Browne reproachfully. "Are you telling me that twenty-four stalwarts such as yourselves could be conquered by Brother Gilman's myrmidons? Remember the good cause! Remember the unhappy Brother Reeve, languishing in that hospital in Norwich. My uncle has only to read these papers, and he will fall over himself in his haste to settle the deal. Assist me in this project, and fame will be yours."

"By George! I'm with you!" said Handforth eagerly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Browne's been treated rottenly by his uncle."

"Yes, rather! Let's help!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorpe. "Browne, old lamp-post, kindly give the necessary instructions. Rely upon the lads to rally round. Name the good old procedure, and we'll fly at the word of command."

"Splendid!" beamed Browne, rubbing his hands together. "And you, Brother Nipper? As skipper of this motley throng, do you give your sanction?"

"I am with the majority," grinned Nipper. "It's a go, Browne."

BUT when they heard Browne's startling suggestions they were decidedly taken aback. They had expected something drastic, but they had hardly reckoned upon being called into such a task as Browne unfolded.

"It's too thick, old man," said Nipper doubtfully.

"It needs to be thick if my uncle is to be convinced," replied Browne. "He has challenged me. He has said that if I ever get into his office again I shall be a clever fellow. And, as you all know that I am a clever fellow— But let us not discuss these obvious points. Do you agree to the scheme?"

"It is too risky," said Harry Gresham. "Think of the awful trouble we should get into if we did it. Why, your uncle would report us to Mr. Lee, and there'd be the most awful commotion."

"We might even be sent back to St. Frank's!" argued Tommy Watson. "Mr.

Lee would say that we weren't to be trusted—"

"You—you weaklings!" roared Handforth, glaring round. "Browne's wheeze is simply gorgeous! It's a winner! What are you all made of—straw?"

"Well said, Brother Handy!" exclaimed Browne. "Let us decide quickly, brothers all. There is not a moment to be lost. To be, or not to be! Let us have your votes!"

"Will your uncle forgive us afterwards?" asked Church.

"He'll not merely forgive you, but probably invite you to dinner!" said Browne promptly. "Take my word for it, brothers, this business will be short and sharp. Brother Gilman will be subdued once and for all, and we shall emerge triumphant. Should I display such confidence as this if there were the slightest doubts of success?"

They hardly knew how to take Browne—even after all their experience of him. However, they had promised to help, and it was not their way to back out.

"We'll do it, you chaps," said Nipper, looking round. "After all, it's Browne's stunt, and he's willing to pay the piper if it goes wrong. Besides, think of the indignity to St. Frank's. We've got to wipe out that stain."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's get it over before Mr. Lee comes back!"

"Yes, rather!"

They all went swarming out of the motor-coach. Browne was in the lead, and he formed his battalion up smartly. At the same moment, out of the corner of his eye, he was gratified to behold Nelson Lee talking with the works manager and one or two other officials. Sir Gilman was not in evidence.

"Come!" said Browne crisply. "Forward! And remember, brothers—sweep all before you. Permit no consideration to hold you in check."

"Hurrah!"

"Come on, the Remove!"

If William Napoleon Browne felt any chagrin at being compelled to enlist the aid of the Remove, he did not show it. Single-handed, he was beaten. But what general ever won a battle single-handed? Remove, or no Remove, nothing could alter the fact that Browne was in command.

"Here you!" bellowed the big commissioner, as soon as Browne appeared. "I've had about enough of you, my lad!"

"Away, knave!" said Browne. "I can't be bothered!"

The commissioner seemed to grow bigger with indignation. He knew that he was safe. This lanky young fellow might be his employer's nephew, but he had received orders to keep him out. And he could not forget that Browne had tripped him up and bowled him over—to the untold joy of at least two lift-boys and a hall-porter with whom he had had a long feud.

"Here, what the— You young—"

The commissioner got no further. He was swept aside by the Removees. They

swarmed in, flooding the great vestibule. "The stairs!" sang out Browne, leading the way. "Don't bother with the lift!"

They went rushing up the stairs to the first floor. Browne knew his way about by heart now, and he no sooner put his face into the general office than about a dozen clerks rose enthusiastically to the attack. They were beginning to enjoy this game. They couldn't remember such a lively day as this.

But they were doomed to disappointment.

For no sooner did Browne appear than his battalion followed, sweeping into the general office in a yelling, excited flood.

"This way!" shouted the Fifth Form skipper.

He legged it across the huge office like a sprint racer, and much as he disliked so rudely disturbing Miss Hale's quietude, he burst in without compunction. The Remove followed him. Miss Hale watched, absolutely aghast. She was speechless. She could only sit there and gaze.

Right into Sir Gilman's inner sanctum went the mob. It was all so swift that almost before Miss Hale could blink, nothing remained but a cloud of dust. And chaos sounded from within the inner sanctum.

Something shot out, and it proved to be an unfortunate gentleman who had happened to be in conference with Sir Gilman at the moment. Not that the schoolboys had ejected him. The gentleman had thought it a wise policy to retire.

The key clicked in the lock, and Miss Hale feared the worst. What chance had Sir Gilman, trapped with that avalanche of schoolboys?

As a matter of fact, he had no chance whatever!

CHAPTER 12.

Browne's Winning Way!

SIR GILMAN BROWNE sat in his easy-chair.

He couldn't do anything else. Handforth and three other stalwarts were behind him, holding him down. Nipper and Archie and Gresham and Travers were on the floor, holding Sir Gilman's legs. Others were keeping his hands out of mischief.

"Help!" bellowed the unfortunate steel magnate. "You—you unmitigated young scoundrels! Miss Hale! Help! You—you—"

"Let me point out, uncle, that any appeals for help will be futile," said Browne smoothly. "Let me also point out that if you persist in making these uncouth sounds I shall be compelled to gag you."

