

No. 187. — MAGNIFICENT NEW SERIES STARTS TO-DAY!

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THE SOLDIER HOUSEMASTER;

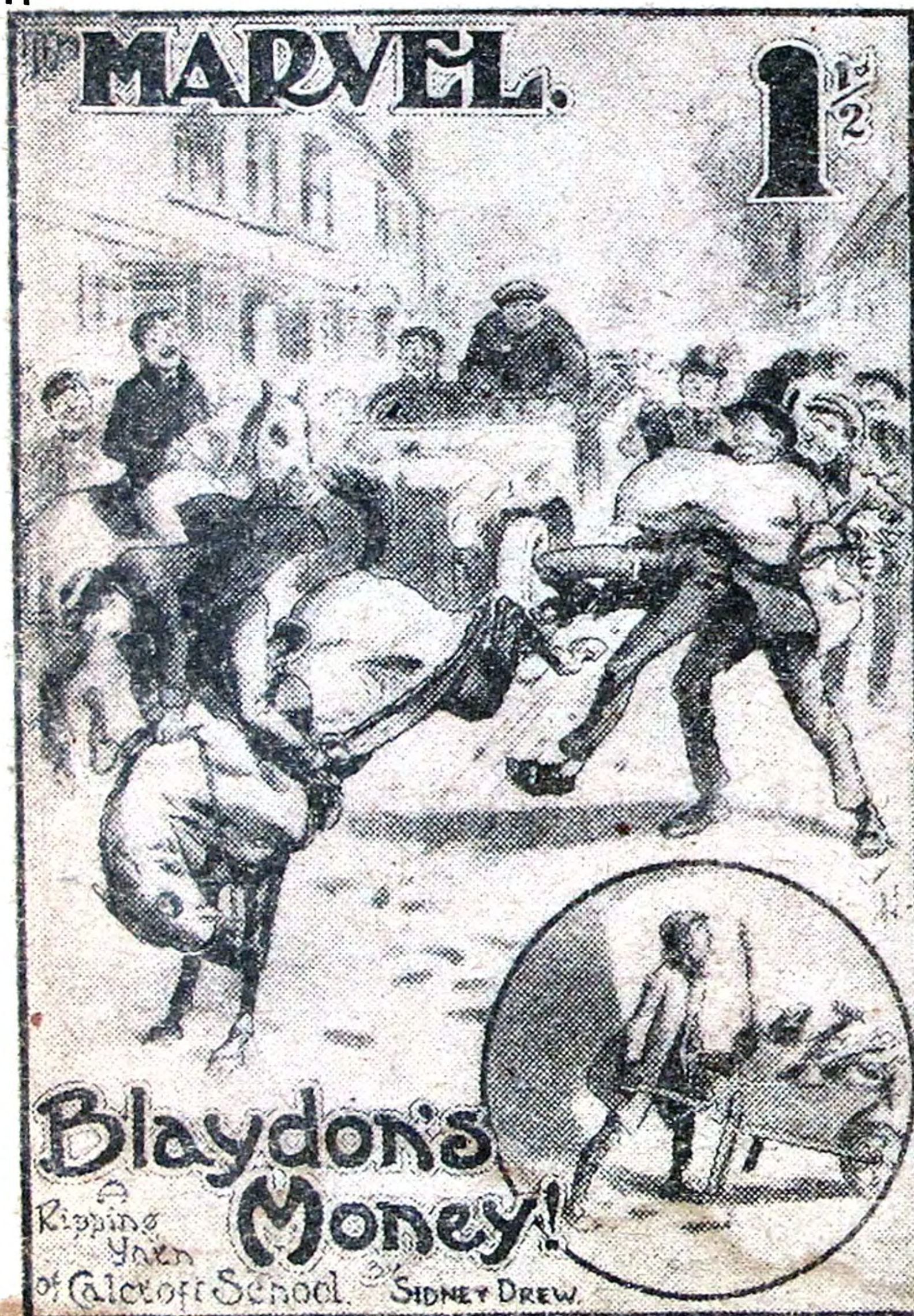
Or, COLONEL CLINTON OF—THE MONKS!

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Mystery of Grey Towers," "Jack Mason's Luck," and many other stirring Yarns. Jan. 4, 1919.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST DAY OF TERM.

"**H**ERE we are again!"

I made that remark as the train pulled up at the little platform of Bellton Station, in Sussex. I tumbled out on to the frosty platform, and was followed by Tommy Watson, Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, Jack Grey, and Reginald Pitt.

Nelson Lee and Sir Crawford Grey alighted more sedately. We were all smiling and cheerful; returning to school after the Christmas holidays wasn't dreaded by any of us—least of all by Jack Grey.

During the previous term he had been known as Jack Mason, the Boy from Bermondsey. He had had a pretty rough time of it, one way and another; but this term promised to be very different. He was no longer a "Council School kid." He returned under his own name, Norman Grey, the son of Sir Crawford Grey and heir to a baronetcy and vast estates. But we had always known him as Jack, and the name stuck to him.

Sir Crawford had only found his son just before the holidays, and the majority of the fellows at St. Frank's knew nothing of the great change in "Mason's" fortunes. But they soon would know! Reginald Pitt was Jack's great chum—a chum he had gained all for himself. Pitt had been several kinds of a rotter at one time of day, but now he was true blue—mainly through Jack's influence.

"Yes, here we are again, Nipper," smiled Nelson Lee, as we collected our various bags and portmanteaux. "I wonder what adventures this term will bring forth? Perhaps none at all, eh?"

I shook my head.

"Don't you believe it, guv'nor!" I said. "There are mysteries to be unravelled everywhere, and I'll bet you'll find plenty of work to do before long—so shall I! Detective work

isn't confined to big towns and cities—"

"Hallo, you chaps! Still alive and kicking!" exclaimed a cheery voice. "Glad to see you again, Mr. Lee!"

"Thank you, Somerton," said Nelson Lee, nodding.

Three juniors greeted us cordially—the Duke of Somerton, Cecil De Valerie, and Owen major, of the Ancient House Remove. Quite a number of fellows had alighted from the train. Lordly Sixth-Formers, lofty-looking Fifth-Formers, Removites, and scurrying fags in dozens. It was the first day of term, and the quiet station of Bellton was very unquiet for once in a way.

We left the most of our luggage for the Ancient House brakes to carry up to the school, and went through the village on foot. The day was cold and crisp—a keen frost in the air. The sun was shining from a clear sky, and the weather couldn't be better. And the weather makes a lot of difference to the average fellow's feelings on the first day of a new term.

Everybody we met was in good spirits. Naturally, Nelson Lee and Sir Crawford walked together, and the rest of us lagged behind to chat with old friends. We met the redoubtable Hal Brewster and Co., of the River House School, and they were as pleased to see us as we were to see them.

By the time we arrived at the gates of St. Frank's we felt at home once more, and I could see Jack Grey's eyes sparkling as he surveyed the noble old pile. The great school was looking its best on this cold, clear winter's day.

Living there constantly, one was apt to lose sight of the beauty of the massive stone archway, the pillars of which supported the wrought iron gates; one forgot to admire the splendid array of gables and turrets and ivy-covered walls of the two great Houses which formed the school—the Ancient House and the College House. The range of buildings, taken as a whole, would require some beating

when it came to a question of sheer grandeur and beauty.

"Doesn't it look fine?" said Jack Grey, almost proudly.

"Begad! I was about to say the same thing, dear old boy," remarked Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez. "We see these things on the first day of term, you know. But to-morrow we shall forget—Pray mind where you are goin', Bosun!"

Tom Burton, of the Remove, had joined us.

"Glad to see everybody," he said cheerily. "Where's Mason? Souse my maindeck! Everybody's talking about you, messmate! You're Grey now, aren't you? I was so blamed surprised that I was like a ship without a compass for five minutes!"

The Bo'sun grabbed Jack's hand, and wrung it in his own bluff, hearty fashion. His honest face was suffused in smiles, and his pleasure was genuine. Grey was pleased, but there seemed to be an uneasy light in his eyes. Tom Burton noticed it at once, and his smile faded away.

"Bust my mains'l!" he ejaculated. "Is anything wrong, shipmate?"

"No-o," said Jack awkwardly. "But—but you said that everybody was talking about me, Bo'sun, and——"

Burton grinned.

"Oh, is that it?" he said. "Nothing to worry about in that, is there? Of course everybody's talking about you. Souse me! Handforth has been yarning ever since he came on board. Half the crew won't believe him——"

"That's not surprising," I put in cheerfully. "The fellows know Handforth's little ways. But it happens to be true, Bo'sun. Our mutual friend, Master Norman Grey, is the son of a baronet and heir to——"

"Oh, draw it mild, Nipper!" protested Jack.

"Rats!" said Pitt. "You're getting your own back now, Jack. The fellows were inclined to look down on you last term, and now it's your turn to look down on them. You'll have Fullwood fawning on you within five minutes, I'll bet!"

"He wouldn't have the nerve to," said Jack, shaking his head.

"Fullwood's got nerve enough for anything," I said. "Well, come on in."

We entered the gateway, and I thought of Pitt's prophecy. Fullwood and Co., the Nuts of the Ancient House Remove, had treated Jack Grey with lofty contempt and disdain during the previous term—believing him to be the son of a carpenter—and I was curious to see what they would do.

But Ralph Leslie Fullwood and his precious pals were not in evidence at present. As soon as we appeared, however, there was a rush of other fellows. Handforth and Co. were there, and heaps of other chaps.

We were surrounded by a yelling mob—expressing their welcome.

"I say Nipper, is it true?" shouted Hubbard.

"Is what true?"

"What Handy says about Mason?"

"Of course it's true," I said. "And Mason isn't Mason any longer. He's Grey now, and his pater is a baronet."

"There you are!" bawled Handforth triumphantly.

My word was good enough, and Jack Grey, much to his confusion, was surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd, who all wanted to shake hands with him at once. He had made himself popular towards the latter part of the previous term by his genuine decency and prowess on the playing-fields. But now his popularity had increased by leaps and bounds in a few seconds. Jack, in my opinion, didn't exactly care for this lionising now that he was "somebody," but he couldn't help feeling honoured. He was breathless by the time the fellows had done with him.

"Give him three good 'uns!" yelled somebody.

"Hurrah!"

The cheers were given with a will, and I joined in heartily with my chums. We, at least, knew that Jack deserved them. And in the midst of it Fullwood strolled over the Triangle from the Ancient House, accompanied by Gulliver and Bell, his two particular cronies.

Fullwood went up to Jack Grey with outstretched hand.

"Welcome back, Mason," he said effusively. "Thunderin' glad to see you lookin' so well! Oh, but your name ain't Mason now, is it? You're somebody else, ain't you, old chap? Isn't your pater a lord, or something?"

"Is that why you're so friendly all at once?" asked Grey quietly.

"Of course it is!" snorted Handforth. "Clear off, Fullwood, you rotter——"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm greetin' my old chum Jack. I always wanted to be pally with him, but he was a bit reserved last term."

The cool effrontery of this statement was rather staggering. Fullwood had hated Jack like poison—because he was a "Bermondsey urchin." But Jack was not the fellow to bear malice. He frankly held out his hand.

"If you want to be friendly, Fullwood——" he began.

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth hotly. "Don't you let him touch your hand, Grey! Fullwood's beastly paw ain't fit to come near yours! Clear off, Fullwood—unless you want my fist in your eye!"

Fullwood scowled furiously.

"What's it got to do with you, hang you?" he snarled.

But his attitude towards Grey was rather too transparent, and his abrupt change of manner now revealed his true colours. A hostile crowd of fellows hustled Fullwood and Co. away, and the three Nuts fled into the Ancient House, ruffled, crumpled, and out of temper.

"Told you what it would be!" growled Gulliver. "You can't expect the chap to be pally after what happened last term!"

"He was going to shake hands——"

"Very likely," said Gulliver. "But that's all. He wouldn't have touched you with a barge-pole afterwards. It was only for the sake of appearances. Grey ain't a vindictive chap, an' he wants to start the term well."

"As rich as ten other fellows put together, too," said Bell sourly. "His pater fairly dotes on him, an' he'll have quids an' quids to chuck about. An' we can't touch a farthing of it! This is what comes of bein' rotten to a chap before we knew who he really was. We've done ourselves in the eye—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Fullwood savagely. "How the dooce were we to know his beastly father was a baronet? We thought he was a street urchin, an' treated him as he ought to have been treated. But we'll get him round before long," added Fullwood. "Pitt's his pal, an' we're already chummy with Pitt."

Gulliver looked doubtful.

"We were last term," he remarked. "Just before the vac., though, Pitt gave us the cold shoulder—us! The check of it!"

"We'll see what—" Fullwood paused, and then grinned amiably.

Reginald Pitt had just turned into the passage, where Fullwood and Co. were chatting. Pitt was alone, and he was en route for Study E—intending to see that the fire was blazing brightly, and to get everything ready and comfortable before Jack Grey escaped from the crowd outside.

"Rather rotten, those chaps hustling us off like that," said Fullwood genially. "Still, I don't mind much—there's nothing of the snob about me, Pitt. We're goin' to have some good times this term—what?"

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Pitt, eyeing the Nuts steadily.

"I've brought some new cards," went on Fullwood. "I vote we have a little party this evening, just to celebrate things. What do you say, old man? You might bring Grey along, too!"

Pitt nodded.

"Yes, I might," he replied reflectively.

"Good!"

"Eh? What's good?"

"You're goin' to bring Jack Grey along—"

"Am I?" said Pitt calmly. "I said I might; but the chances are about fifty million to one that I sha'n't! My dear idiots, I gave you credit for having more sense. Do you think I'd breathe the air of your study willingly?"

"You—you cheeky beast!" gasped Fullwood, scowling.

"Not at all," smiled Pitt. "I'm just telling you the truth, Fullwood. Now I'm on the subject, I might as well add a few more things. For example, the less I see of your face will be all the better—both for me and your face. This term is different from last and you won't find me such a blind ass as I used to be. A month or two ago I couldn't see an insufferable rotter when he stood before me—but I can see him now. In fact,

I can see three insufferable rotters. I don't want to be rude, but will you please refrain from talking to me again? Your voices grate on my nerves, and the air ain't very pure in your vicinity."

