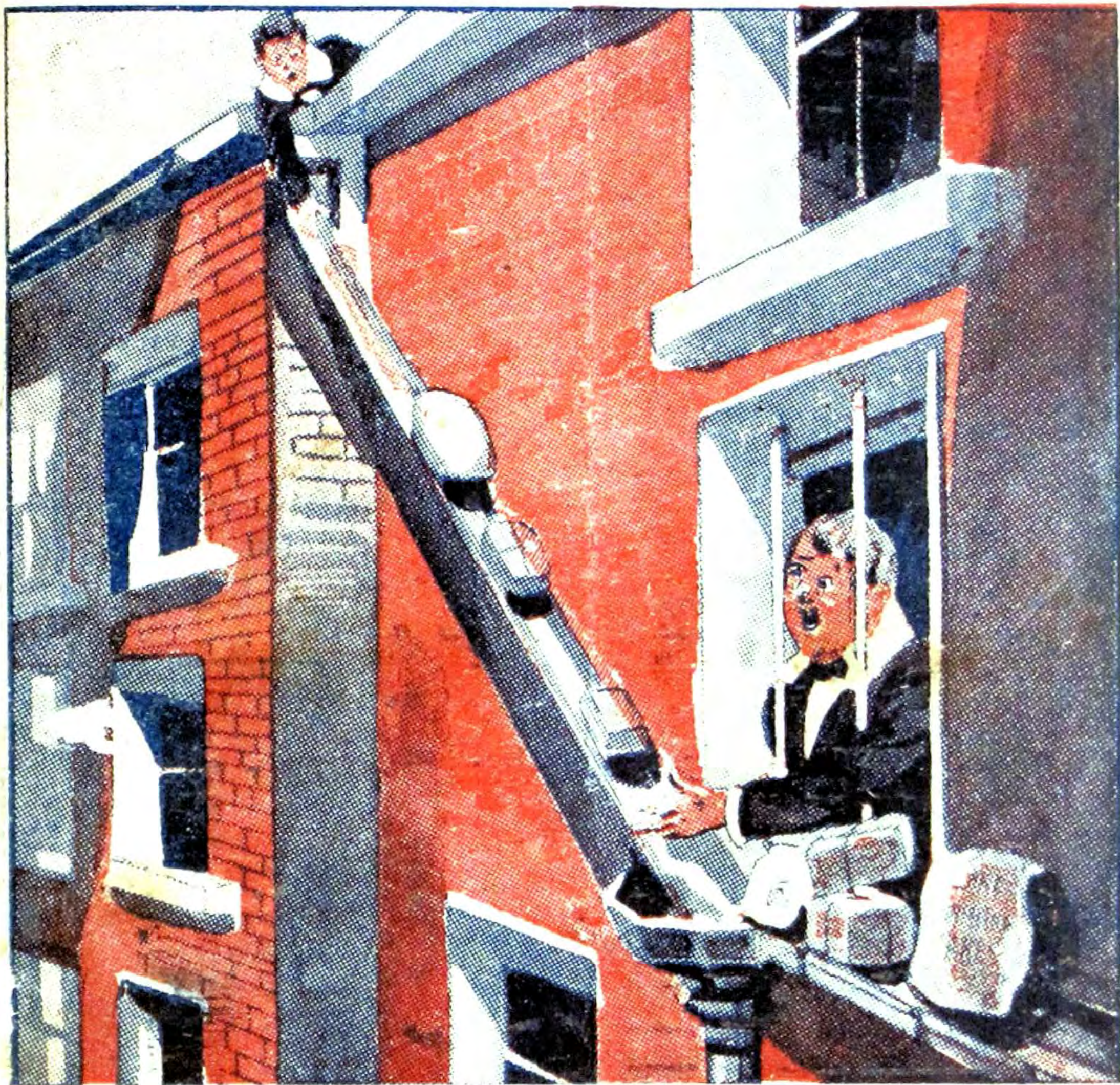


No. 284—A HUMOROUS STORY of the FAT BOY of ST. FRANK'S!

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We began to suspect Fatty of getting food from outside

FATTY LITTLE'S HUNGER STRIKE.

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 Schoolboy's Patent," "Nipper and Co. in Lancashire," "Handforth's Great Triumph," and many other stirring Tales.

November 13, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

IN DURANCE VILE.

FATTY LITTLE groaned.

He did not groan because he was in pain, or even because he was hungry. It was quite natural for him to be hungry, even after he had consumed a good meal. There was never any satisfying Fatty Little's appetite.

He was groaning now, because, whichever way he looked at it, he could not see any method of obtaining food at once—indeed, it was quite possible that he would have to wait for an hour or so before he saw the welcome sight of some grub.