"This is your doing, you—you—"

"Admitted!" said Browne smoothly. "I freely and willingly accept the full responsibility. Pray do not imagine that these energetic specimens of British boyhood are to blame. They are merely under my sway."

"I'll have you thrown out of your school for this!" vowed Sir Gilman.

"It appears to be your hobby, sir, to have people thrown out of places," said Browne soothingly. "When I have my way, you will find that this procedure on my part is justified. I have great pleasure in accepting, in advance, your invitation to dinner at Barton Manor."

"You—you—" Sir Gilman paused, realising that he was not cutting a very dignified figure. "Well, you have got me in a position which places you in the advantage. Be sure that you will suffer for it later. For the moment I must submit. What do you want?"

Browne beamed benevolently.

"To begin with, uncle, I want your word of honour that you'll sit quietly in your chair and read these papers," said Browne, promptly producing the documents and laying them on the desk. "Do you agree?"

"I absolutely refuse!"

"Let me remind you that we have the upper hand—"

"I tell you, I absolutely refuse!"

"But why this display of stubbornness?" asked Browne mildly. "If you will only be reasonable, Uncle Gilman, your comfort will be instantly restored. I merely ask you to give your parole, and all will be well. We will stand by silently and obediently until you have finished reading. We will then depart in an orderly manner. What could be more reasonable?"

"Do it, sir!" urged Handforth, in Sir Gilman's ear. "That invention of old Reeve's is a corker, according to Browne—"

"Good heavens!" gasped Sir Gilman. "I am deafened! William, tell these—these friends of yours to keep silent."

"Brothers, kindly leave this to me," said Browne. "Now, sir, if you will give me your parole—"

"I have already told you that I will do no such thing."

"If you will read these papers—"

"I refuse to read them!" interrupted Sir Gilman hotly. "I have made up my mind, and none of your hooliganly nonsense will make me change it. When I say a thing, I mean it. I shall make no attempt to struggle, since that would be futile. I shall wait until my staff brings assistance—which will be soon."

Browne had not been prepared for this. While he admired his uncle's steadfast attitude, he was rather alarmed by it. Even this daring stunt might fail unless something drastic was done.

"I take it, then, that you absolutely refuse to give us your word that you will sit quiet if we release you?" he asked.

"If you release me, I shall at once call for help and have you all—"

"Thrown out," said Browne, nodding. "I know! I fear it is useless to repeat that these papers are of international importance."

"Quite useless."

"Nevertheless, the firm which secures the

sole rights to the manufacture of this steel will become the most famous firm in the world," urged Browne. "Do you think, uncle, that I would have gone to this length if I was at all doubtful? Brother Reeve is genuine. His invention is phenomenal. You may not realise it at the moment, but I am doing you a vast kindness by using force in this way. You will never cease to be grateful."

"Grateful!" spluttered Sir Gilman. "Why, you—you—"

He broke off, words absolutely failing him. But his jaw was firmly set. He was resolved not to give in.

"There is only one course which remains," said Browne, his eyes gleaming. "Brothers, be good enough to hold the prisoner very tightly. If he attempts to interrupt me, take measures to silence him."

"What—what do you intend to do now?" panted his uncle.

"Since you refuse to read these papers, I am going to read them aloud to you—line by line," said Browne triumphantly. "There is an old proverb, Uncle Gilman, which says that if Mahommed will not come to the mountain, the mountain must go to Mahommed. Be good enough to regard yourself as Mahommed. I advise you to listen carefully, and—"

He broke off suddenly and fairly gave a yelp of excitement. It was such an unusual exhibition in Browne that the Removites regarded him in astonishment. One and all, they were beginning to doubt the success of this enterprise.

BROWNE was staring fascinatedly at a little sealed parcel which had been reposing on the desk, under his very eyes, ever since he had entered. It was a registered parcel, and the only feature which had now attracted Browne's attention was the postmark on the label.

He had noticed it by sheer chance—"Norwich." It seemed to give him a world of added confidence.

"Now, uncle, let us begin," he said smoothly.

"You can begin, if you like—but I shall

not listen!" fumed Sir Gilman. "Do you understand? I shall not listen to a word!"

"If I read, you will be obliged to listen."

"But I shall not be obliged to heed," snorted Sir Gilman. "Good heavens! Do you think I am going to submit to this outrageous nonsense? You may think yourself clever, William, but you will be defeated. Once and for all, I will have nothing whatever to do with this preposterous process you refer to. You may have been fooled, but I'm not going to—"

"Hold him tightly, brothers," said Browne grimly. "Act 2 will now begin. Uncle Gilman, kindly unplug your ears, for they are now going to be filled with something that will fairly sizzle your brains."

He started reading aloud. And Sir Gilman, at the same time, set his teeth and deliberately hummed a tune. His gaze was fixed on the door. At any moment he was expecting help to arrive. He pictured his office staff preparing to break in.

Actually, Sir Gilman was in a far worse plight than he believed. For Miss Hale, noting the complete peace within the inner sanctum, and hearing Browne's conversational tone—although any words were indistinguishable—naturally concluded that the intercourse was amicable.

"It's no good, Browne," said Nipper, after a while. "You'd better give it up. Your uncle is stronger than you are. I was afraid of it from the start. You've failed, old man."

"Not yet," said Browne, laying the papers down. "If I am driven to it, I shall read these documents aloud until my uncle knows them by heart. Then, indeed, he will succumb. But there is another shot in my magazine."

He picked up the little registered parcel and commenced to unwrap it.

"Go on!" said Sir Gilman grimly. "Not content with committing this outrage upon my person, you must add insult to injury by interfering with my private correspondence. There shall be a heavy reckoning, young man."