Fullwood and Co. by this time were red in the face with fury. The straight truth never pleased them; and just at this moment the truth from Pitt was altogether beyond endurance.

"You cad!" snarled Fullwood. "Wipe him up, hang him!"

Fullwood and Co. intended great things. They dashed at Reginald Pitt in a body, having observed that the passage was clear. The Nuts always preferred attacking when the odds were all in their favour. They thought this was the case at the present moment—but it wasn't!

"Feeling lively?" asked Pitt, quite unperturbed. "My dear chaps, you needn't think that— That's no good, Fullwood. How do you like this? I'm always willing to give a chap instructions!"

Fullwood had lunged at Pitt with all the fury of his hateful nature. But Pitt swept the oncoming fist aside and planted his own knuckles fairly in the centre of Fullwood's face. Ralph Leslie went down with a howl. Quick as lightning, Pitt pursued his advantage, and delivered two forcible blows in quick succession—one for Gulliver, and one for Bell!

It was a ludicrous sight. The three Removites, all of them bigger than Pitt, staggered back blindly.

"Of course, if that's not enough I'll oblige with a few more hints," said Pitt, with exasperating calmness. "Your nose is bleeding, Fully, and it won't do that swell waistcoat any good. What! Going?"

Pitt's tone was bantering, and the Nuts almost choked with rage. Fullwood was hurt, and he hadn't much desire for further fighting. And his chums, always ready to follow their leader, backed down the passage with him.

"I'll make you sit up for this!" snarled Fullwood fiercely.

Pitt laughed, and went on his way. He knew how much to believe in that threat. It was Fullwood's habitual parting shot, and meant absolutely nothing. But Pitt had certainly made the Nuts realise that he was a changed being.

Entering Study E, he found that Tubbs, the page-boy, had been particularly painstaking. Tubbs had been fond of Jack during the previous term, and the amazing news he had heard that day made him all the more anxious to please. Not that Tubbs did it in the expectation of a tip. The Ancient House page was a faithful youth, and was generally liked.

There was nothing for Pitt to do. The fire was blazing merrily, the room was tidy to a point of stiffness. It certainly wouldn't be as tidy again until the beginning of the next term!

So Pitt sauntered out again, and emerged into the crisp air of the sunlit Triangle.

He was just in time to hear some news from the lips of Bob Christine, of the College House.

Christine was the skipper of the Monks—that is, the College House section of the Remove. I captained the Ancient House fellows, and Christine and I were great friends—in addition to being keen rivals.

When Pitt came out there was still a crowd of fellows round Jack Grey, and he was rather anxious to escape. A diversion came in the form of Christine and Co., whom we hadn't seen until this moment.

"This is going to be the worst term of any for you, Christine," I said genially. "We're going to prove beyond question that the College House is a mere nothing compared with——"

"Rats!" grinned Christine. "How's everybody? What do you think of the giddy news? A bit startling, isn't it?"

"About Grey, do you mean?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Grey? No, of course not," said Christine. "That's your affair—not ours. I'm jolly pleased, of course, and I wish Grey all the luck in the world. But I was talking about old Stocky."

"What's the matter with him?" I asked curiously.

Christine had suddenly become quite serious—a most unusual event for him on the first day of term. His news apparently concerned Mr. Stockdale, the Housemaster of the College House.

And we all got ready to listen.

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING ORIGINAL IN NEW FELLOWS.

"**D**EAR fellow, I trust that nothin' is the matter with your esteemed Housemaster, Mr. Stockdale!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez and gazing concernedly at Christine. "You are looking frightfully grave, begad!"

Bob Christine nodded.

"Well, it is a bit serious," he replied, in a worried tone. "Old Stocky was a bit of a beast sometimes, but everybody liked him. Of course, he wasn't such a ripper as your Housemaster," he added grudgingly. "Everybody knows Mr. Lee's the best master at St. Frank's. But Stockdale was jolly decent, and it's a pretty stiff blow to lose him like this——"

"Lose him?" I echoed. "Hasn't he come back, then?"

"No; and I don't suppose he ever will," said Christine gravely.

"Is—is he dead?" asked Pitt, with a start.

"Not quite so bad as that," replied Christine, although it's pretty near it."

"Great Scott!"

"Poor old chap!"

"What's the matter with him—had an accident?"

Bob Christine nodded.

"Well, I suppose an accident was the real cause of it," he replied. "I heard it from one of the seniors this morning. Old Stocky was skating during the holidays, and he was as enough to go on a weak part of the ice, and he fell through."

"Oh!"

"He wasn't hurt much at the time, and didn't think anything of it," went on Bob. "The water was only about four feet deep, and he soon scrambled out. But the exposure and the soaking didn't do him any good. You see, he was alone, and had to walk home a couple of miles—with his clothes freezing stiff. He was put to bed, and a doctor was fetched, and all the rest of it, but he was soon in a fever. It's turned to pneumonia now, and he's as weak as a rat."

"Poor old Stocky!" I exclaimed feelingly. "It only shows how easily these mishaps can occur. Isn't he out of danger yet?"

"They think he is; but there's no knowing," said Christine. "Pneumonia's a pretty rotten complaint, isn't it? Even if he does get well, he won't be fit for anything for months. So we sha'n't see him this term, anyhow. It's quite likely he won't come back any more."

We were all in sympathy with the Monks. We knew that they liked their old Housemaster very much indeed. His non-appearance this term would upset things in the College House. And it would all depend upon the new Housemaster whether the College House fellows were better off or worse. It wasn't our affair, but we were greatly interested.

"Do you know who's coming down in Stockdale's place?" asked Pitt.

Christine's face brightened.

"Rather!" he replied. "We've got a fine chap appointed. That improves matters a lot, and I don't suppose we shall care much—if we hear that Stocky is getting on all right. The new man promises to be the real goods."

"Who is he?" I asked curiously.

"A chap named Clinton," put in Talmadge. "We've heard all about him, and you can take it from me that he'll knock spots off even Mr. Lee!"

"Oh, will he?" I said grimly. "Look here——"

"Don't get ratty!" grinned Christine. "Clinton is first class. Used to be at Eton or Rugby, I think—anyhow, one of those big schools like St. Frank's. He's an M.A., and I don't know what else, and his qualifications are top-hole. Oh, a fine chap, by what I can hear. But that's not the best of it, by any means."

"What are you getting at?" I asked.

"Why, Clinton is a D.S.O.," announced Christine triumphantly.

"A giddy soldier?" shouted Handforth.

"You bet!" grinned Yorke. "Colonel Clinton, D.S.O."

This news certainly impressed us, and Christine and Co. were gratified. They had intended all along to give us a surprise. And it was certainly news to learn that a distin-

guished officer of His Majesty's Forces was to take command of the College House.

"Rather rummy, isn't it?" I asked.

"Of course it isn't," replied Christine. "He was a Housemaster before he joined up to do his bit. Went out to France two years ago, I think, and rose from lieutenant to colonel in next-to-no-time. He got the D.S.O. in rescuing an ordinary private, I believe. Then he was invalided out of the Army, and has been convalescent for months. It's only natural that he should accept a position as Housemaster somewhere."

"That's right enough, I suppose," agreed Watson. "When's he coming?"

"This afternoon—in about an hour's time, I think," replied Christine briskly. "I'm getting a lot of the chaps together, so that we can give the colonel a rousing welcome. We'll show him what we think of him as soon as he gets here."

The Monks went off, cheerful and enthusiastic—having apparently forgotten to look grave any longer over the unfortunate Mr. Stockdale. They were exceedingly proud of the fact that they were to have a soldier-Housemaster, and prided themselves that they had gone one better than us.

I reserved my opinion until the new man would arrive. It was quite likely that Colonel Clinton was a splendid soldier; but how had his service in the Army affected him? It seemed to me that he wouldn't be improved for scholastic duties.

The fellows trickled indoors in twos and threes, and Handforth and Co., who had been arguing near the gates—an habitual occupation—were about to follow, when McClure stared in astonishment down the lane.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Look what's blowing up!"

Handforth and Church turned, and followed the direction of McClure's gaze. And, really, there was some excuse for the Removite's astonishment.

A boy was approaching at a brisk pace, having evidently walked from the village. His age was about the same as Handforth's, and he was attired in well-cut Etons and a glistening top-hat. His waistcoat was of the fancy variety, but quiet in hue, and made of thick woollen material. His tie was coloured grey, with black spots, and his boots glittered as he walked.

There was nothing to occasion astonishment in all this. The fellow was dressed as scores of other fellows were dressed on that day—in their best clothes. But the boy himself was a most unusual specimen.

He was amazingly thin, and he seemed to be all legs and arms. His trousers, although well-tailored, were narrow, revealing the skinniness of his legs in the most painful manner. His hands were encased in thick grey woollen gloves, which would have met with strong disapproval from Tregellis-West; and his woollen muffler, of the same colour, encircled his neck like a bandage.

From beneath the topper a thick mass of curly, sandy hair could be seen, almost fall-

ing over his ears, which projected considerably. His face matched his figure, for it was skinny and strikingly lean, his nose appearing to stand out far in front of his face. Two vacant-looking eyes, brown in colour, were set in deep hollows. Altogether, the boy was a most unusual-looking person.

"My hat! What's he coming here for?" asked Handforth, in an unnecessarily loud voice. "This isn't Barnum and Bailey's freak show!"

"Shurrup, you ass!" muttered Church. "He'll hear you!"

"One of the new chaps, I suppose?" said McClure.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "This—this object a new chap! I didn't know any new fellows were due this term."

"Two of them—in the Remove, anyhow," said McClure. "I heard it from Morrow, of the Sixth. He ought to know—he's a prefect. They're both for the Ancient House. Of course, there are lots of new kids for the Second and Third——"

"We'll soon see, anyhow," interrupted Handforth grimly. "Hi! I want you!"

This last was addressed to the extraordinary boy who was approaching. Handforth's shout was quite unnecessary, for the newcomer was practically facing the three chums of Study D.

He came to a halt, and his face broke into a vacant smile.

"Did you address me, my young friend?" he asked mildly.

Handforth turned red.

"Yes, I did address you," he growled. "And I'm not your young friend, either. Who are you, and what the dickens do you want here?"

"Dear me! Am I not at St. Frank's?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, but——"

"Then I have made no mistake," went on the boy, rubbing his gloved hands together with satisfaction. "What a splendid place, to be sure! This superb gateway, I should imagine, was erected many hundreds of years——"

"Blow the gateway!" said Handforth.

"Are you a new kid?"

The boy smiled in a pitying fashion.

"Good gracious, no!" he replied mildly. "I am far from new, my young friend. Indeed, I am fifteen years, two months, and five days old."

"Ha, ha, ha!" grinned Church and McClure.

Handforth glared.

"Trying to be funny, eh?" he demanded ferociously. "Well, look here, my son, I don't allow——"

The boy placed a hand upon Handforth's arm.

"One moment—one moment, I pray you," he said. "May I correct that statement? I am not your son; indeed, the idea is preposterous, since I am perhaps a few weeks older than yourself. I am the son of Admiral——"

"You'll get a thick ear in a minute,"

snapped Handforth "What do you want at St. Frank's?"

"Really, I want nothing," said the boy. "It is not my wish that I came here, although I can now understand my father's words when he told me that I should meet many delightful boys in this school. I am a new pupil for the Ancient House, and I shall take my place in the Remove, I believe."

Handforth breathed hard.

"What have we done?" he asked, addressing the empty air—"what have we done to deserve this? Look here, you image," he went on, glaring at the new boy. "We don't stand any nonsense in the Remove, I can tell you!"

"No?" said the stranger smilingly. "Are you in the Remove?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Then nonsense is surely spoken quite often in the Remove——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" yelled Handforth, as Church and McClure roared. "If you laugh at this chap's rot I'll punch your fat-headed noses!" He twirled on to the new fellow. "What's your name, you freak?" he roared, louder than ever.

"Steady on!" murmured McClure.

But the new boy was quite unperturbed.

"My name?" he repeated. "I have no objection to telling you, since you appear curious. You must allow me to remark, however, that curiosity is a vicious habit in a boy so young. My name is Nicodemus Trotwood."

Handforth, who had been about to speak, stopped short with his mouth open.

"Which?" he gasped at last.

"Nicodemus Trotwood," repeated the new boy mildly.

"Oh, my only topper!" murmured Church, in a faint voice. "Hold me, somebody!"

"You silly ass, he's rotting!" bellowed Handforth indignantly. "No chap on earth could have a name like that!"

"Indeed, it is my name," exclaimed Nicodemus Trotwood gently. "But you must not attach blame to myself. When I was christened I was, unfortunately, too youthful to have any voice in the matter. My father, Admiral Trotwood, is the responsible party, but I would not dare to question his wisdom and sagacity in christening me Nicodemus. The name, after all, is distinguished." There have been many famous people named Nicodemus——"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Nicodemus Trotwood! Ye gods and little tadpoles! Did you ever hear anything like it? Look here, my son, I'll give you some advice. Bury that name, and call yourself Jim Brown or Joe Smith. You'll be ragged to death——"

"Don't be an ass, Handy," grinned Church. "The name suits him, anyhow. I suppose he isn't a relative of Betsey, by any chance?"

"Betsey?" snorted Handforth.

The new boy smiled with complete understanding.

"Your young friend is referring to the

quaint character of Betsey Trotwood, in the excellent novel from the pen of Mr. Charles Dickens named David Copperfield," he said gently. "No, I am no relative—indeed, such a thing is impossible, since Betsey is merely a character of fiction, whilst I am flesh and blood. May I be allowed to pass within?"

Handforth stared down the road searchingly.

"I can't see her," he remarked.

"Can't see who?" asked Church.

"This infant's nurse," replied Handforth. "I suppose he's got a nurse, hasn't he? Surely they wouldn't allow him to come here all by himself?"

Nicodemus Trotwood shook his head.