The fat boy of the Remove at St. Frank's was in disgrace—dire, terrible disgrace.

He was, in short, imprisoned in the Ancient House punishment room. True, he had not been there for long—just over an hour—but he was already beginning to feel the effects. At just about this hour he generally raided the study cupboard—or the cupboard of anybody e'se's study. Fatty wasn't very particular about that point, so long as he got something to eat. But it was impossible for him to raid any study now; he was locked in the punishment room, and there was no escape.

The fat junior rose from his chair, and paced up and down the punishment room with a worried brow. He looked round him with a fierce, desperate light in his eyes.

The room was rather small, and it was

furnished in a meagre fashion. It contained a bedstead, a table and a chair, and a cupboard. The window was a small one, and it was far from the ground. Not only this, but outside there were some stout iron bars. In the past it had been known that some juniors had escaped from the punishment room. That was impossible now, for the window was barred like a prison cell.

And the door, Fatty Little decided, was beyond his powers of forcing. Any ordinary door was quite a simple matter for a junior of Fatty Little's bulk; but this door was particularly strong—a heavy affair of solid oak, with an extremely powerful lock. There was no escape for the imprisoned junior.

"I shall starve—that'll be the end of it!" Fatty told himself desperately. "They never give a chap half enough grub here. I should have been dead long ago if I hadn't spent all my money on tuck! And it's all Handforth's fault—the silly, fatheaded ass!"

Fatty sat down on the bed, and glared at the opposite wall.

"Great cocoanuts!" he exclaimed. "To think that I should come to this! The Head ought to be boiled in oil for giving me a punishment of this kind! A week of solitary confinement—it's—it's inhuman! They couldn't have done anything worse in the Middle Ages!"

There was, perhaps, some little excuse for Fatty Little's indignation. The main cause of his present predicament was the arrogance of Edward Oswa'd Handforth, of Study D.

Handforth had been boasting about his recent activities connected with the case of Dick Goodwin, of the Remove. Handforth had certainly done well in that affair, but he assumed, quite wrongly, that he had beaten Nelson Lee at his own game. As a result there had been no holding Handforth. Always inclined to be arrogant, he had now become positively insufferable.

Dick Goodwin's affairs were now settled; his perils were over, and he was happy and content. His invention was safe, owing to the wonderful work which Nelson Lee had accomplished.

For Handforth, who had distinguished himself greatly, had rather spoilt it by boasting in the most outrageous manner. It was not Handforth's intention to boast; he seriously thought he was speaking the truth; he believed that he had done something which finally stamped him as an amateur detective of the most astute type.

And, happening to meet Fatty Little at the top of the stairs, an argument had resulted. As a net result, Fatty had become impatient, and had walked forward. Handforth went flying, toppled down the stairs, and crashed into the Headmaster at the bottom!

Dr. Stafford, fortunately, had not been greatly hurt; but his dignity had been shattered to atoms. This was particularly the case because quite a number of juniors had witnessed the incident, and had been indiscreet enough to cackle. White with fury, the Head had seized upon Handforth as the culprit.

But Fatty Little could not see this. He owned up that he had caused Handforth to topple down the stairs. And Fatty was taken to the Head's study, flogged, and then sent to the punishment room for a whole week. It was rather a severe sentence, but the Head had never been quite so angry before, and he passed the sentence before he cooled down. And it was not Dr. Stafford's habit to withdraw.

Thus it came about that Fatty Little was languishing in durance vile—in the Ancient House punishment room. The time was now about eight o'clock in the evening, and Fatty was starving—at least, he told himself that he was starving. As a matter of fact, he had eaten enough food at tea-time to last him well into the following day. Food was a kind of religion with Fatty; it was hardly possible for him to make any remark

without bringing grub into it in some form or other.

He was seriously alarmed about his position.

He knew what it meant to be in the punishment room. No other juniors were allowed to come near him; nobody in the school, in fact, was permitted to approach the punishment room. If they were caught doing so, they would be flogged. It would, therefore, be quite impossible for Fatty to commission any junior to supply him with food, for, to begin with, he couldn't get into contact with any junior; and, secondly, no food could be brought to him, since the door was locked.

He would not be allowed out of that room until a week had passed. It seemed to Fatty Little that his world had come to an end—that there was no prospect ahead.

A week!

It seemed, to Fatty, like seven years. How he would be able to live through that period he did not know. He did not care to think about the subject at all. But he did think about it; he couldn't take his mind off it; it haunted him.

And then he started, and gazed eagerly at the door.