"While admitting that this parcel is undoubtedly addressed to you, uncle, I must

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tell you that it was sent at my instigation," said Browne calmly. "I purposely instructed that it should be sent direct to you, so that no time should be lost. Actually, this is mine."

He congratulated himself upon his forethought. While telephoning to the Norwich Great Hospital the previous day, he had made a suggestion to the house surgeon. That gentleman had doubtless acted upon it, for here was the concrete evidence that he had done so.

Casting the wrappings aside, Browne merely glanced at a short note—which informed Sir Gilman that the "enclosed" had been found, according to Browne's suggestion, in Mr. Reeve's pocket, and had been sent on as requested.

Browne produced a smallish knob of metal, uneven in shape, but brilliant crimson in hue.

"Look at this, sir!" he said triumphantly. "I suggested that this specimen should be sent to you. I have repaired an error that should never have been made. Before leaving Norwich I should have rifled Brother Reeve's pocket myself."

"A grave omission," said Sir Gilman tartly. "I imagine you to be quite adept in that procedure. Seldom have I met such an accomplished young scoundrel as you. And you my own nephew! I am appalled!"

"Do not be appalled," said Browne. "Be attentive."

He held the metal immediately in front of his uncle's gaze. Sir Gilman tried hard not to look at it. But it was impossible to ignore that gleaming, scintillating, glittering object.

"Upon my word!" he ejaculated, startled. "Let me—"

He tried to reach for it, but his arms were held.

"Desist, brothers," murmured Browne. "The battle is won!"

Sir Gilman did not hear. Finding his arm released, he seized that piece of extraordinary metal and turned it in his fingers. He weighed it in his hand, and then he bent forward, his face flushing with something that was akin to stupefaction.

"Extraordinary!" he muttered. "Undoubtedly, this is metal. Yet I have never seen anything so amazing—"

He broke off, leapt to his feet, and went to his desk. Swiftly opening a drawer, he took out a small hammer and tapped the metal sharply. He produced a file, and was busy for several minutes. Then he sat back and breathed hard.

"Steel!" he said dreamily. "Unquestionably this is steel of the finest quality. Yet it has the colour of a ruby—and this colour is an integral part of the metal. Gad! It is almost unbelievable!"

"And here," said Browne smoothly, "is a treatise on the secret process by which this steel can be manufactured. Let me remind you that the process is absolutely unprotected—unpatented. It is the privilege of the Apex Steel Manufacturing Co., Ltd., to provide the necessary capital for commercialis-

ing this product. Be good enough to read, brother."

Sir Gilman did not hear him. He had completely forgotten his previous views; he had even forgotten his startled, wondering audience. William Napoleon Browne was the coolest fellow in the room.

An urgent tapping sounded on the door.

"Go away!" shouted Sir Gilman. "I am busy."

"But, Sir Gilman, Mr. Lee is waiting—"

"I really beg your pardon, Miss Hale," called Browne's uncle. "I did not realise it was you. Tell Mr. Lee that I will see him soon. Ask him to wait. But do leave me alone."

He bent over his desk, and became absorbed in Mr. Martin Reeve's crabbed handwriting.

"WILLIAM, you've undoubtedly won," said Sir Gilman, half an hour later, as he eyed Browne with twinkling eyes. "Gad, boy, what an obstinate mule I was, eh?"

"We all have our faults, sir," beamed Browne.

"You wanted to put this invention in my way, and I refused to heed you," continued Sir Gilman. "Why, boy, this is the most amazing discovery of the age!"

"A conclusion, I would point out, that I came to long since," murmured Browne. "But I am not one to crow. And I take this opportunity of expressing my regret that my supporters and myself should have found it necessary to use violence—"

"Nonsense! Your only course was to use violence," said Sir Gilman handsomely. "You were perfectly justified. I repeat, this is the discovery of the century. Your friend, Reeve, is already a millionaire. Without a minute's delay, the Apex foundries shall put the manufacture of this steel into effect."

"And Brother Reeve will get a square deal?"

"I have already said that he is as good as a millionaire," replied Browne's uncle. "I am very anxious to meet Mr. Reeve. He must be a man of genius. Have no fear, William—we shall treat him fairly."

.

William Napoleon Browne was escorted back to the School Train in triumph by the Removites. And the Sheffield newspapers, the following morning, were full of the story. Browne had become famous. He enjoyed himself thoroughly.

Good news had come from Norwich. Mr. Martin Reeve was recovering rapidly. He had heard of his change of fortune, and he had written to Browne, expressing his heartfelt thanks. Not that Browne needed any. The pats which he had bestowed upon his own back were all-sufficient.

THE END.

("The St. Frank's Touring School!" is the title of next Wednesday's stunning complete yarn, chums. Order your copy now to avoid disappointments.)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed, EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



VINCENT HARDING

HERE'S your photograph opposite mine this week—Vincent Harding (Bridgewater). I rather think many of the boys like reading about the Moor View girls. Girl readers, I believe, prefer reading about the boys. If I'm wrong, it's up to all you boy and girl readers to put me right.

The colours of the Ancient House—Desmond Dalley (Sutton)—are red and blue.

You hit upon a good point—Vera Cooper (Mitcham Junction)—when you said in your letter that you didn't feel in a mood for writing, but that if you didn't do it on the spot, mood or no mood, you might not do it at all. That's absolutely true. I'll bet hundreds of readers "don't feel in the mood," and put it off. I wish they would write to me on the spur of the moment, as you did. Your letter, in spite of your disclaimer, was most interesting. So when you're in a good mood, I shall expect something really brilliant.

The title of the first Nelson Lee story in the Old Paper—Colin Kendall (Willesden)—was "The Mystery of Limehouse Reach," and it appeared on June 12th, 1915.