"No, I have no nurse, dear friend," he said almost sadly. "Perhaps it is unfortunate that my parents did not provide me with one; but they were apparently unaware of the fact that I should find it necessary to encounter such individuals as I now see before me. Possibly I need protection——"

"You do!" snorted Handforth. "You look pretty simple, but you're ready enough with your replies, I notice. You'll need a lot of protection if I have any more of your cheek. I've a good mind to—— Yes, this is St. Frank's, old chap."

Handforth's change of tone was most marked, and the reason was not far to seek. Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, had suddenly turned out of the gateway, and Handforth thought it just as well to put on his best manners.

"Here's a new boy for the Remove, sir," said Handforth.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "Dear me! Is this—— I suppose you are not presuming to joke with me, Handforth."

Handforth looked shocked.

"Rather not, sir," he replied. "His name's Nicodemus Trotwood."

"Nico——" Mr. Crowell paused, hastily straightened his face, and nodded. "Ah, Trotwood!" he went on. "I understood that you were coming, my lad. But I have yet to have a chat with your Housemaster regarding new arrangements for this term. You had better report yourself to Mr. Lee as soon as possible. You will find Mr. Lee's study within the Ancient House. Go through the lobby, take the first passage to the right, proceed until you arrive at a passage which turns to the left, and Mr. Lee's door is the third one down. But these boys will direct you, no doubt."

"Thank you, my dear sir," said Trotwood amiably.

Mr. Crowell stared for a moment, but then passed on. It was something unusual for a new boy to address him as "my dear sir." But the Form-master could see that Nicodemus was something of a novelty, and he did not correct him.

"There's one thing about old Crowell I like," grinned Church, when that gentleman was out of earshot. "He's so giddy lucid. Now the dickens does he expect a chap to remember all those directions?"

Nicodemus Trotwood smiled.

"But surely there is nothing much to remember in what Mr. Crowell told me?" he asked. "I think I can repeat his instructions word for word. He told me that I shall find Mr. Lee's study within the Ancient House. I am to go through the lobby, to take the first passage to the right, proceed until I arrive at a passage which turns to the left, and Mr. Lee's door is the third one down. That, I am sure, is what the excellent Mr. Crowell told me."

Handforth and Co. stared.

"How the dickens could you remember it?" asked McClure wonderingly. "I suppose you've met some of our chaps in the village——"

"Indeed, no," interrupted Trotwood smoothly. "That is not the case, my dear friend. It happens, however, that my memory is singularly developed. I make no boast of the matter, because I was born that way. Lessons are rather a bore to me, because I can always learn them thoroughly in the course of one afternoon."

"You—you bragging rotter!" snorted Handforth. "Do you think we believe that piffle? I'll punch your nose——"

"Pray refrain from such violence," interposed Trotwood quickly. "My nose, I am well aware, provides a most excellent mark, since it is unfortunately prominent. That, also, is no fault of my own, and I accept it with resignation. Since you are inclined to doubt my veracity, however, I am perfectly willing for you to set me a simple task of memorisation. It pains me to think that you should deem me capable of bragging, when such is far from my thoughts."

"Well, you're a queer chap, I must say," remarked McClure. "I'll tell you what, Handy," he added, with a grin. "Give him that letter I wrote you, let him read it through, and then ask him to repeat it!"

"Oh, that's too thick——" began Church.

"Nay!" interrupted Trotwood. "The test is an excellent one."

Handforth produced a somewhat grubby letter from his pocket, and held it out to the new boy. There were two pages of closely written matter, chiefly concerning McClure's arrangements for meeting his two chums so that they could all travel down to St. Frank's by the same train.

Nicodemus took the letter gingerly, and Handforth grinned.

"This is where you're shown up, my son!" he said pleasantly. "If you can read that letter through and then repeat it, I'll believe that the age of miracles isn't past. You never saw that letter before, anyhow!"

Trotwood merely seemed to skim over the pages, just glancing at them. He handed the letter back before Handforth could have read a quarter of it.

"I thought you'd give it up!" grinned McClure.

"By no means!" smiled the new boy serenely. "Please do not imagine for one moment that I am displaying my powers

willingly; this was your suggestion, and I am always obliging when possible."

"Repeat the letter, you fraud!" snorted Handforth.

He and his chums grinned. But then their grins slowly vanished, and their faces became filled with expressions of amazement. Handforth's gaze was fixed somewhat dazedly upon his letter. For this astounding new junior was actually repeating the letter word for word! And he went through to the end, and did not make one single error—and he had only seen the letter for about a minute! It was almost uncanny, and Handforth and Co. were really startled.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church. "He did it—absolutely correct in every word! The chap's a living marvel!"

The practical demonstration had far more effect than any amount of words. And it was absolutely true that Nicodemus Trotwood possessed an abnormal memory. There have been cases of such a prodigious development of the memory often enough, but Handforth and Co. had never experienced anything like it. They regarded Trotwood as though he were something more than human.

"Well, I can't understand it!" gasped Handforth. "I remember seeing a man at the London Coliseum once. He could remember any old date you liked to mention, and never made a bloomer. But I thought he was tricking us somehow. You must be the same."

"I assure you I was not tricking you——"

"I mean you must have a memory the same as that chap," explained Handforth. "We know there was no trickery about this—that letter has been in my pocket ever since I received it this morning! My hat! I shall have to tell the chaps about you."

Handforth and Co., still rather dazed by this discovery, deserted Nicodemus Trotwood and rushed into the Ancient House to spread the news. This kindly move on Handforth's part met with an unfortunate response—although anybody less impulsive than Handforth would have foreseen the consequences.

Naturally the juniors thought that Handy was trying on some new wheeze, and his yarn was simply laughed at; he was told to go and bury it. He was informed that it would be far better if he thought of something that wasn't quite so silly. Handforth became incensed, and finally he was hurled into the passage with great force.

Church and McClure followed him, although they took the precaution to leave Study II on their feet. It was Farman and Owen major and Canham who had treated Handforth with such violence, and he picked himself up, breathing vengeance.

"I'll show 'em!" he panted. "I'll——"

"Better go easy, Handy!" put in McClure nervously. "It's the first day of term, remember, and we don't want any rows——"

"You mind your own business!" snorted Handforth, "I'm going to—— Good! Here's the chap himself! Now we'll see!"

The lanky figure of Trotwood had just

entered the passage, looking somewhat like a lost sheep. His shining topper was in his hand, revealing his mop of curly, sandy hair. He blinked at Handforth and Co. almost fearfully as they bore down upon him like so many whirlwinds.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I trust——"

"We're not going to hurt you," said Handforth briskly. "Some of the chaps won't believe that you've got a memory like a wizard!"

"I don't think so, really!" exclaimed Trotwood, with mild surprise. "The day is quite calm, the wind being merely a breeze."

Handforth stared.

"Who's talking about the weather?" he roared.

"Did you not mention that a blizzard is raging?" asked Trotwood innocently.

"Blizzard!" snorted Handforth. "You silly, cracked idiot! I said you'd got a memory like a wizard! What the dickens is the matter?"

"I'm sure I don't know!" said Trotwood. "My father purchased it."

"Your father——" Handforth paused, gasping.

"Did you not ask for the name of my hatter?" asked Trotwood, gazing searchingly into the interior of his topper. "Ah, here it is! The firm's inscription is plainly marked. Good gracious me!"

The shiny topper sailed out of Trotwood's hand as Handforth gave it a violent push. He had no respect for toppers—not even his own.

"I suppose you think this is funny!" he said, with deadly calmness. "If you do, I don't! What's the idea of pretending to be deaf? Look here, my son, you'd better realise straight away that I'm not going to put up with any of your rot!"

"Dear me! I really thought it was cold today," said Trotwood meekly. "Ah! But you were referring to your own condition? You certainly appear hot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure howled.

"Hot!" gasped Handforth weakly. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! If this chap doesn't get murdered within the next minute it'll be a miracle! You'd better be careful what you're up to, Trotwood! I haven't got much patience left, I can tell you straight!"

"Yes, I'm afraid I am late," agreed the new boy.

"Late!" bellowed Handforth. "I—I said——"

He grabbed Trotwood's shoulders, and shook him until his hair quivered wildly. But, somehow, the new junior's muscles stiffened under Handforth's grip, and the shaking ceased. Try as he would, Handforth couldn't shift Trotwood again.

"I regret having to exert my strength, but I really cannot allow this exhibition of violence," said the new boy. "I have done nothing to cause you to become incensed—I have never even seen you before. I am a little deaf, and perhaps that explains your

show of temper. Will you please speak more loudly?"

"You silly ass!" roared Church. "Didn't we see you outside?"

"I think not," said Trotwood, shaking his head.

"Why, you awful fibber!"

"I am sorry, but I fail to understand your attitude," said Trotwood, speaking very firmly. "I think you are most rude, and I beg of you to put an end to this unfortunate scene."

"He's dotty!" said McClure. "Absolutely off his chump!"

Slowly a smile overspread Trotwood's skinny features.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I think I understand——"

"Why, what—who—— Great goodness!" panted Handforth, clutching at the wall for support. "Look—look down the passage! Oh, my only hat! I'm going dotty!"

Church and McClure were quite ready to believe that statement, and Church was on the point of making a remark when he, too, gasped. And the three Removites stared down the passage with pale faces and widely opened eyes.

There was sufficient cause for their amazement.

Trotwood was standing close beside them. But there, coming down the passage from the direction of the lobby was—Trotwood! There were two of them—two boys exactly alike!

Handforth and Co. were utterly speechless.

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL CLINTON'S APPRECIATION.

NICODEMUS TROTWOOD walked down the Remove passage with his peculiar stride, and there was an amused twinkle in his brown eyes which completely obliterated the vacant expression which he seemed capable of assuming at will.

"Really, Cornelius, I thought you would be getting into some trouble," he exclaimed reproachfully. "You should have waited for me——"

"What's that you're saying?" interrupted the second edition of Nicodemus. "These rough boys attacked me, and it was not until a moment ago that I realised the truth. They have evidently met you, and they mistook me——"

"Am I dreaming?" asked Handforth dazedly, recovering the power of speech. "There are two of them, Church, ain't there?"

"I can see two, anyhow!" panted Church.

"You—you asses!" shouted McClure.

"They're twins! We thought we were speaking to Nicodemus, and it must have been his giddy brother! This is just about the limit, ain't it?"

Handforth pulled himself together.

"One of them was bad enough," he remarked grimly. "But two! It simply beats

the band! We shall be having the Ancient House called the Freaks' Home, or something! I've never seen such weird-looking merchants!"

Nicodemus Trotwood smiled in his slow way.

"You are singularly frank, my dear friend," he remarked. "I have no objection, of course, since I am fully aware that the appearance of my brother and myself is somewhat unusual. It is our misfortune, and we are scarcely to blame. I was expecting a few sneers——"

Handforth's expression changed.

"I say, I didn't mean to be personal," he said quickly. "Goodness knows, I ain't a rude chap! If I made some remarks about your faces which you don't like, I apologise. Fullwood's the chap to insult you—not me. If you're booked for the Remove, you're quite welcome."

"That is very good of you, Handforth," said Nicodemus, beaming. "I quickly perceived that you were a good boy, in spite of your hasty temper."

Handforth swallowed hard. Just for a moment Nicodemus was in great peril of being subjected to Handforth's famous uppercut. It was distinctly humiliating to be referred to as a "good boy"! But Handforth mentally restrained himself.

"You've got a few things to learn yet," he said. "But I've never been so surprised in my giddy life! This chap's like you in every detail. Twins resemble one another nearly always; but this is startling!"

Handforth did not exaggerate. Nicodemus Trotwood and his brother were as alike as two pennies fresh from the Mint. Their facial expressions, the peculiarities of their figures, the colour of their eyes and hair, the leanness of their faces—all, in fact, were precisely the same.

They were even clothed in an identical manner, both wearing the same kind of waistcoats and ties. Their appearance was somewhat calculated to give any fellow a big start if he encountered them at the same moment.

The Trotwood Twins were perhaps distinguishable to their own parents; but it was practically impossible for anybody else to tell which was which. But one was deaf, and this would always form an instant clue.

"And what's the name of your brother?" asked Handforth wonderingly.

"I beg your pardon!"

"Great pip! I'm talking to the wrong chap," groaned Handforth. "You!" he added, turning. "What's the name of this second edition?"

"Cornelius."

"Well, you're a pair, and no mistake!" remarked Church. "Nicodemus and Cornelius! You'll have to prepare yourselves for a lively time this evening—the chaps will rag you to death!"

"I feared that our arrival would cause widespread hilarity," said Nicodemus sadly. "However, these trials must be borne with fortitude. When the novelty has worn off,

no doubt we shall be accepted without further persecution. But we are prepared, and so whatever comes to pass will find us unperturbed."

"Talks like a dictionary, too!" said Handforth, still staring. "I wonder what the dickens old Crowell will say when he gets you two chaps in the Form-room to-morrow? I can see his hair going grey after the first week!"

"What is the argument about, my dear Nicodemus?" asked Cornelius mildly.

"Nothing of importance, my good Cornelius," replied his brother, rather loudly. "Indeed, there is no argument, actually. Handforth was pointing out——"

"And which is Handforth, pray?"

"The big boy with the large hands, my dear brother——"

"You leave my hands alone!" interrupted Handforth warmly. "You'll jolly soon find they're capable of doing some damage!"

"I have not the slightest doubt that such is the case," beamed Nicodemus. "What could one not do with such brawny fists? I only wish that mine were as splendid!"

Handforth was mollified, and he and his chums continued regarding the new arrivals as though they were two specimens from the Zoological Gardens. As Church remarked, the new fellows wanted a bit of getting used to!

"Hi, Nipper!" roared Handforth suddenly.

I was just emerging from Study C with Sir Montie and Tommy. It was our intention to drop into Jack Grey's study to have a word with him about our arrangements for the evening. But we gazed down the passage as Handforth called.

Curiously enough, several other fellows came from their studies at the same moment. Just for that five minutes Handforth and Co. had had the passage to themselves, except for the new arrivals. In a way, this was astonishing, but it was a fact. And now just the opposite was the case.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, staring at the new boys.

"Dear fellows, this is most astounding," said Sir Montie, gazing through his pince-nez at the twins. "Begad! They are both alike—an' they are really the queerest-lookin' fellows I have ever—— But I am frightfully rude!" added Montie hastily. "Pray forgive me, dear old boys! You are visitors, no doubt?"

"No, we are members of the Remove, my good friend," said Nicodemus Trotwood. "We wish to see the Housemaster, so that——"

But Nicodemus was interrupted. As was only to be expected, the commotion was somewhat loud in the passage for some little time. The crowd was being added to constantly, and the twins were being mobbed uncomfortably before long. This was not because the fellows were anxious to cause trouble. But the new juniors' appearance was such that a din was inevitable.

I was inclined to grin, for I realised that these two boys would create many diversions in the Remove during the coming term. Both were quaint in their manner of speech, and

the deafness of Cornelius was liable to lead to humorous misunderstandings. I couldn't quite believe Handforth's story about Nicodemus Trotwood's memory, but I soon received plenty of evidence. I also saw that Nicodemus was not by any means the simpleton he appeared at first glance.

The first thing which struck me about him, after I had got over my surprise, was that he would be an exceedingly useful fellow for detective work—always providing that he had wits enough for the task. And I wasn't very doubtful on that point. With such a memory he would be able to perform wonders. For it was an absolute fact that he could listen to a long conversation and then repeat it practically word for word hours afterwards. His memory was almost beyond ordinary understanding. It was something approaching the uncanny.

It was Nelson Lee who rescued the twins from their unhappy position. The gov'nor's arrival dispersed the crowd at once, and he smiled kindly upon the newcomers.

"I am your Housemaster, boys," he said. "I have already been informed by Dr. Stafford that you were expected to-day. Dear me! The likeness between you is quite remarkable. You must be prepared to undergo some slight chaffing from the other boys during this first week."

"We are quite ready to undergo the ordeal, dear sir," said Nicodemus respectfully. "The boys are naturally interested, and it is not for us to become incensed. Our appearance, wherever we go, is always the cause of comment, and we are well accustomed to it. Have no fear for us, I beg of you."

The gov'nor chuckled, and took the twins off to his study, where he examined them, and allotted them Study L, in the Remove passage. This study had been unoccupied during the previous term, and it was rather smaller than the others. But Nicodemus and Cornelius Trotwood were quite pleased with their quarters when they arrived.

I piloted them into it, and Nicodemus looked round him with approval. I soon found that he was the brainy one and the leader of the two. Cornelius was always ready to obey his brother in every detail.

"Quite excellent, my good Nipper," said Nicodemus. "A fire will be necessary, of course, and this furniture must be supplemented by some cushions and rugs and at least two easy-chairs. But we shall be quite comfortable here."

Cornelius nodded.

"Make a point, my dear Nicodemus, of writing home to our father this evening," he remarked. "Give him a list of the articles we require, and they will be sent down at the first available moment—Dear me! Can I not hear an unusual sound?"

The deaf junior certainly heard something. We heard it terrifically, and I glanced out of the window. Christine and Co. were responsible, and they were cheering with all the strength of their lungs.

Practically every member of the College House Remove was in the Triangle, to say

nothing of fags and a sprinkling of Ancient House fellows. I knew the reason for this demonstration.

Colonel Clinton, D.S.O., had arrived.

I turned towards the door, and saw Reginald Pitt grinning in the passage.

"Coming out?" he asked. "We might as well have a look at the giddy colonel."

I nodded, and left the study. For the moment the Trotwood Twins were left to look after themselves. No doubt this diversion was welcome to them, although they seemed most imperturbable youths.

Sir Montie and Tommy were out in the passage, and we all hurried through the lobby into the Triangle. The sun was still shining, although the short winter's afternoon was nearing its end, and the frost was slightly sharper.

The Monks were still cheering. They were gathered in a great crowd near the gates, and caps were flying skywards. Fags dashed about on the outskirts of the crowd, yelling for all they were worth.

"Well, the colonel ought to be pleased," I remarked, grinning.

"He's bound to be, old boy," said Tregellis-West. "I expect he will be a youngish chap, you know, with one of those preposterous little moustaches, an' a back as stiff as a board. But he won't be in uniform, will he?"

"Of course not," I replied, as we drew nearer. "Where the dickens—My hat! Is that him? Not much like your description, Montie!"

The Monks were still noisy, and at the back of the crowd, facing it, stood the new Housemaster of the College House—Colonel Clinton, D.S.O. His back was certainly stiff, as Montie had said—as stiff as a ramrod. But he was not a young man, and he didn't look at all like a colonel of the New Army.

His face was red, and his iron-grey moustache was huge, sticking out on either side of his face in great tufts. It was one of those military moustaches one sees on a stage colonel, but seldom in real life. The schoolmaster-soldier must have been past middle age when he joined up—and that moustache wasn't a war-time cultivation, either.

He wore a big monocle in his right eye, and he surveyed the cheering juniors in a manner which filled me with expectation, although Christine and Co. were too excited to heed the danger signs.

It was a glare which was almost calculated to freeze anybody on the spot; and it travelled round comprehensively and thoroughly. There was a haughtiness and pomposity about his attitude, too, which was quite out of place at the moment.

He was dressed in a tweed Norfolk suit, the coat of which was cut in a very military fashion, with patch-pockets and belt. Apparently he felt more at home in this familiar attire. His cap, also of tweed, was semi-military, too.

"Welcome to St. Frank's, sir!" yelled Christine.

"Hurrah!" bellowed the crowd.

"Three cheers for our soldier-Housemaster!" roared Christine enthusiastically.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" cheered the crowd loyally.

"Speech, sir—speech!"

"Go it, sir!"

"Spee-e-e-eech!"

The new Housemaster raised his walking-cane up high, and there was instant silence. That cane had been raised a dozen times before, but the fellows only subsided now because they thought that the colonel was about to reply to their royal welcome.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" demanded Colonel Clinton.

It wasn't so much his words, but his tone. It expressed unutterable fury and pompous indignation. And his voice was an absolute bellow, harsh and unmusical.

"How dare you?" roared the colonel, jamming his monocle further into his eye. "By gad! Such a scene as soon as I enter the school! Disgraceful! Outrageous! Clear out of my way, you—you rabble!"

The College House juniors fell back, aghast.

"We're—we're giving you a—a welcome, sir!" gasped Christine.

"Boy!" bellowed the colonel, pointing his quivering cane at the junior. "What is your name?"

"Christine, sir."

"You are the leader of this undisciplined scene?"

"Yes, sir. But we were only welcoming you—"

"How dare you bandy words with me, sir?" roared the Housemaster. "Attend my study at seven o'clock this evening! Take yourselves off—everybody! Do you hear me? Go! Get out of my sight! How dare you bar my path?"

The juniors were too astounded to move for a moment.

"You impudent young puppies!" barked the colonel. "By gad! I will show you what discipline is before long! It is about time I came to this ill-conducted school! Move out of my way, you confounded brats!"

Bob Christine nearly fainted as he staggered back.

"Confounded brats!" he gasped weakly. "Ill-conducted school! Oh, help!"

"Discipline!" shouted the Housemaster. "That's what you want—and you'll have it too, by gad! I will soon make an alteration here!"

He strutted away towards the College House, fairly bristling. The juniors stared after him, too astounded to say a word. They simply gasped. This—this was the result of their rousing welcome!

The great Colonel Clinton, D.S.O., had shown his appreciation in a singular manner! Poor Christine was thunderstruck, and his supporters were in a similar condition. I turned to my chums, grinning.

"Looks like trouble in the Monks' camp," I remarked. "Their beautiful soldier-Housemaster doesn't seem to be a very nice-tempered gentleman, does he?"

Sir Montie shook his head sadly.

"Colonel Clinton may have been an officer," he said, "but he isn't a gentleman, begad! He isn't really, old boys!"

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON LEE IS MYSTIFIED.

ANCIENT HOUSE fellows, taken as a whole, didn't concern themselves much about the behaviour of Colonel Clinton, D.S.O. He was the Monks' Housemaster, and so they had to do all the worrying.

Nevertheless, the scene in the Triangle was the talk of the school by tea-time. It was generally agreed that the colonel's attitude had been utterly "rotten," and that he ought to be ashamed of himself. After all, the juniors had only indulged in a little cheering—which ought to have flattered the newcomer immensely.

Christine and Co. themselves were disappointed and incensed. They considered that they had been humiliated, and they weren't far wrong. Colonel Clinton had started badly, and the remembrance of that scene rankled.

I was almost sure that Nelson Lee had seen—and heard—what had passed. At all events, I spotted the guv'nor at his open study window immediately after the colonel had stalked into the College House.

But I had no opportunity of having a word with Nelson Lee on the subject. The evening was drawing in, and our programme was fully mapped out. This was the first evening of term, and a general freedom was allowed.

A big tea was held in Study C, and there were many guests. In addition to my own chums we had Jack Grey and Reginald Pitt, De Valerie and the Duke of Somerset, and the Bo'sun and Justin B. Farman.

Handforth was also giving a big spread, and his study—next door to ~~ours~~—was packed out, too. Almost at the last moment a thought came to me, and I excused myself and buzzed down the passage to Study L.

I tapped and entered. Nicodemus and Cornelius Trotwood were sitting before their fire, sorting out Latin grammars and French dictionaries, and all sorts of other books. They were in the throes of unpacking. I couldn't help grinning as I regarded the two lank, skinny juniors, both of them identical.

"What about tea?" I asked abruptly.

"Is he coming?" said Cornelius, getting to his feet.

"Eh?"

"You were talking about Mr. Lee——"

"Really, my good Cornelius," interrupted Nicodemus, "Nipper was referring to tea. We have been waiting, expecting the tea-bell to ring, my friend Nipper," he went on, beaming at me amiably. "Have we failed to hear its welcome note?"

I chuckled.

"The tea-bell hasn't gone yet," I replied.

"Juniors generally feed in their own studies at tea-time here--when they're in funds. You're strange yet, and you don't know the ropes. We're standing a spread in Study C. Would you like to join in? You're more than welcome."

Nicodemus Trotwood smiled with pleasure. "On behalf of my brother and myself, I gratefully accept this most kind invitation," he said graciously. "It is an extension of friendliness which I am most--"

"That's all right," I interrupted. "Come along, my sons."

Cornelius blinked at his brother.

"Why is he calling us Hans, my dear Nicodemus?" he inquired mildly.

"You are mistaken, my good brother," said Nicodemus. "Nipper was merely referring to us as his sons--although that, of course, is palpably absurd. However, it seems to be an habitual form of address in this great seat of learning, and we must accustom ourselves to it. We are coming, Nipper. Thank you--thank you exceedingly, my dear friend."

The quaintness of these two juniors was quite refreshing, and I wondered how long it would be before they fell into the usual slangy language of the Remove. Perhaps never, and I rather hoped it would be so. Their style of talking was so utterly different from that of the other fellows that it was interesting to listen to them.

They followed me along the passage, and there were general grins amongst the guests when we entered Study C. The twins beamed round with great good nature, and took their seats without much difficulty, although the accommodation was limited. It was fortunate they were thin.

"It gives my brother and myself great pleasure to sit here on this auspicious occasion," said Nicodemus beamingly. "We are greatly surprised to find that our school-fellows have been so considerate as to think of us on this, our first evening amongst you all."

"Is this a speech?" asked De Valerie politely.

"By no means," replied Nicodemus. "I have no desire to monopolise the conversation, my dear friends. But I am anxious to let you know that Cornelius and myself appreciate the honour which has been bestowed upon us. We are plain fellows--nay, we are, unfortunately, ugly--and we quite realise that our presence might possibly have the effect of spoiling your appetites. Therefore we are doubly grateful. Is that not so, my good Cornelius?"

His brother blinked.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Nicodemus?" he said politely.

"That's all right," I put in with haste. "No need to go over it all again, old chap. And you needn't be afraid about your faces--they won't spoil our appetites. I've seen worse faces many a time!"

"On door-knockers," murmured Pitt, "but nowhere else!"

Fortunately, Nicodemus didn't hear that

bit, although I don't suppose he would have minded if he had. He was so refreshingly frank himself that nobody had anything to say. I had half an idea that the innocent-looking Nicodemus was laughing at us behind his mask of simplicity. He was far deeper than he appeared on the surface, at all events. Cornelius was genuinely meek and mild.

The tea was a great success. A commotion in the next study at one period led us to suppose that slaughter was being committed, but this soon passed over. We afterwards learned that Teddy Long, of the Remove, had sneaked into the study amongst Handforth's guests, and had devoured all the plum cake--a prized article made for Handforth by the devoted hands of a maiden aunt. Teddy Long, needless to say, was ejected with great force; and a certain sickly look about his face towards supper-time seemed to indicate that Handforth and his guests had been mercifully delivered from a similar fate. That cake had been made to look at--not to eat.

Tea over, our guests departed, and after we had cleared up we went along to Study E, where Jack Grey and Pitt were entertaining the former's father, Sir Crawford Grey. The baronet meant to stay the night at St. Frank's and depart in the morning.

He was in the very best of humours--as, indeed, we all were. We talked on various subjects, Colonel Clinton included. Sir Crawford said little, but what he did say was to the point. He expressed his satisfaction that the colonel was the master of the College House, and not of our own.

After spending a very enjoyable hour, Montie and Tommy and I departed. But before long we were all together again. For on this special night we were allowed to take supper with Nelson Lee himself in his own study.

It was another party--but a more select one. Nelson Lee was the host, and Sir Crawford, Jack, Pitt, Montie, Tommy, and I were the guests. We had excellent appetites, surprisingly enough, considering the tea, and we had a fine time. But it came to an end all too soon, and we were forced to say good-night and trot off to the dormitory.

Nelson Lee and Sir Crawford sat smoking and chatting until nearly eleven, and then the baronet retired, leaving his host alone. Lee did not remain long, however. He switched off the light just after eleven, and passed out into the silent corridor.

Five minutes later Nelson Lee was seating himself in Dr. Stafford's study. The Head was up late on this particular night, and he was not looking as hale and hearty as usual. Nelson Lee saw the change at once.