Your drawing—Jack Hollington (Bethnal Green)—is remarkably good; but before I criticise any more of your work, I want to see something original, please. Copying is, after all, comparatively easy. Creating is a different thing altogether. I wonder if the general run of readers would care for a series of stories, as you suggest, featuring Bernard Forrest coming back to St. Frank's?

The colours of the River House School—Beryl J. Pilcher (Godalming)—have never been mentioned. Next time I'm there I'll find out for you. It is the Ancient House colours which are red and blue. Willy Handforth was born on September 24th. I think it must have been a very exhilarating day, with plenty of breeze about.

There may be a holiday adventure series this summer—Horace Pryke (Walderslade)—after the School Train finishes its tour. It all depends. As soon as the holidays begin a party of fellows might go off somewhere or other. You never know!

The Blue Crusaders—Dennis Stow (Rochampton)—were never schoolboys at St. Frank's. Claude Gore-Pearce, much to the sorrow of the other Removites, first came to St. Frank's in New Series, No. 96, dated March 3rd, 1928, and entitled "The Mystery of Edgemore Manor."

Nipper calls Nelson Lee "guy'nor" merely in an affectionate way—Hyman Afia (Acton)—because Lee is his guardian. I should have thought you would have known this.

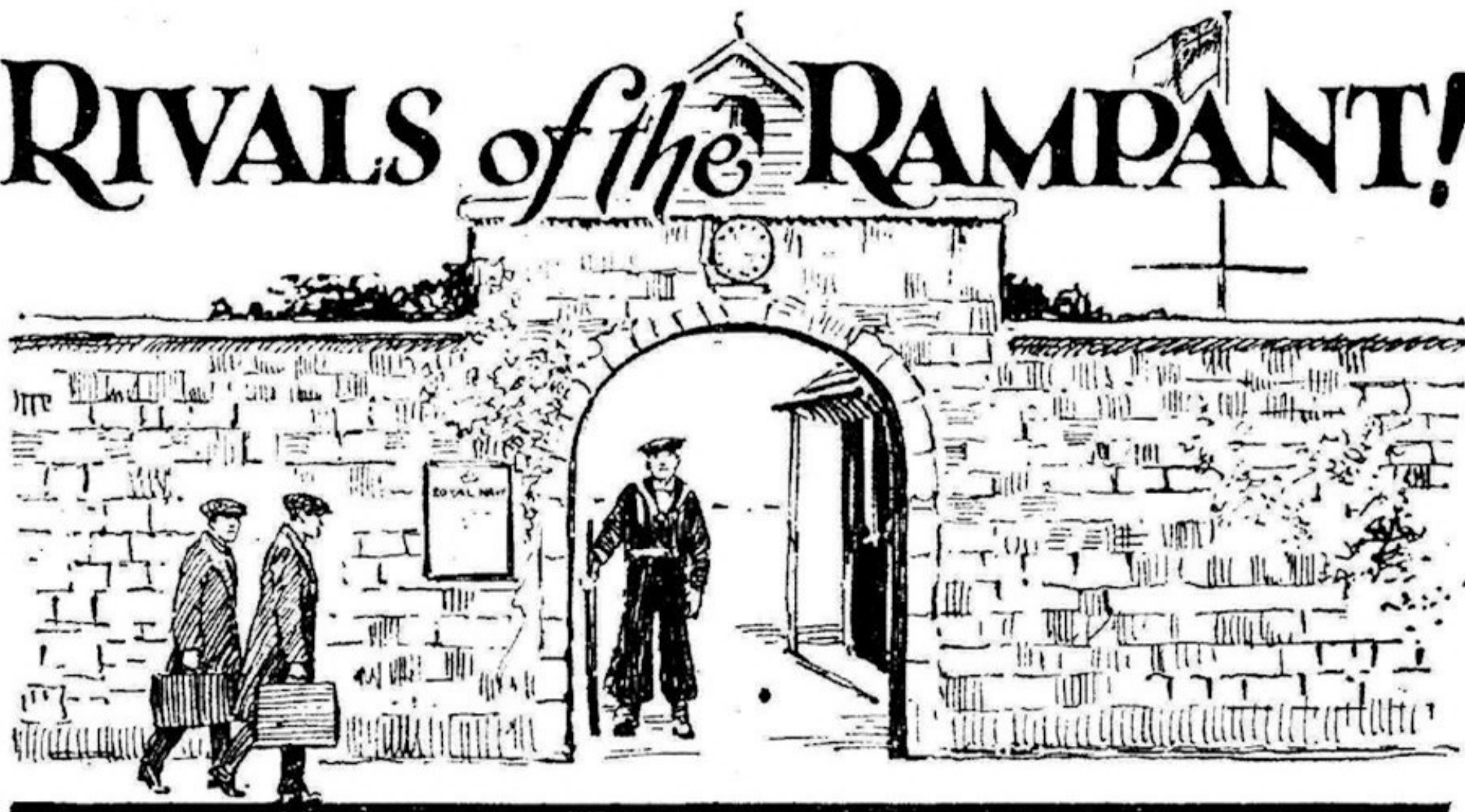
It pleases me to hear—Flora Molony (Melbourne)—that the St. Frank's stories always put you in a happy frame of mind. I can say the same about your letter; and, far from being bored by it, I want some more.

Fullwood was a rotter at one time "J. P. S." (Hanwell)—and he changed from his old bad ways through the combined influence of Clive Russell and Winnie Pitt. The change came about during a visit to the South Seas, recounted in the summer of 1925—Nos. 529 to 536, Old Series.

Yes: Yung Ching is still at St. Frank's—John Lynn (Blackpool). He is in Study R, in the West House, with Harold Doyle and Larry Scott.

This Fine Serial has only just Started—Begin Reading it Now!

RIVALS *of the* RAMPANT!



By STANTON HOPE

Barny Springs a Surprise!

DELIBERATELY Smith shoved Jack aside, then lifted a hand threateningly as Jack whipped up his fists in an attitude of defence.

"Belay there, Clem!" came a gruff voice from behind the pair. "You hit someone your own size, me boy!"

It was old Barny Morland who had returned.

"'Mornin', uncle," grunted Smith, in a sulky voice. "I found this kid hanging' around for you again, and as he got cheeky I thought I'd give him a licking."

"Well, you let him alone," Barny said.

"He's always been friendly enough to you from what I've seen, while all you do is to take nasty digs at him in return. Now be a good lad, Clem, and be friends with him; Jack's uncle is dead, and from now on I'm taking over as his guardian—the same as I'm yours."

Smith's jaw eagged.

"Great pip!" he exclaimed. "You must be potty, uncle! You don't mean to say that you're bringing along this beastly reformatory kid to live with us?"

Barny shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Or, leastways, not for more than a few days. Jack's going to join the Navy the same as you."

"Me! My giddy aunt, I thought you'd forgotten all that rot you talked about—"

"Well, I haven't!" Barny retorted. "You want smarterin' up, me boy, and there's nowhere you'll better get the discipline you need than in the Service."

He turned to Jack Gilbert.

"My boy," he said, in a quiet tone, "some of the folk in your home in Brass Alley found the hole in the cellar early this morning, and the river is being dragged by the police. It's believed that both your uncle and you are dead, and it strikes me there'll be no harm done in leaving things as they are—that is, letting 'em suppose that you have gone as well."

Clement Smith looked up at the old man with wide-eyed surprise.

"Here, I say!" he exclaimed. "What's this young skate been up to now?"

While Jack remained silent, Barny explained what had occurred on the previous night, and Smith emitted a faint

whistle.

"I've been thinking things out, boys," Barny said, "and I've got a proposition to put up to the both of you."

He settled himself against some chains behind the structure on the float, out of sight of the firemen, and slowly filled his pipe.

"I'm getting an old man," he said, "and the time's not far off when I've got to slip my cable for the last long voyage of all. Both in the Navy and Fire Brigade I lived

It has always been Jack Gilbert's ambition to join the Navy. His chance comes, but only on a very strange condition—and that condition is going to mean plenty of trouble for Jack in the near future!

a quiet sort o' life, and saved money, and in all I've got something like a couple of thousand pounds stowed away in the bank."

"My aunt!" breathed Smith.

His eyes sparkled, for he fully expected to become Barny's sole heir. The thought of £2,000 to squander in billiard-rooms and other resorts of ease, was gratifying in the extreme.

"That money," resumed old Barny, "shall go to one of you two boys—the one who shows himself the more worthy of it."

In the pause that followed this announcement, Jack faintly uttered a protest, while Clement Smith stared blankly as though unable to credit what had been said.

"You don't mean to say," spluttered Smith, at length, "you're thinking of putting into your will the name of this—this young scum of the gutter?"

Barny Morland turned sharply on him.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, Clem," he snapped. "Jack is a decent young fellow, and the more credit to him that he is after the rotten life he's been forced to lead. You have had every opportunity, and hitherto have shown yourself nothing but a workshy slacker. It's partly for your sake that I've hit on the plan that'll make you fit to have the money—and to make you go all out to win it.

"My scheme is that you two boys shall go to the Admiralty Recruiting Office, in Whitehall, and, if possible, get yourselves accepted into the Navy as boys o' the seaman class. All being well you'll be sent to the naval training establishment known as H.M.S. Rampant, at Porthaven, and the one of you who comes out of his training best in the matter of work and promotion, ability in sport, and good conduct, shall come in for that nest-egg o' mine. You both agree?"

Jack drew a deep breath.

"Ay, Barny," he said, "though it's not the money that—"

"Yes, it is!" hooted Clement Smith. "It's all a lot of rot! Why the thump should he have a chance for the dibs?"

"Because," grunted Barny, "it happens that the law allows me to do exactly what I like with my own money."

"Well, it ain't fair!" whined Smith. "Anyway, this kid would never be accepted in the Royal Navy—they don't take young blackguards and crooks. I'll squeal on him! I'll tell 'em about him and his crooked uncle! I'll let 'em know—"

"Very well, Clem," interposed old Barny Morland quietly. "And if you do, I'll cut your name out of my will at once."

The young bully whined and protested. "Now enough of this, Clem!" said Barny sternly. "Are you going to join the Navy, and try to fulfil the conditions I have stated?"

At which Smith swallowed chokingly several times, and finally gave a curt nod.

"Hang it! I—I suppose so!" he grunted, glaring his hatred at Jack. "But it's a beastly shame I've got to associate with a chap of his type and—"

"Then it's agreed," said Barny, rising. "To-morrow I will go along with you boys to Whitehall on the first stage o' your journey to the Rampant!"

Porthaven Bound!

"GOOD-BYE, Clem! So long, Jack! The best o' luck to the both of you!"

Old Barny Morland, the moisture in his kindly eyes, waddled along by the side of the moving train, gripping in turn the hands of his nephew, Clement Smith, and young Jack Gilbert as the two boys were borne out of the London terminus.

To Jack it was all like a dream. According to the arrangements made by Barny, he and Clem Smith had presented themselves as candidates at the Admiralty Record Office in Whitehall, and there had been entered for the Royal Navy by the Recording Staff Officers. And now he and Smith were on their way to the naval training establishment for boys, known as H.M.S. Rampant, at Porthaven.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS RETOLD.