"A tiring day, Dr. Stafford, eh?" he suggested. "I am afraid I shall be keeping you up--"

"Not at all--not at all!" the Head interrupted. "Stay as long as you please, Mr. Lee. Try one of these cigars, and pull your chair to the fire. It is cold to-night, and the fire is cheerful."



"Come, my friend, you had better pull yourself together," remarked Nelson Lee, as the stranger pulled himself into a sitting position.

(See page 15.)

Nelson Lee selected a cigar, lit it, and pulled his chair round. For a few moments he sat smoking in silence; then he looked up.

"You think Mr. Stockdale will recover, doctor?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so—I trust so with all my heart," replied the Head gravely. "Poor Stockdale! I never thought he would be forced to desert us in this fashion. But he possesses a strong constitution, Mr. Lee, and I have no doubt he will pull through. It will be a long time before we see him again—a very long time."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"And, meanwhile, Colonel Clinton will remain here?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Head slowly. "Yes, I suppose so. Clinton is a clever man, Mr. Lee, and his qualifications are above reproach. He was appointed by the governors a week or two ago, and they have every confidence in him."

"Have you?" smiled Lee, looking up.

"Well, I don't know—I don't know, I'm sure," said Dr. Stafford, with a worried frown. "Clinton is capable, very capable. His record is splendid—his scholastic record, I mean. But I am rather uncertain——"

The Head paused, and stared moodily into the fire.

"You are thinking of what happened this afternoon?" asked Nelson Lee quietly.

"Yes, I was hearing that matter in mind," replied the Head, removing his glasses and polishing them abstractedly. "The incident was rather unfortunate, Mr. Lee, and I'm afraid the boys have received a bad impression."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am quite sure of it," he said. "After all, they only acted as all schoolboys will; they were honouring their new Housemaster by giving him a rousing reception. Surely Colonel Clinton ought to have realised that! And yet he was quite furious, and, indeed, insulted the boys in no unmeasured terms."

"The subject rather distresses me," said Dr. Stafford, his brow puckered. "There is no need for me to tell you, Mr. Lee, that I strongly disapproved of the colonel's attitude. I did not hesitate to tell him so this evening, and I regret to say that he was most arrogant. I'm afraid we shall have trouble with him. I'm very much afraid that he will cause upheavals in the College House."

"But, my dear sir, you have power——"

"Yes, yes, of course," interrupted the Head. "I have power to a certain extent, Mr. Lee, but it is not my habit to order my Housemasters about. They have complete control over their own Houses, and it is not for me to interfere. Colonel Clinton was appointed by the governors, and not by me. However, I shall certainly put my foot down if the gentleman goes too far with his pompous nonsense."

Lee easily saw that the Head did not wish to pursue the subject, and so he changed it. He already knew the record of the new Housemaster, and it was certainly beyond

reproach. Colonel Clinton had had a brilliant career before entering the Army, and that career had been continued, although in a different phase.

It was difficult to understand his condition of mind, and Nelson Lee was frankly puzzled. Why had the colonel taken the efforts of Christine and Co. so harshly? By all rights he ought to have been honoured.

However, the matter was not one which Lee concerned himself about. The most likely explanation was that Colonel Clinton had a shockingly bad temper, and he had been feeling particularly irritable during the afternoon. Even so, there was no excuse for his conduct, and Lee knew well enough that the newcomer would not be popular.

Nelson Lee sat chatting with the Head until well after midnight. They had much to talk about, but at last Lee rose to his feet with a yawn and tossed the stump of his cigar into the fireplace.

"Well, doctor, we must be getting to bed, I suppose," he said smilingly.

"We are terribly late," remarked the Head, glancing at the clock. "Dear me! Nearly twelve-thirty!"

The detective smiled more broadly. Twelve-thirty was quite an early hour for him, and Dr. Stafford's almost shocked voice was rather amusing. And Nelson Lee knew that the Head was still worried and concerned. And the only reason for this could be the advent of Colonel Clinton.

Lee was thoughtful as he walked away from the Head's study in the direction of the private staircase; but, instead of going straight up to bed, he decided to take a breath of fresh air in the Triangle.

He quietly unlocked the side-door and stepped out. And at that very moment a dim form loomed up out of the darkness and nearly collided with him. Nelson Lee peered forward keenly.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Lee?" came a somewhat startled voice. "I was just going to knock on the door——"

"What on earth are you doing out of your House at this time of night, Carlisle?" demanded Nelson Lee sharply, recognising the voice as that of Carlisle, of the Sixth—a College House prefect.

"I was just coming for the Head, sir," panted Carlisle. "I saw a light in his window, and knew that he hadn't gone to bed. There's—there's something wrong over in my House, sir. I came out of my room to get a drink——"

"Never mind that, Carlisle," interrupted Lee. "What is wrong?"

"Why, sir, I was going along the passage, and I caught sight of a man prowling about—a man wearing a horrible-looking mask. I—I was quite scared, sir, and rushed away to the Housemaster's bedroom."

"Well?"

"Colonel Clinton wasn't there, sir."

"You went to his study?"

"Yes, sir; but that was empty, too," replied Carlisle huskily. "I expect the

colonel went out to look for the chap, and—and he might be in danger. Will you come and search, sir?"

The prefect's story was rather extraordinary, but Nelson Lee knew that this was no time for asking a dozen questions. The thing was to act—and then hear the full story afterwards.

So, without a word, he hurried across the Triangle, Carlisle following him. They entered the College House, and stood still in the passage, listening. And just at that moment there came the sound of a window being raised. It was a very faint creak, but Nelson Lee's keen hearing was not at fault.

"Stay here, Carlisle," he said quickly. "Perhaps you had better go straight up into your room—you can leave this affair to me."

The prefect didn't exactly like it, but he obeyed. And Nelson Lee went out once more into the cold, frosty night. He looked along the lower windows of the great building, his idea being that the unknown man was in the act of escaping.

And this proved to be the case.

As Nelson Lee watched, a shadowy form leapt lightly to the ground from the window, and paused uncertainly for a moment. Lee stole forward, hoping to take the man by surprise. He half expected to see Colonel Clinton leave the window in pursuit; but this did not happen.

And just then the dim form became aware of Nelson Lee's presence. At all events, this is what Nelson Lee judged, for the man took fright abruptly, and dashed away across the Triangle without the slightest attempt to conceal his movements.

"Very well, my friend!" muttered Lee grimly.

He gave chase on the instant, full of confidence. There were few sprinters who could equal Nelson Lee's pace, and he rapidly overhauled the fugitive. The man was making for the dense belt of trees which stood out stark against the starlit sky near the old monastery ruins, in the corner of the Triangle.

By the time the man was well amongst the trees Nelson Lee was right on his heels. And it was not even necessary for the detective to grasp his quarry in order to bring him down, for the fugitive suddenly tripped on a pile of dead, frozen leaves and soil, and went down heavily.

Apparently the wind was knocked out of him, for he made no attempt to rise. And Nelson Lee stood over him, and peered down curiously and somewhat grimly. The man turned over, and Lee heard a muffled gasp.

The detective could see no face whatever, and he thought of Carlisle's words. Bending down until his face was quite close to that of the other, he now saw that a heavy mask completely covered the marauder's face. And the mask was so complete that there were glasses fitted into the eye-spaces.

"Come, my friend, you'd better pull yourself together," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I should like to know what you were doing in the College House at this hour of the

night. If you cannot give me a very full explanation, the police will have to take a hand——"

Lee's prisoner struggled into a sitting position, and Lee broke off, expecting the man to reply. But he did not do so. Instead, he suddenly sprang to his feet as though intending to flee. This was by no means certain, but the detective was taking no chances.

He seized the fellow and quickly forced him to the ground again, where he lay on his back. And now Lee took matters into his own hands. He wrenched at the mask in vain for some moments, and then discovered that it was a thing which completely enveloped the head and was secured at the back by means of a strap.

This strap had become jammed, and Lee had some little difficulty in freeing it. But he did so at last, and then, with one pull, jerked off the mask and was about to throw it aside. But the prisoner, with a quick gasp, snatched it from Lee's hand and thrust it into his coat, out of sight.

"By gad!" he panted huskily. "How—how dare you, sir?"

Nelson Lee gave one slight start of surprise, and then stared down at his prisoner keenly.

The man was Colonel Clinton!

CHAPTER V.

THE COLLEGE HOUSE REGIMENT.

NELSON LEE rose to his feet at once, and held out his hand for the colonel to seize; but the latter ignored it, and scrambled up unaided.

So far as Nelson Lee could see in the gloom, the colonel was scowling with anger, and his face was red and his scanty hair ruffled. He glared at Nelson Lee aggressively, and stood breathing hard for some moments.

"There has evidently been some little misunderstanding, Colonel Clinton," said Nelson Lee pleasantly. "I am sorry——"

"And so you ought to be, sir—and so you ought to be, by gad!" snorted the colonel fiercely. "Confounded interference! What the dooce do you mean by chasing me in this unwarrantable fashion, you infernal busybody?"

Nelson Lee remained quite calm.

"Your temper, I'm afraid, is somewhat short, colonel," he said coldly. "On this occasion I can find excuse for such conduct, but you will please understand that I have distinct objections to being termed an infernal busybody. If you choose to go about the House disguised as you were, you cannot but expect to arouse suspicions. In running you to earth I was only performing an obvious duty."

Clinton swallowed hard.

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Lee," he growled, although the expression in his eyes plainly told that he was still furious, and that he hated this encounter. "It was my own fault from the start. I dare say, and perhaps I owe you an explanation."

"I am certainly awaiting one," said Nelson Lee, as they walked from beneath the trees into the open Triangle.

"I am under no obligation to explain my movements to you, sir, but, under these exceptional circumstances, I will unbend," said the colonel pompously. "It was one of my senior boys who commenced the trouble, I believe, and I have no doubt that the young fool went across and aroused you."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"He was fully justified in doing so," he remarked quietly.

"That is for me to decide, Mr. Lee!" snapped the colonel. "I shall make a point of punishing the upstart very severely. What was he doing out of his bed at such an hour? I will tell you what happened, but you'll please understand that the explanation is quite gratuitous on my part."

Nelson Lee made no comment; the man's arrogance was almost humorous.

"The mask you saw me wearing, Mr. Lee, was one I brought from the front with me," continued the colonel. "It has saved my life upon more than one occasion, and I treasure it highly. A whim seized me to-night to wear it for a few moments—I don't know why, but I have stated the fact. I donned the mask, and smiled to myself as I decided to walk upstairs to my bedroom wearing it."

"I quite understand, colonel," said Nelson Lee.

"I have told you all that really matters," continued Clinton. "Before I reached my bedroom that young puppy appeared, and was nearly scared out of his wits. Has he never seen a gas-mask before? The young fool was rushing away before I could detain him."

"Well, really, colonel, Carlisle had some excuse—"

"He had none," snapped the other. "Carlisle! I shall remember that name, and the boy will deeply regret his impertinence in the morning. I knew very well that he was arousing other people, and his first move was to go to my bedroom. Naturally, I attempted to remove the mask; but the strap was jammed, and I was quite helpless."

Lee smiled to himself in the darkness.

"I heard voices, and decided that my better course was to leave the house in secret until the alarm was over," continued the new Housemaster. "It is undignified—preposterous—that I should be found in such a ridiculous plight. It is fortunate that you were the only witness of my discomfiture, Mr. Lee."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"You can rely upon me, colonel, to say nothing," he exclaimed. "The affair is only a trivial incident, after all, and you will no doubt silence Carlisle in the morning. I am deeply sorry you were put to such trouble, and I hope you will forgive me for having chased you so strenuously."

The colonel thawed slightly.

"Why, of course—of course," he said gruffly. "From your point of view, no doubt,

the affair was somewhat startling. From mine it was only ludicrous. Well, it is over now, and we will say good-night."

The colonel walked off towards the College House almost before Nelson Lee could return the compliment. Clinton had made no attempt to shake hands, and Lee was not at all anxious in that respect.

"Very plausible," he murmured, as he walked slowly towards the Ancient House. "Very plausible indeed—but I have my doubts. For one thing, that mask was never used on the Western Front—or any other front. It was of a design totally unlike the regulation military pattern."

Nelson Lee instinctively felt that Colonel Clinton hated him because he had taken part in this affair. But it couldn't be helped. And was the incident as innocent as it seemed on the surface? Nelson Lee was puzzled, and unsatisfied. It struck him that there was something more in this than met the eye.

However, it was impossible to openly doubt the colonel's word, and the whole matter was dropped. Nelson Lee went to his bed and slept soundly until the morning. He thrust the gas-mask incident out of his mind, so he assured himself. Actually, it remained there all the time.

Sir Crawford Grey took his departure that morning, and Jack Grey was excused from lessons in order to accompany his father to the station. But the rest of the fellows settled down smoothly to the usual school routine. The new term had commenced, and the holidays were being forgotten.

In the Ancient House, of course, everything was as usual. But there were a great many changes over in the Monks' camp. Colonel Clinton, the new Housemaster, was evidently no believer in precedent. He commenced operations by shelving nearly all Mr. Stockdale's carefully thought-out rules and introducing others according to his own ideas.

They were only minor details, and did not greatly affect the boys' liberties. But it revealed the absolute conceit of the man; he evidently thought that nobody's rules were of any use except his own. He was Housemaster, and his orders had to be obeyed. It was just an exhibition of haughty arrogance.

The really first intimation of the colonel's disciplinary campaign occurred just after morning lessons. Christine and Co. were gathered round the College House steps, and the juniors practically filled all the space up. Needless to say, there was quite a din proceeding, for several groups of fellows were talking at once. This was quite an ordinary state of affairs.

During Mr. Stockdale's reign, if he had appeared the juniors would have moved aside instantly, politely raising their caps. And Mr. Stockdale would have passed on with a nod and a smile. He knew his boys, and he also knew that noisiness was inseparable from them.

Colonel Clinton had other ideas.

He appeared from the lobby, and stood in the doorway for a moment, screwing his monocle into his eye. Christine and Co. saw

him at that second, and hastily drew aside, raising their caps respectfully.