JACK GILBERT, a cheery youngster of some fifteen years, lives in Brass Alley, in Wapping, by the river-side. And how he hates it! How he hates Brass Alley and all its unsavoury and crooked associations! For Jack lives with his uncle—his only living relative—one

LEW BONNER. A waster and a good-for-nothing rascal is Bonner, who hasn't done a day's honest work for years! He intends that Jack shall follow in his footsteps, and therefore his rage is terrible when the lad refuses to "do" a certain job. A fight ensues, in which Bonner falls through a trapdoor into an underground stream. Jack dives in after him to the rescue, but there is no sign of his uncle. Apparently he has been swept away to his doom. And thus Jack attains his freedom. There and then he decides to forget the sordid past and to start afresh. He tells his story to

BARNY MORLAND, a kindly old man, who has been Jack's only friend. Barny agrees that Jack is doing the right thing, and offers to take him under his wing. He also tells the lad that he wants him to join the Royal Navy along with his—Barny's—nephew.

CLEM SMITH. Jack is delighted. He has always wanted to join the Navy. Barny goes off to make inquiries, and while he is away Clem Smith strolls up. Clem is a worthless individual, and a constant source of worry to his uncle. He hates Jack, because of the latter's friendship with Barny. "You beastly young crook!" he sneers, upon seeing Jack—and a fight seems imminent.

(Now read on.)

Entry had been a near squeak for Jack, and he had only just made the grade in height, chest measurement and general physique. The soil of Brass Alley had not been fertile to promote strength and growth.

Old Barny had vouched for his character, and no mention had been made of the reformatory. Number five of the regulations for entry into the Royal Navy distinctly states that "candidates are not received from prisons or reformatories"—but then, the reformatory was of the past so far as Jack was concerned.

"I expect, Clem," remarked Jack after a while, in a friendly attempt to make conversation, "that good old Barny will feel sort of lost not having you at home."

"Huh!" grunted Smith.

Although snubbed, Jack made other attempts to get on more cheery terms with his companion, but finally gave it up.

An hour's ride in the train brought them to Warnford Junction, where they had to change. Neither boy had any luggage, for uniforms and so forth would be supplied to them.

Together they entered a buffet and ordered ham sandwiches and tea. As they stood by the marble counter, they looked strangely alike in the grey check caps and brown overcoats which old Barny had bought for them.

While they munched their sandwiches, Clem Smith sidled nearer.

"Look here, we've got to be pals, I s'pose," he said, "so you might as well start by trusting me. What was the truth about that fishy affair of your crooked uncle? How exactly did he come to get 'snuffed out'? Was it really an accident, or did you deliberately do him in?"

Aware that a waitress was looking, Jack checked the fiery retort that sprang to his lips.

"You'd better dry up," he muttered, "or else try and talk some sense. I'll remind you that it was part of the conditions Barny laid down that you were to say nothing about what you know."

Smith took a huge bite of his ham sandwich.

"All right, keep your giddy wool on!" he mumbled. "I don't want to rake up your rotten past. Still, even if you did dump your crooked uncle in that underground ditch, I don't know as I should blame you."

"Well, I didn't!"

An irritating grin curled the other's mouth.

"All right, I believe you," he returned—"even though the police mightn't if they knew. A funny thing," he added, "that Lew Bonner's body was never found."

Jack set down his empty cup with a clatter that startled the waitress into life.

"Steady on with the counter!" she exclaimed. "It's only made of marble, not cast-iron! Didn't I hear you fellows say you want to get to Porthaven, 'cause if so you'd better get a move on. There's a train coming into number four platform now."

The boys hastily paid for their tea and sandwiches, and dashed for the subway. But the guard's whistle piped out, and as they reached the other platform, the Porthaven train was on the move.

"Hop in!" yelled Smith frantically. "Anywhere, you chump!"

"Stand clear there!" bellowed the guard.

The door of a first-class carriage was open, and, diving across to it, Jack was about to step in when his companion, in a panic, gave him a violent shove in the small of the back. Like a torpedo launched from its tube, the youngster shot head first into the compartment, sprawling over the legs of the only passenger and catching him a hearty clump on the right ear. A friendly porter came running alongside the moving train, and, gripping Smith, who was gasping like a stranded cod, assisted him aboard and shut the compartment door.

"Thundering wars!" bellowed the injured passenger, shoving Jack off his legs. "This is outrageous! Confound you for a clumsy idiot, boy!"

"S-s-sorry, s-sir!" stuttered Jack, and turned to upbraid Smith for that quite unnecessary shove in the back. And then his gaze fell upon the passenger he had slammed—a resplendent being in naval uniform with ample gold lace and golden oak leaves entwined over the peak of his cap.

"J-jumpin' j-jemmies!" gurgled Jack, reverting in his surprise to an expression learned from his uncle, the cracksman.

Both boys had learnt a deal about the Navy from the yarns old Barny had spun them; they had been shown pictures of famous admirals and ships. Thus when their gaze fell on the ample gold lace on the sleeves of the irate passenger opposite—a broad band and three stripes above it, the top surmounted by a curl or ring denoting executive rank—they knew him to be a full admiral.

The old gentleman's face was as red as the comb of a turkey-cock, but despite this, they recognised him as none other than Admiral Sir John Rodney Britton, commander-in-chief of the Porthaven Division, in which the training establishment they were going to was included.

"M-my hat!" panted Clem Smith.

An intolerant bully to those weaker and lowlier than himself, Smith, like so many of his kidney, was ever ready to lick the boots of his betters and grovel to the great. Rising to his feet while Jack still sat dazedly and stared, he stood on the floor of the swaying carriage and dragged off his cap with an obsequious gesture.

"I—I hope you'll forgive us butting in here, sir," he said, giving a squirm of his shoulders. "Believe me, I'm awfully sorry this chap should have been so beastly careless. You see, sir, we're on the way to report at the Rampant training schools, and he got into a funk about being late, I s'pose."

"Humph!" snorted the admiral. "Both joining the Navy are you?—a dashed fine start!" Then he exploded:

"Confound you, put on that cap and sit down, boy!"

As though jabbed in the waistcoat with an invisible pike, Clem Smith gave a gasp and collapsed back on the seat.

The admiral spread his newspaper and began to read, while now and then he tenderly felt the ear which had come into contact with Jack's fist. But as the train raced on through the rain-soaked countryside, he began to take more interest in the two boys.

The questions he put were glibly answered by Clem Smith, who liberally peppered "sirs" into all his statements. And while Clem Smith did the talking, Jack remained silent and uncomfortable, aware that he had created a bad impression.

stood there acting as a sort of solitary guard of honour while Admiral Britton prepared to alight. There was a pleased smirk on his face as he touched his cap like a flunkey, while back in the carriage Jack stood behind the admiral, feeling more like the "gutter-snipe" he had been called so often, than ever he had done in his life.

The admiral laid his great coat over his left arm, but instead of stepping out of the compartment at once, turned direct to Jack and took him by the hand.

"Good luck, my boy," he said quietly. "You'll win through in your new life if you keep but one thing in mind; just this—you belong to the Royal Navy."

Then stepping out of the train, he saluted



Like a torpedo launched from its tube, Jack shot head first into the compartment, and his outstretched hand caught the only passenger in the compartment a hearty clump on the right ear. "Thundering wars!" bellowed that individual, who was obviously a full admiral. "Confound you for a clumsy idiot, boy!"

At last, after what seemed an interminable journey to Jack, although it was not more than forty minutes from Warnford to the South Coast, the train drew into Porthaven.

Before even it stopped, Clem Smith leaped up and lifted the admiral's great coat from the rack.

"Thanks, my boy."

"Have you a bag under the seat, sir?"

"No—and if I had, I could get a porter."

Unheeding of the hint conveyed in the tone that further services were not required, Clem Smith opened the door as the train came to a halt, got out on the platform and

the fawning Smith and walked briskly down the platform.

Directly the admiral was out of ear-shot, Clem Smith's manner changed entirely.

"Come on, tumble out, you dreamy bone-head!" he grunted. "Pretty rich that, swiping the giddy commander-in-chief over the ear your first day in the Navy! My hat, I wonder what Uncle Barney will think about it when I send word home!"

The remarks were as little heeded by Jack as the drift of smoke from a shunting engine that was passing on the far side of the platform. His eyes were fixed on his tingling

right hand as though it contained some precious treasure.

"Crumbs!" he muttered to himself. "A real gent that, if ever there was one!"

Cut Down!

"**O**P aboard, sonnies! Another 'alf second and you'd have missed the boat!"

The be-whiskered deckhand at the railway jetty dragged aboard the two boys just as the ferry for the North Side of the harbour got on the move.

"Thanks!" laughed Jack, a trifle winded. "We seem to be cutting things a bit fine."

"Phew!" puffed Clement Smith. "What the thump's the good of rushing? There's another boat in half an hour, and besides we might have stopped a while over here and had a look round the town."

"Except that we promised old Barny we'd go straight to the training schools and report," remarked Jack.

"Oh, shurrup!" spluttered Smith. "To hear you talk, anyone would think you were a blessed plaster saint instead of a beastly crook's—"

He broke off short, noting the fire that sprang into Jack's eyes, and then moved away among the passengers on the ferry-boat, mostly women and children and a few naval ratings and men of the Royal Marines.

A heavy sea-mist was drifting up the famous harbour at Porthaven, and Jack, moving forward to a spot near the low bridge where the grizzled skipper of the ferry stood at the wheel, was disappointed not to see much of the great naval base.

The warships in port, the gunnery and torpedo schools, the submarine base, the cordite testing depôt and other things he had heard old Barny yarn about, were shrouded in the drifting sea-mist. The mournful notes of syrens rose dismally on either hand, punctuated by ear-splitting blasts from the whistle of the ferry itself. It was wet, chill weather enough to damp the spirits of the brightest.

Clem Smith drew near.

"Don't you go pushing off when you get to the other side," he remarked, with a shiver. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee somewhere, and you can jolly-well wait for me so's we can go up to the schools together."

"Righto," Jack said; "I could do with something warm myself."

The eerie notes of a bell sounded monotonously from the blanket of fog, louder and louder. A break in the drifting mist revealed a green-painted buoy high on trestled iron-work on a long sand-bank about a cable's length distant on the starboard bow. It was the notorious Pilots' Bank, the one danger spot in an otherwise safe harbour, which, owing to the curious cross currents, had defied all attempts at dredging.

"The old man up there is hugging the bank pretty close," remarked a Marine corporal, jerking a thumb toward the bridge. "Pink

me, if I didn't think that bell sounded from the other side of us."

The buoy and the sand-bank were blotted out again by the drifting mist, and certainly the bell seemed to come echoing from port as well as starboard. The deep-throated voice of a siren thumped out against the driving mist. A white feather of steam leaped upward from the brazen whistle of the crowded ferry-boat as it gave shrieking response.

"S-sounded near, didn't it?" remarked Clem Smith, a trifle nervously.

Again came the voice out of the fog, a giant voice that vibrated terrifically in the ears and put a chill upon the soul. And out of the mist to starboard loomed the bows of a steamship, overshadowing the ferry like fate itself.

Clang!

The metallic ring of the ferry's engine-room telegraph found answering echo aboard the big cargo boat. The chill air was rent suddenly with the screams of women and children, the hoarse cries of men and the bull-like bellow of the ferry's skipper.

"Get aft—for your lives!"

Jack, rooted to the spot as though hypnotised, felt the fingers of Clem Smith clawing into his arm in an agony of terror. He heard his companion's whimper like that of a dog that senses the presence of death; he saw the towering black bows of the steamship cut clear out of the mist, the name "Felsgap" in rust-red lettering, the deckhands staring dazedly from the fo'castle-head. Then—

Crash!