"What is the meaning of this confounded noise?" demanded the colonel harshly.

"Noise, sir?" repeated Christine.

"Yes, boy—noise!" snapped the Housemaster. "Clear off these steps—every one of you! Do you hear me? How dare you block up the gangway in this disgraceful fashion? And don't let me hear any more shouting!"

"It's not school-time, sir," protested Yorke hotly.

"Do not presume to argue with me, sir!" roared the colonel. "I intend to put a stop to these loose methods. By gad! The barracks are a disgrace to any—"

"The—the barracks, sir?" gasped Christine faintly.

"You heard what I said, boy!" said the Housemaster. "I choose to call this house the barracks—and everybody else will follow my example. Go! Get to the other side of the square, out of my way!"

"It's called the Triangle, sir," explained Talmadge politely.

Colonel Clinton glared.

"I am well aware of what it is called," he snapped. "The name is an absurd one. This open space is the barracks square, and it must be termed so by every boy under my command. I intend to make my regiment—"

"Your—your regiment, sir!" said Christine dazedly.

"Confound you, boy, you are like an infernal parrot!" bellowed the colonel. "Yes, the regiment—I said the regiment! You will find out before long that the days of slovenliness have passed. Clear out of my way!"

Christine turned red.

"Mr. Stockdale never ordered us off the steps, sir," he said warmly. "We—"

"Stop!" roared Clinton. "If you dare to say another word I will have you court-martialled on the spot! What is your name, boy?"

"Christine, sir!" said Bob, breathing hard.

"Very well, Christine; report yourself at headquarters at six o'clock to the minute," said the colonel grimly.

The junior stared wonderingly.

"To—to headquarters, sir?" he repeated.

"I—I don't understand, sir!"

"I did not expect you to," snorted Clinton witheringly. "I have come to the conclusion that the boys of this camp are a set of nincompoops. Headquarters, Christine, is my study—but it will be called a study no longer. Remember my command. Report yourself at six o'clock without fail!"

And the Housemaster stalked down the steps, and strutted away towards the gymnasium. The juniors had dispersed, but they collected together as soon as Clinton's stiff figure disappeared within the gym.

"He's dotty!" said Christine. "Headquarters! Barracks! Oh, my only hat! He's got militarism on the brain!"

"He can't be dotty," objected Yorke. "He's a jolly clever man, and it's fat-headed to say anything else. Just look at his

record! But I must say he's a pompous beast. We ain't fit to lick his boots—according to his ideas. We're so much giddy dirt!"

And this was the general idea throughout the College House. Colonel Clinton seemed to imagine that he was the lord of all he surveyed. He was an autocrat, and everything and everybody had to bend to his will.

The fellows were keenly disappointed. Before the colonel's arrival they had complimented themselves upon the fact that they were to have a Housemaster who had distinguished himself in the Great War. But they had not bargained for such a military autocrat as Colonel Clinton was proving himself to be. A man who had been in the Army since youth would not have been so high-and-mighty as Clinton.

The juniors were forced to stand it without protest; but the seniors, particularly the Sixth, soon showed the Housemaster that they were not prepared to stand any nonsense. And the lordly Sixth-Formers received a big surprise. For Colonel Clinton treated them as he treated the others, and already a storm was brewing amongst the prefects.

But so far the fellows had only received a bare inkling as to what was to follow. Never in their wildest dreams did they imagine that Clinton would go to such lengths as he soon made apparent.

The colonel made no attempt to interfere with his boys during lessons. The Form-masters found everything as usual. Clinton was only concerned with making the boys obey his will at other times.

And a notice which appeared on the board in the College House lobby just before tea made everybody stare and wonder. The notice was written in a stiff handwriting, which was obviously the colonel's. The whole House, it seemed, was to gather in the big hall at seven o'clock, in order to listen to their Housemaster.

There was no hint regarding the subject to be dealt with, and the boys, seniors and juniors, were filled with curiosity. There was much speculation, but nobody could form anything like a correct guess.

Christine appeared in the lobby soon after six, his hands tucked under his arms and his face screwed up with pain. His chums knew that he had been to the colonel's study, and they regarded him sympathetically.

"Hurt much, old chap?" asked Yorke.

"Not a bit!" said Christine sarcastically. "Oh, corks!"

"How many swipes?" asked Talmadge.

"Four—laid on about three times as heavily as old Stockdale used to!" groaned Christine. "Oh, the beast! And I didn't do anything, either!"

The punishment was undoubtedly severe, and the juniors were indignant. However, nothing could be done, and Christine soon got over his pain, and had practically forgotten by the time seven o'clock arrived.

There was no getting out of the thing. Prefects came round and collected every College House junior from far and near. So.

at seven o'clock to the minute, the big hall was crowded. There was not a single absentee.

Most of the faces were discontented and impatient. They didn't like this interference with their own time, and when Colonel Clinton stepped upon the platform there was a dead silence, which would have been disconcerting to anybody else.

The Housemaster polished his monocle, jammed it into his eye, and looked over the boys with a pleasant smile. This was the first time anybody had seen him smile, and he looked so genial that it was thought that his announcement was amiable in character. But the fellows soon learned to the contrary.

"Now, boys, I intend to say a few words to you," said the colonel, after clearing his throat. "As you all understand, I am now your Housemaster. You are under my control completely, and it is for me to order your lives as I choose."

This was a bad beginning, and the dead silence continued.

"I have no intention of being harsh in my rule," continued Clinton. "At the same time, I want everybody to understand that I will put up with no nonsense. This House must set the example for the Ancient House—for every public school in the United Kingdom, indeed. There has been too much laxity hitherto, and I intend to put a stop to it. You have been allowed an absurd amount of freedom——"

"Oh!"

It was a long-drawn-out protest from everybody.

"Naturally, you will not take kindly to the new order of things at first," continued the colonel. "I do not expect you to. But before long you will realise that discipline is beneficial, and you will be glad that you are members of the College House Regiment!"

"The College House what, sir?" asked Reynolds, of the Sixth.

"You heard what I said, boy!" said the colonel, glaring. "You must understand that discipline can only be maintained by the adoption of stern methods. Therefore, I have formed you into a regiment, and this House will in future be called the Barracks. I am your commanding officer."

The majority of the boys were grinning now, and a titter of amusement ran through the ranks. The absurdity of the thing was almost comic.

"Silence!" thundered the colonel furiously. "You will find that this is no laughing matter, you disorderly rascals! You need not think that I shall be your commanding officer in name alone. By gad! You will soon realise that I am here for a definite purpose. I shall conduct things in my way—and I must be obeyed. Insubordination will be punished heavily."

"But it's impossible, sir," protested Reynolds, of the Sixth. "We're not soldiers! It's ridiculous to speak of the College House as a regiment. The other fellows will be yelling when they hear——"

"I am not concerned with the other fellows," snapped the colonel angrily. "Keep silent, boy, or I will cane you!"

"Cane me, sir?" gasped the prefect. "Me?"

Colonel Clinton laughed harshly.

"Yes, boy," he declared. "It has been the custom, I believe, for prefects to be exempt from corporal punishment, but I will have none of that nonsense while I am in command. By the time I have done with you there will be a vast change. You will be an orderly body of troops—you will be like one machine, working smoothly and evenly——"

"We don't want to be a machine, sir!" roared a dozen voices.

"It is not a question of what you want," bellowed the colonel. "It is what I order! You must do what you are told without question. This spirit of independence must be crushed out of you. You are soldiers—my soldiers! And I shall drill you and discipline you until you have lost all individuality!"

"He's mad!" muttered Parry, of the Fifth.

"Hun!" hissed somebody.

In a second the colonel's manner changed.

"Who uttered that expression?" he demanded quietly. "Some foolish boy called me a Hun. I will not seek his name, because he is evidently unconscious of the grave nature of his charge. I need say nothing to refute it, since my record at the front is, I believe, sufficient. For many months I fought the Huns, and I think I deserve the honour which was graciously bestowed upon me."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're proud of you, sir!"

The colonel looked round him, in a much better temper. But it was obvious to everybody that he had lost none of his pomposity.

"I have no intention of emulating the Hun," he went on, "but it is my conviction that schoolboys should be trained severely, and that discipline should be maintained from a very early period. By such methods you will be fit to go into the world freely, and, in the event of war, you will be ready for action at a moment's notice. Therefore, I intend to rule over you in a somewhat novel manner. You will not like it to begin with, but that will make no difference. After a week or two matters will adjust themselves, and you will regard my orders as the regular routine. Each Form, from the Sixth downwards, will have its own officers. That is my scheme, and I rely upon you to assist me in it."

"Officers, sir?" asked Parry, of the Fifth.

"That is what I said," nodded Colonel Clinton. "I will enlarge upon that statement. You will understand at once that in order to maintain strict discipline it will be necessary to have certain rigid regulations. Therefore I declare that each Form must have its officers. I intend to appoint them now. The three officers will be major, captain, and lieutenant. Each will have his own duties to perform, and there must be no insubordination. Officers must be obeyed in all things without question."

The fellows were staring now, and they were amazed. It was hardly possible to credit that the Housemaster was serious. The very idea of each Form having its own officers was palpably preposterous. But Colonel Clinton was in deadly earnest.

Then and there he left the platform and went round to each Form. Three fellows were picked indiscriminately and appointed to their various ranks. In the Remove the choice fell upon Freeman as major, Page as captain, and Turner as lieutenant.

Naturally Bob Christine and Co. were furiously indignant, but they could not give voice to their feelings here. Christine, the Form skipper, had been utterly ignored! It was an open insult, but it couldn't be remedied.

The colonel returned to the platform.

"There will be other innovations before long," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction. "I intend to appoint certain non-commissioned officers, but we will not bother about them for the present. Now, boys, I want you to understand this position thoroughly."

"I—I suppose you're not joking, sir?" asked Reynolds, the prefect.

Colonel Clinton glared.

"If you make such a foolish remark again, Reynolds, I shall see that you are severely punished," he snapped harshly. "Joking! You will soon see whether I am joking or not! Another word from you, sir, and you will be confined to barracks!"

"Oh, glory!" muttered Reynolds faintly.

"You must understand what this means," went on the Housemaster, ignoring the prefect's exclamation. "All boys who are officers will report to me at certain times of the day—which I shall fix later—for orders. These orders will be given to the rank and file, and they must be obeyed in every detail. Furthermore, officers must be saluted by privates—not occasionally, but always. And everybody must salute me. To-morrow I intend giving you preliminary instruction in drilling. For the present I have nothing more to say. You will salute and dismiss."

The fellows were rather too astonished to salute, but they were quite ready to dismiss. Not ten of them saluted, and they had broken ranks before the colonel could repeat the order. He set his teeth and looked grim.

The big hall emptied, and the Monks, seniors and juniors, trickled away into their various quarters, dazed and bewildered.

Things were reaching a pretty pass, indeed!

CHAPTER VI.

MILITARY DISCIPLINE RUN RIOT.

BOB CHRISTINE looked at me almost vacantly.

"What's the good of asking what's happened?" he demanded. "How do I know? I'm dreaming, I believe—or else it's a nightmare. The chap must be dotty—clean off his rocker!"

The first rumours of Colonel Clinton's

amazing orders had found their way into the Ancient House five minutes after the Monks had been dismissed. And naturally the Fossils, especially the juniors, were exceedingly interested.

Handforth brought the news into Study C, and Sir Montie and Tommy and I at once jumped to our feet and followed Handforth out into the passage. We found quite a crowd leaving the House.

It was dark in the Triangle, but the night was fine and still, with a keen frost in the air. Over by the College House were many groups of excited juniors, and I had approached Christine and his own particular chums. Apparently they were still half dazed by what had occurred.

"He can't be off his rocker," I said, in reply to Christine's remark. "He may be a bit dotty on discipline, and all that, but he's got his wits about him. I suppose he's going to make you drill?"

Christine laughed bitterly.

"Drill!" he echoed. "That's nothing. We're going to be persecuted such a terrific lot that we shall soon become cogs in a big machine—we shall have lost all our independence and—"

"Rats!" I grinned.

"That's what Clinton said, anyhow," went on Christine grimly. "My hat! He doesn't know who he's dealing with! It's all very well for him to talk about the way he fought the Huns, but these methods of his ain't British! He's got a bee in his bonnet on the subject of military discipline. We've got to salute him—every one of us."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But that's nothing," went on Christine. "Each form has got three officers—"

"Officers?" I gasped.

"Yes—a major and a captain and a lieutenant."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We thought you'd grin!" said Yorke feelingly. "Go on! We don't mind a bit! We should grin—if we weren't affected by Clinton's rot. It's the biggest joke I've ever heard, but it's against our chaps!"

"Officers!" gasped Tommy Watson. "That's about the limit."

"Dear boys, there must be something wrong."

"Of course there's something wrong," snapped Christine. "Something wrong with our giddy Housemaster! But he's not joking, he means every word of it. And it's absolutely galling!"

"What is, dear old boys?"

"You know Freeman?" snorted Christine. "He's a decent chap—I won't deny it—but he couldn't lead a horse to a drinking trough! He's a meek chap, and yet Clinton has made him major of the form—or company, or platoon, or whatever he calls it! Major Freeman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad! It's too funny for words—it is, really!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows who were laughing all be-

longed to the Ancient House. We could see the richness of the joke, but the Monks were in a state of dismay. They had to bear the brunt of the extraordinary colonel's idiosyncrasies.

"Captain Page — Lieutenant Turner!" groaned Christie. "Just think of it! We're all privates, and we're under the orders of those chaps! It's—it's insane! The whole thing's a giddy farce!"

"I've never heard anything like it," I said thoughtfully. "At the least, Clinton ought to have chosen you for major, Christine. What does Freeman say? He ought to hand over his commission to you."

Bob Christine grunted.

"Clinton would be on his track if he did," he replied. "It's not a bit of good grumbling or growling, we've got to stand it. He's our Housemaster, and we can't refuse to obey him."

"What about that rotter we had on our side Hunter?" said Watson. "We didn't stand any of his rot, did we? We rebelled, and had a barring-out——"

"Oh, that was different!" interrupted Christine miserably. "We can't do anything like that in our House. Besides, you had warm weather for your barring-out, and that made it easier. How the dickens do you think we could manage in this freezing weather, you asses?"

"It would be a bit difficult," I admitted.

"And there's no excuse for rebelling," went on Christine. "Clinton hasn't taken away any of our liberties—yet. There's no telling what he will do, of course. And, after all, he's a distinguished soldier, and the kink of his may only be a flash in the pan. So far as I can see, we've got to stick it."

"My dear chaps, you can get a lot of fun out of the thing," I said cheerfully. "There's nothing to worry about that I can see. I can't quite imagine the Sixth playing at soldiers like that, even if the juniors are forced to. There'll be ructions—and that'll be interesting."

Page, of the Remove, loomed up out of the darkness and joined our group.

"Now then, you common fellows, salute me!" he grinned. "It's up to you to start the thing——"

"Blow you!" snapped Yorke. "I'd rather salute the pageboy."

"Dear fellow, that's what you would be doing," remarked Mr Montie mildly. "Page is this chap's name, so it stands to reason that he's a Page-boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can salute the fountain if you like," said Captain Page. "I didn't want to be made an officer, I can tell you, and I sha'n't take any notice of it. Freeman isn't going to, either—nor is Turner."

"Well, there's something for Clinton to rave about, to start with!" I grinned. "I don't know what to advise you for the best, my sons, but I should certainly do the saluting stunt when your giddy colonel's

looking on. It's not much trouble, and it'll save heaps of pain."

Bob Christine shook his head.

"Do you think we're going to stand it?" he asked fiercely. "I don't! And I'm jolly sure the seniors will make a fuss. We shall be the talk of the whole county if we join this nonsense. Everybody will be cackling."

"They're cackling already," grinned Pitt, who had just come up. "Listen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Shouts of laughter were sounding from every direction. Seniors and juniors alike—all belonging to the Ancient House—were yelling at the unfortunate plight of the Monks. Colonel Clinton could hardly have anticipated this result when he gave his instructions. In his arrogance he probably expected that the Ancient House would be duly overawed.

"Why aren't you fellows grinning?" asked Pitt briskly, gazing upon the despondent Christine and Co. "What on earth is the good of worrying? You don't think you'll have to stand that rot, do you?"

"What else can we do?" growled Bob Christine.

"I wasn't thinking of what you could do, I was remembering that Dr. Stafford is the Headmaster," replied Pitt calmly. "My dear, innocent fatheads, do you suppose the Head will stand by and see Clinton make the whole school a laughing-stock? Of course he won't."

"He'll put his foot down," I declared.

"Hard," added Pitt.

Christine and Co. looked more hopeful.

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of the Head," said Talmadge. "Of course, he doesn't know what Clinton's been up to, yet. I shouldn't be surprised if we see the colonel eating his words before bedtime!"

"Oh, it won't be so sudden as that!" I said. "Give him until to-morrow, anyhow. But it won't be long before he comes toppling off his perch—you'll see."

This idea became general very soon. In fact the Monks convinced themselves that the Head would step in and put a stop to the farce. And their spirits rose accordingly. Christine and Co. were even grinning long before supper, and their grins were occasioned by the happy thoughts of seeing the lofty Colonel Clinton knuckle under to the superior orders of the Head.

Dr. Stafford did not believe in interfering with his Housemasters, but he would certainly drop on Colonel Clinton when that gentleman commenced his plan in real earnest. So far it was only talk, and didn't matter much.

With those ideas knocked out of Clinton's head, he would probably be an excellent Housemaster. He certainly possessed a wonderful knowledge of all scholastic matters, and was learned to a degree which approached perfection. He was a brilliant scholar in every way, and he would have done better to stick to this. To attempt military discipline at St. Frank's would merely bring ridicule upon his own head.

This had already happened, and Colonel Clinton was regarded by everybody as something of a freak. Already he was known as "Colonel Clinton of the Monks!" This was merely a term of ridicule, and no Housemaster could possibly have any control over his boys so long as they looked upon him with contempt—or something approaching it.

Over-in the Ancient House we chuckled during supper, and we chuckled in the dormitory. And we were quite anxious for the morrow to come, so that we could witness the pleasing spectacle of our rivals saluting their "officer!"

I wanted to have a word with the gov'nor about it, but I didn't get a chance. I was quite sure, however, that Nelson Lee would be somewhat disgusted with the whole business. The Ancient House fellows almost loved him, and yet he could be exceedingly stern when the occasion demanded. It was painful to see his fellow Housemaster making himself an object of hilarity.

Our hopes regarding the saluting were doomed to disappointment. For in the morning the Monks failed to put in an appearance. Not a single junior emerged into the Triangle, although the morning was sunny and bright.

"They're up to snuff!" grinned De Valerie. "They're stickin' in their studies until breakfast time so as to be safe. Well, I don't blame them."

"Seems rather silly, though," I remarked. "It's almost admitting that they're under Clinton's thumb already—Hallo! There go a couple of seniors!"

Two Sixth-Formers were strolling across the Triangle. And at that moment the Colonel appeared in the doorway of the College House.

"Now for it!" I chuckled.

But the Sixth-Formers walked up the steps and entered the House as though the Housemaster didn't exist—they simply ignored him. Clinton uttered a bellow as he turned, and the next moment he had disappeared into the lobby.

"Trouble!" remarked Sir Montie sadly. "There's frightful trouble for somebody now."

"And there'll be more trouble, too," I declared. "The juniors might be forced to play the fool, but the seniors won't have any of it. Sixth-Form chaps can't be ordered about like sags, you know."

After breakfast the Triangle was again crowded with Fossils, but only six or seven Monks appeared. There was no saluting, for the fellows who had been appointed officers were conspicuous by their absence. I surmised that Christine and Co. had threatened all sorts of dire punishment if those unhappy youths showed their faces.

But Colonel Clinton came out, and the way the Monks appeared engrossed in the architecture of the College House was very remarkable. And when Colonel Clinton glared round him he found that everybody in his vicinity was looking the other way, except a group of three fellows who were

grinning at him direct. The Fossils were all on this side of the Triangle—except these three.

"Outrageous!" stormed the Housemaster. "Salute, you young dogs!"

"Talking to us, sir?" inquired one of the trio, who happened to be Handforth and Co.

"Yes, I am talking to you, confound your insolence!" roared the colonel. "Salute at once, do you hear me?"

"I should think you can be heard down in the village, sir," remarked Handforth recklessly. "As for saluting, I don't see that we're bound to do that. What do you think, you chaps?"

"Rather not!" said Church and McClure rather nervously.

The colonel simply quivered.

"This impertinence is past all bearing," he thundered. "I do not know your names, but you will report yourselves at headquarters—"

"But why, sir?" asked Handforth innocently.

Everybody else was looking on with great and joyous interest. There was hardly any other fellow at St. Frank's who would have had the utter nerve to bait the new Housemaster in this open fashion. But Handforth had cheek enough for anything, and Church and McClure knew better than to desert their leader at such a critical moment. At that minute Handforth was the most popular chap in the lower school. Everybody was filled with glee, and watched with bated breath.

"Why, sir?" repeated Handforth blandly. "I don't see—"

"You shall receive six cuts with the cane for this open defiance," fumed Colonel Clinton. "Salute at once—at once!"

Handforth and Co. remained unmoved.

"We don't mind saluting if it'll give you any pleasure, sir," said Handforth generously. "But, of course—"

"You—you don't mind!" stormed Clinton, purple with rage. "Do you know whom you are addressing, you insolent puppy? Do you know that I am your Housemaster—your commanding officer?"

Handforth looked surprised.

"No, sir, I didn't know that," he replied mildly. "It's news to me. I thought you were the Housemaster of the College House!"

"I am House—" began the colonel furiously. "By gad!" he added suddenly. "Tell me, boy, who are you?"

"Handforth, sir, of the Remove," said the youth. "I belong to the Ancient House—and so do these chaps. We didn't think it was necessary to salute—"

But Colonel Clinton, hardly trusting himself to speak, had turned on his heel and was striding rapidly towards the College House. He was confused, and fled. The juniors were all strange to him as yet, and he had made a bloomer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The yell went up from the Ancient House in a roar, and the colonel must have felt

pretty small as he plunged into the lobby of his own house. Handforth and Co., looking very pleased with themselves, strolled over to us.

"That's the way to do it," grinned Handforth.

"Jolly lucky for you if you don't get reported to the guv'nor," I said. "Even Mr. Lee wouldn't excuse your giddy nerve, Handy."

"Your guv'nor's a brick," said Handforth calmly. "I believe he was looking on all the time from his window. Hallo! Here come the other frcaks. That's three we've got this term!"

Handforth was referring to Nicodemus and Cornelius Trotwood, who had just emerged into the Triangle. The twins looked as simple and innocent as ever, but Nicodemus proved that he was fully aware of the situation in the Monks' camp.

"The spectacle was most entertaining, my dear friend," he said, beaming upon Handforth. "Cornelius and I witnessed it from our study window. Dear me! The excellent colonel was quite dangerous. I fully expected him to strike you. But you were quite right not to salute. I should have been annoyed had you succumbed."

"Oh, you'd have been annoyed?" asked Handforth grimly.

"Indeed, I should," repeated Nicodemus. "For boys to salute their masters is surely the height of absurdity. I sympathise exceedingly with the dear boys you call Monks. They are passing through a great trial. Military discipline is essential in the Army, but at a school—Oh, no! It is very absurd, and I strongly disapprove."

"You'd better tell Clinton that!" grinned Watson.

"I shall, indeed I shall," said Nicodemus gravely. "When the opportunity presents itself I shall not hesitate to inform that misguided gentleman that——"

"What is the discussion, my dear Nicodemus?" inquired the other Trotwood mildly.

"We are merely talking about the colonel, my good Cornelius."

"Really, I object to that word," protested Cornelius.

"Which word, my good brother?"

"You remarked that something was infernal——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's not far wrong," grinned Handforth. "Colonel does sound a bit like infernal, and this particular colonel is thundering hot stuff. I say, Nick, it's a wonder you don't buy your darling brother a pair of gramophone horns!"

Nicodemus looked astonished.

"But the size, my good Handforth!" he protested. "They would be in the way, surely?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We turned as the bell clanged out for morning lessons, and trooped to the Remove Form-room, the twins going to their respective places. Mr. Crowell had placed them

far apart, one on either side of the room, so that he might know which was which without trouble. A precaution of this sort was necessary.

"Where's Christine?" I asked wonderingly. "Where are all the rest of 'em?"

"Haven't come over yet!" grinned De Valerie.

The class-rooms at St. Frank's were all situated in the Ancient House—this being by far the larger of the two buildings. The College House was merely for the purpose of accommodating its occupants. There was, however, a big laboratory in the College House, and an extensive library and recreation-rooms galore.

Not a single Monk had turned up, and Mr. Crowell himself was due!

"They'd better buck up, the silly asses!" I remarked. "This is running it a bit too fine, I must say. See any sign of 'em from the window, Pitt?"

The windows were fairly high, but Pitt climbed on to a form and looked out.

"No, not a sign——" he began.

"Pitt! Get down at once!"

Mr. Crowell had just entered, and Reginald Pitt subsided into his seat gracefully. Standing on the forms to look out of the window was forbidden—although it was done, on the average, about twenty times a day.

"I was just looking for the College House chaps, sir," explained Pitt.

The Form-master looked round impatiently.

"They shall be punished for this non-attendance," he said, compressing his lips.

"Not a single junior is here——"

"There's something going on outside, sir," put in Handforth eagerly. "Shall I have a look out——"

"No, Handforth, you shall not!" said Mr. Crowell.

He took a chair to one of the windows, and stood upon it, watched by all the juniors with great interest. We all saw Mr. Crowell give a big start.

"Good gracious me!" he gasped in amazement. "Upon my soul!"

This was too much for the fellows' curiosity. Within a second everybody was up, and the windows were soon crowded. I happened to get a good look—and what I saw filled me with astonishment and mirth!

Out in the Triangle was every boy of the College House, with the exception of the Sixth Form. The Fifth, the Remove, the Third, the Second—in fact, everybody! And they were all in formation, marching steadily—marching past Colonel Clinton, their Commanding Officer, at the salute!

CHAPTER VII.

IN DEFIANCE OF THE HEAD!

THE scene was absolutely unprecedented in the history of St. Frank's.

It wasn't as if the fellows were cadets, or anything of that sort. St. Frank's wasn't a military training college,

and never had been. And to see the boys, seniors and juniors, engaged in a march-past was simply a scream.

The Sixth apparently had refused to take part in the absurdity, but the Fifth and the juniors hadn't had the nerve to rebel. They looked rebellious, however, and there was much gnashing of teeth.

Half of them were out of step, and the salutes were wild and weird in their variety. The ranks, moreover, were ragged and untidy; and, altogether, Colonel Clinton's regiment was a most disreputable-looking crowd—regarded as soldiers.

The colonel himself stood on the College House steps, as straight as a pole, and he barked out instructions like a gramophone. He apparently imagined that he was drilling a well-trained company of infantry.

"Halt!" he bellowed suddenly.

Two-thirds of the Monks halted, and the remainder didn't. There was immediate confusion, but in the end the crowd came to a standstill.

"Right turn!" roared the colonel. "Form fours!"

This order was hopeless. The fellows had probably heard the term, and a lot of them knew what it meant. But they didn't know how to carry it out. The disorder was appalling, and Clinton danced with rage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites in the Form-room couldn't contain themselves, and they roared. Mr. Crowell made no attempt to check them, but was smiling rather grimly himself. The spectacle of Colonel Clinton prancing up and down the ragged line was comic.

Meanwhile, the Sixth Form was holding a hurried council in the College House lobby, and a decision was quickly reached. The scene in the Triangle was utterly farcical, and something had to be done without delay.

Reynolds, Jesson, and Carisle—all College House prefects—hurried away to the Headmaster's study. They found Dr. Stafford standing at the window, his brow puckered and frowning.

"Well, Reynolds?" he exclaimed sharply.