As the steel cutwater of the cargo steamer sheered through the ferry's bows, the stricken craft reeled off her course like a seal struck to the heart by a hunter's harpoon. Men, women and children went skittling like nine-pins over the deck, and the port rails aft buckled under the weight of bodies.

Jack's feet were braced against a cleat in the deck, his body against the structure which supported the little bridge. He heard a piercing shriek, "Save me—save me!" and found Smith grovelling on the deck at his feet.

A series of terrific jolts followed as the grim bulk of the cargo steamer slid slowly past.

Looking upward again, Jack saw a member of the crew near the jackstaff on her lofty poop-deck—a man in coarse-blue jersey and cap—gazing down in bewilderment. And Jack Gilbert gave a choking gasp, for the face of the man peering down from the deck of the Felsgap was none other than that of his own uncle!

Heroic Seamanship!

IN another moment the two boats were clear; the man on the steamer's deck veiled in the drifting mist.

"Good heavens!"

For one brief moment, Jack forgot the catastrophe, forgot the deadly peril to himself and the other passengers in the stricken ferry, in the shock of that vision he

had seen. Was it all some dreadful nightmare? Or had Lew Bonner, his dissolute uncle whom he had believed dead, made some miraculous escape from the Thames that dreadful evening of the cellar fight?

"She's sinking!"

The cry rose above the babel of the passengers aft, who were striving to extricate themselves from heaps on the deck.

Jack came out of his momentary trance and saw that the ferry was swinging round and settling low at the head. The new note of a siren rose from the deep-water channel leading from the sea, the warning of some incoming ship. Then half turning, Jack saw that there was no one at the wheel.

Shaking off Smith's clawing hands, he took the few steps in a couple of bounds. The grizzled skipper was moaning against a bulkhead aft of the wheel, against which he had been hurled on the shock of collision.

Never in his life had Jack acted as steersman, although old Barny had more than once taken him aboard tramp steamers in the Thames and told him the general principles of navigation.

All that his interested ears had ever assimilated came back in a flood to him now. His mind was crystal-clear in its realisation that within a few minutes this ferry-boat and all aboard her would sink in the deep channel of the harbour—unless something was done.

And there was only one thing to do. The ferry-boat was still driving forward from the power of her engines, for the men below had been flung headlong before they had time to stop her—and immediately on the starboard beam lay the Pilots' Bank.

That normally treacherous bank of sand was now an open invitation, and, gripping the wheel with the strength of despair, Jack put it hard over.

Round came the sinking ferry-boat—in the nick of time to avoid a destroyer coming in from the sea and unaware, as the boat's whistle was silenced, of anything in her track. Reaching back, Jack tugged the line attached to the whistle and gave a piping signal in the Morse code which he had learnt from Barny Morland—S.O.S.

The last notes of the ferry whistle were still echoing over the harbour when the skipper, rubbing his bruised head, staggered to his feet and took in the situation.

"Shiver me!" he exclaimed. "You've done it—done it, boy! Saved the lot of us, you have!"

Then came a violent jolt as the bow of the ferry plunged into the sand, and the skipper went reeling sideways to crash headlong down the half-dozen steps to the deck below!

For a moment, it seemed to Jack as though his arms had been jerked out of his body, and he released the wheel as the boat plunged more firmly into the sand and came to rest. Hastily he descended from the bridge, and sharply ordering Clem Smith to attend the injured skipper, went aft to help calm the women and children.

Scarcely, however, had he taken a dozen steps along the deck than a sudden sickness assailed him.

His physique, ill-nourished in the squalor of Brass Alley, though just sufficient to get him through as a boy entry into the Navy, was not strong enough to resist the terrific strain of what he had just passed through. The jolting his back had received against the bulkhead when the Felsgap had struck the boat, the sight of his uncle, and his own final heroic effort to put the ferry aground, now took their toll. His legs wilted and he fell to the deck.

Vaguely he was aware of a rush of feet past him and a sudden outburst of voices. They were cheering someone. He felt too sick to understand what it was all about, or to care, either. The ferry passengers, satisfied that the boat, firmly embedded in the sand of the Pilots' bank, would not sink, were able to turn their attention to whom they thought was the saviour of their lives.

Jack dragged himself to his feet, and saw the lean form of the destroyer, ghost-like, less than half a cable's length away in the mist. Her commander, on the bridge, was shouting orders through a megaphone, and boats were being lowered with naval smartness. A crowd of excited ferry-boat passengers were round Clem Smith and the prostrate skipper.

The cheers rang out afresh.

"Bravo, mate!"

"A mother's blessing on you, boy!"

They were lionizing Smith, who was protesting feebly.

"I didn't do nothing, straight I didn't."

These protestations were taken only as the modesty of a true hero.

The destroyer's boats came alongside. From the first of them stepped a naval lieutenant. He made his way among the group surrounding Clem Smith, hearing on the way how that worthy had saved the lives of all.

"Lift the captain down into the boat," he ordered some of the ratings; then, turning to Smith, he gripped his hand. "A very fine bit of work, my boy," was his quiet comment.

Smith swallowed hard several times—and said nothing!

(More exciting chapters of Stanton Hope's magnificent serial next week, chums.)



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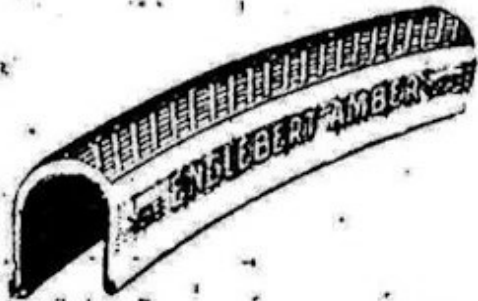
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