"We wish to protest, sir," said Reynolds, in a firm voice. "It is generally considered bad form to complain to you about our Housemaster, but this affair is altogether too preposterous. We have, in fact, refused to obey orders."

"Indeed!" said the Head, removing his glasses.

"Colonel Clinton told us to take part in this—this insane march-past in the Triangle, sir," went on the prefect. "We all refused, considering that it was beneath our dignity."

"Quite so, my boys—quite so," said the Head agitatedly. "I can quite understand, and I do not blame you for taking this stand. As you say, Reynolds, it is beneath the dignity of the Sixth Form—indeed, the whole occurrence is distressing. Your Housemaster has gone too far—much too far."

The three seniors exchanged pleased glances.

"He's making us the laughing-stock of the whole school, sir," said Jesson. "It's—it's unheard of. Bellton and Bannington—in fact, the whole county—will hear of it in no time, and St. Frank's will be ridiculed wholesale."

"I fear that you are right, Jesson," said the Headmaster, in distress. "However, Colonel Clinton was appointed by the governors, and it is not within my power to dismiss him—as I should like. This behaviour on the part of your Housemaster was certainly never anticipated."

"But can't you stop this farce, sir?" asked Reynolds, in dismay.

Dr. Stafford compressed his lips.

"Yes, Reynolds, I can—and I will!" he replied grimly. "You may go, my boys. Leave this matter to me."

"Yes, sir," said the prefects joyfully.

They departed, full of satisfaction. They knew how awkward the position was for Dr. Stafford. It was almost impossible for the Head to rush out into the Triangle and order the colonel to desist. Clinton was not a mere under-master, and he couldn't be ordered about even by the Head. Moreover, the fact that all the boys were present made the position much more difficult.

Nevertheless, Dr. Stafford had the power to countermand any order given by either Housemaster at St. Frank's, and he intended to use that power now. This affair was approaching a scandal.

The Head left the study, and emerged into the Triangle, his gown fluttering in the stiff, wintry breeze. Christine and Co. saw him first, and they sent up a roar. It was immediately echoed by all, and the colonel's efforts to restore order were fruitless.

"This, sir," bellowed Clinton, as the Head approached—"this is what comes of lack of discipline! These boys are utterly wild, and my orders are flouted before my very face! It is disgraceful—"

"You are quite right, Colonel Clinton," interrupted the Head curtly. "This scene is certainly disgraceful. I trust that you will dismiss the boys without delay. You must surely be aware that lessons have commenced for the day?"

The colonel glared.

"I care nothing for that, sir!" he shouted. "And I positively refuse to dismiss the brats before—"

"If you do not dismiss them, I shall be compelled to take matters into my own hands," interrupted Dr. Stafford, breathing hard. "I shall regret to take that course, but this scandalous scene must end at once."

The colonel laughed harshly.

"I positively refuse to take orders from you, sir!" he bellowed furiously.

The two masters stood looking at one another for a second—a very tense second—and the Monks watched with bated breath. The Head turned to them.

"Boys," he said quietly, "you may dismiss. Go to your various class-rooms—"

"Hurrah!" roared the crowd. "Three cheers for the Head!"

"Hurrah!"

"Stay where you are!" shrieked Colonel Clinton violently. "Do not dare to—"

But the Monks were streaming away towards the Ancient House, and the colonel's voice was drowned in the general din of cheering. The Housemaster had been defeated, and the juniors particularly yelled with delight.

Meanwhile Colonel Clinton and Dr. Stafford regarded one another steadily. The Head's gaze was cold, Clinton's hot with fury. Without a word the Head strode towards his private door—and Clinton followed him.

Christine and Co., flushed and victorious, entered the Remove Form-room. They were not allowed to talk, for Mr. Crowell strictly maintained order. But after lessons, when we all streamed out into the Triangle, the Monks gave vent to their joy.

"Well; the nightmare's over, thank goodness!" said Christine fervently. "It didn't last long—but we had enough of it!"

"I shouldn't think Clinton will have the nerve to show his face again, after what happened this morning," remarked Yorke. "The Head absolutely sat on him!"

"Rather!" I grinned. "It's a victory for you, my sons."

"And the saluting business is all over, too," went on Christine, with great satisfaction. "If Clinton behaves himself in future he might turn out all right; but that military rot was too jolly thick!"

Reginald Pitt nodded.

"I thought the Head would step in," he said. "Clinton's been told off, to put it politely, and he can't start all over again. He's made himself an object of ridicule already."

"Oh, he'll be quiet for a day or two, I expect," said Jack Grey, with a nod. "If he's got any sense, though, he'll call the chaps together and express his regret—Hullo! You're wanted, Christine."

Bob Christine and his chums looked round. Reynolds and Jesson were approaching, their faces grim.

"All you juniors are wanted at once," called Jesson sharply.

"What for?" roared Christine.

"I don't know—Housemaster's orders," said the prefect. "I suppose he's going to explain that his military wheeze has fizzled out, or something. He's got to say some rot, in order to keep his end up."

Christine and Co. grinned, and readily followed the prefects. Within ten minutes

every College House junior was lined up before the steps of their House, and a considerable crowd of Fossils hovered near, to see the fun. I was standing with Sir Montie and Tommy, and we were all grinning.

Colonel Clinton appeared, his monocle gleaming in the sunlight. He stood upon the steps, and he eyed the gathering with malicious satisfaction.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed, with all his old pomposity. "I have decided to overlook the scene of this morning, and we will start afresh from now—"

"Start—start afresh, sir?" gasped Christine.

"That is what I said, boy!"

"But the—the Head—"

"There is no necessity to refer to Dr. Stafford, Christine!" snapped Colonel Clinton sharply. "I have come to the conclusion that the senior boys are unsuited for the disciplinary training I have in mind; therefore they are excluded. But the juniors, and the Remove in particular, are to receive my full attention. The Remove is the most insubordinate Form of all—and it shall be drilled most severely."

The juniors stared at their Housemaster dazedly.

"The Head won't allow it, sir!" shouted Clapson, with great heat.

"No! Rather not!"

"We won't be drilled—"

"Silence!" thundered the colonel furiously. "How—how dare you? It is not a question of what Dr. Stafford will allow! The first boy to speak will be flogged with the utmost severity!"

He glared up and down with gloating triumph.

"Attention!" he barked suddenly. "Salute!"

"Oh, my only topper!" muttered Tommy Watson. "It's starting all over again!"

And it was!

And, in the very middle of it, the Head crossed the Triangle with some books under his arm. He did not even look at the Monks, but kept straight ahead. He had ignored the whole scene!

The whole thing was amazing.

How had Colonel Clinton mesmerised the Head into allowing this Gilbertian state of affairs? It was startling in the extreme. It was more than startling—it was appalling. It meant that the Monks were to be forced to continue this militarism; and there was now no appeal!

THE END.

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OUR POPULAR SCHOOL SERIAL!**The Chums of Littleminster School.****A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.****By ARTHUR S. HARDY.****The First Chapters.****BASIL HOOD** is a new boy at Littleminster School.*On his arrival he makes a friend of***JOHN CHALLIS**, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

MYERS and **COGGIN** are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Challis takes Hood fishing in a punt, which gets cast adrift. Later on Grainger, the Captain, sees Challis at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven. Meanwhile Basil suspects Myers of casting the punt adrift, since he found a coin belonging to him near the spot. Unsuspectingly he puts the coin in a drawer in his cubicle. It vanishes, and Basil suspects Myers. Challis is chosen to play for the School against Ragley. Myers is left out, and turns up to look on at what he believes will be Challis's downfall.

*(Now read on.)***MYERS IS LEFT OUT.**

SO convinced was Myers that Littleminster were bound to go down before the might of Ragley that he stationed himself near to where the three fags sat, in order that he might gloat over them in the moment of the school's defeat. For, though he was a Littleminster boy, Myers was mean enough to hope and wish that the home side would go down before the bowling and batting prowess of the rival school that day.

They had excluded him from the team, and he was poor sportsman enough to long for their discomfiture.

Dr. Mason had come down to watch the play, and by his side sat the Head of Ragley, who had motored over with some of the masters in order to be present at the eventful match.

The stumps had been set. The level playing pitch shimmered in the sunlight. Overhead hung a cloudless sky.

It would be impossible to imagine a more perfect setting for such a game.

Suddenly a thrill of excitement ran through the ranks of the assembled boys.

Mr. Evans, the umpire for Littleminster, and Mr. Ford, the Ragley master who was

to officiate for the rival school, with their white linen coats on, were seen to leave the pavilion and walk towards the pitch.

Then after them streamed a group of flannelled players; one or two of them wore their blazers.

One look, and a mighty shout went up.

"It's Ragley! Hurrah! Littleminster's won the toss, and we're going in to bat. Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

The cheers sounded like the cheers of triumph, though a ball had not yet been bowled. But what did that matter? Littleminster had won the toss, and with it the first move in the great game.

Ragley was out to field, and the school was going in to bat.

My word! And the pitch was perfect, though it might show signs of wear by the time the first innings was over. The ground was dry, and would soon powder around the crease.

The comment swelled into a mighty roar, and was presently hushed, while all eyes were directed at the pavilion to see who were going to open the innings for Littleminster.

The moment so long and eagerly awaited was at hand.

THE GREAT MATCH!

PRESENTLY out of the pavilion door strode two figures clad in white—white that was blinding in the sun. One wore a cap of the school colours, the other was bare-headed, a laughing, handsome stalwart, who chatted easily with his chum, as, with bats under their arms, they hurried through the crowd of cheering boys on to the level stretch of green grass, pulling their cricketing-gloves on as they came.

"Hurrah!" piped Basil Hood, pinching Raymond's arms. "It's good old Grainger; and Moreash is going to open the innings with him. Now we shall see!"

As they reached the pitch the ways of the two drew apart, and Grainger prepared to face the bowling from the school end. Having taken his middle, he carefully marked his crease, and, having glanced at the spread of the field, set himself to meet the bowling.

Ragley meant business. Their crack fast bowler, Rylands, opposed Grainger, and his first ball was dead on the wicket. The school captain blocked it neatly; but each

(Continued overleaf.)

was the spin on it, that it seemed to swerve round the bat, and, narrowly missing the off-side stump, caused the boys to hold their breath in fear.

"Great Scott! That was a shaver!" muttered Fawcett.

Rylands was bowling in first-rate form, and Grainger was forced to block the first five balls. The sixth he sent slowly between the wickets, and, running smartly, got to the other end amidst a roar of encouragement from the juniors.

He had now to face bowling of a totally different kind. Farren, of Ragley, was a bowler of the googly type. The spin and shoot he managed to get into an apparently innocent ball was very disconcerting to the batsman who imagined that he had nothing to beat.

But Grainger knew his man. He had played against him before, and so each trap set for him was avoided, and as the fourth ball sent down was a nice loose one that came squarely on to the face of the bat, the captain of Littleminster sent it soaring high over the ropes for as grand a four as had ever been hit on that famous field.

After that matters became brisk for a while, but just when the batsmen appeared to be getting nicely set a catastrophe occurred.

Grainger, opening his shoulders, let drive at what he believed was a loose one of Rylands's, but at the last moment he saw the ball swerve dangerously, and, changing his mind, tried to cut it to the off—his only chance.

The ball struck the edge of the bat, but, shooting in at an acute angle, struck the middle stump, driving the bails a yard away, and Grainger was out.

The captain was out, with the unlucky number 13 on the board.

A howl of dismay echoed as he ran briskly towards the pavilion, with a smile on his face.

"Hard luck, Grainger, old chap!" said Vernon regretfully. "What a shame!"

"Oh, these things happen!" said the captain lightly. "That ball was a bit of a fluke, I reckon. After it struck the pitch it came straight on, but swerved at the last moment. I don't know why. Anyhow, I couldn't alter my swing, and it beat me."

Digby now went out to resume the innings.

He shaped confidently, but the very first ball Rylands delivered scattered his stumps, and he came back with a duck to his credit, the score still standing at 13.

Chalfont was next in, and, with a nervousness palpable to all, fidgeted at the wicket a long while before he set to face the bowling.

Rylands made short work of him. A yorker spreadeagled his wicket as he made a wild swipe at the ball, and things looked mighty serious.

Three wickets for 13 runs, and some of the best men gone!

A silence of dismay gripped the Littleminster boys, and all except Myers were down in the dumps indeed. Myers, grinning, did not pretend to hide his jubilation.

"Ragley will win in a common-hack canter," he chortled. "Littleminster doesn't stand a ghost of a chance!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying so, even if you think it, you worm!" cried Ponsonby, who had stationed himself close to Myers on purpose to keep an eye on that individual, fiercely. "Ragley may be good, but they're having the luck!"

"Luck! It's skill I call it," sneered Myers, as he cast a glance at the pavilion to see who would be the next man in. "Hello, here's your new pal coming in to show us what he can do! The school can't expect to win when they put a chump like that in the eleven!"

Yes, it was John Challis who came slowly out of the pavilion, and, with strained, nervous face and twitching lips, made his way to the vacant crease.

Challis looked a fine, big, powerful fellow, every inch a cricketer, in fact, as he strode to the wicket, with the sun playing on him.

He was as big as a fully grown man, and his fine shoulders and depth of chest made an impression on the Ragley men as he went by.

They had heard of Challis, and were curious to see how the new man would shape.

The Littleminster boys raised a cheer, but it was a feeble effort. They were all too anxious to make much of a demonstration. And, besides, they could see that Challis's face was white and strained.

"I don't believe, somehow, that John will last long," whispered Basil, in an awed voice. "He's over-anxious, and I don't wonder, seeing how things are going."

The Ragley men, rising from the grass, briskly took their places, and Rylands prepared to carry on his deadly work.

The boys held their breath as the ball was bowled. "Ow!" Challis scraped at it nervously, and it ran up his bat. Still, he was all right, and the field changing over brought Rylands's little run of luck to an end.

Yet another disaster was to befall the School, for Moreash, after scoring a neat 2, was out long before to a nasty googly from Farren, and the score showed 4 wickets for 15 runs!

Vernon now joined Challis, and played the rest of the over neatly without scoring, and Challis was set to do the best he could with the deadly Rylands.

(To be continued.)