A footstep had become apparent in the corridor. It was one of the upper corridors, and was quite out of bounds for any of the boys. Fatty rose to his feet, his eyes gleaming. Perhaps the Head was coming to release him; or, better still, perhaps some food was being brought!

A key sounded in the lock, and the next moment the door opened, and the comfortable figure of Mrs. Poulter appeared. Mrs. Poulter was the matron of the Ancient House, and she was carrying in front of her a metal tray. Her face was rather black. She was a good-tempered old sort as a rule, but she did not much care for the task of supplying Fatty Little with his meals.

"This is rare trouble you've got yourself into, Master Little!" she said severely, as she came in, closing the door after her. "I never thought you were one of them sort!"

Fatty was staring at the tray which Mrs. Poulter had set upon the table.

"What—what's this?" demanded the fat junior.

"Why, Master Little, it's your supper!" replied the matron.

"My—my what?"

"Your supper——"

"But—but what's the good of that little bit?" demanded Fatty, in alarm. "Why, there ain't enough there to feed a mouse with! There's only a mouthful altogether!"

Mrs. Poulter set her lips rather grimly. She looked at the contents of the tray—a large mug of hot cocoa, a heaping pile of thick bread-and-butter, and quite a nice piece of cheese. Mrs. Poulter knew who her host was—she knew Fatty Little's appetite, and she had purposely brought a double portion of food. For, in her heart, the matron felt rather sorry for Fatty, and she was doing her best for him. For Fatty to make these remarks concerning the food was rather discouraging.

"Well, Master Little, I've brought you an extra lot!" said Mrs. Poulter. "I'm sure it wouldn't be healthy for you to eat more than that——"

"What rot!" interrupted Fatty. "Great jumping bloaters! Is—is this all I'm going to get?"

"It certainly is, Master Little!"

"Then I call it a shame!" declared Fatty warmly. "I—I shall be starved before the end of the week! What's the good of a little snack like this to me, with nothing more until to-morrow morning? Why, I shall be dead before breakfast-time!"

Mrs. Poulter smiled.

"You'll be all right, Master Little," she said. "It wouldn't do you no good to have more than this. I thought I'd brought too much as it was. You'll feel quite comfortable when you've eaten that!"

Fatty snorted, and started on one of the slices of bread-and-butter.

"I'm blessed if I thought they'd try to starve me!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I want three times as much as this, Mrs. Poulter—please remember that to-morrow night. And bring me a tremendous lot for breakfast, or I shall never be able to keep my strength up."

"I shall certainly not bring you more than this, Master Little!" said the matron tartly. "If you had any more it wouldn't be good for you."

"It's a bit rotten that a decent school like St. Frank's should only provide grub of this kind!" said Fatty bitterly. "I've often complained about the meagre fare which this school provides. It's a disgrace! It's a crying scandal—that's what it is, Mrs. Poulter! Why, if the chaps

didn't have a good bit of pocket money to buy tuck with, we should all starve!"

Mrs. Poulter smiled again. She knew that Fatty was an exceptional junior.

"Well, Master Little, it won't do any good for me to remain here," she said. "When you've eaten that supper you'll feel all right, and the best thing you can do is to get straight to bed, and go to sleep."

"I shall die before the week is out!" said Little, with his mouth full. "Even if I don't die, I shall be as thin as a rail! Nobody could keep his stamina up on grub of this kind. This won't last me more than five minutes; I generally have a terrific supper."

"I am very sorry——"

"That's no good!" interrupted Fatty. "You being sorry won't take my hunger away, will it? Great pancakes!"

Fatty looked at Mrs. Poulter with an eager light in his eyes.

"I say, perhaps we might be able to wangle something!" he exclaimed.

"Look here, Mrs. Poulter, I've got a good bit of pocket money—I'm rather flush at present. If the school won't provide any more grub than this, I could easily buy some from a tuck shop. If I give you the money, could you buy me some extra grub, and bring it with the ordinary food?"

Mrs. Poulter shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Master Little, but I shouldn't be allowed to do that," she said. "If the headmaster got to know about it I should be in hot water. And you really don't need it, Master Little! It wouldn't do you any good at all——"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Fatty. "It's no good going on like that, Mrs. Poulter. I know what's good for me better than you do! And I know jolly well that I sha'n't be able to keep my strength up if I don't have a lot more grub than this. I've got plenty of tin. You could easily smuggle in some pork pies, and tarts, and cakes, and all that sort of thing. Be a good sport, you know; don't leave me to pine away in this rotten place!"

But Mrs. Poulter was firm. She shook her head again.

"I couldn't do it, Master Little!" she said. "It wouldn't be right; besides, you don't need the food. The school provides very good fare, and I'm sure I've got nothing to grumble at—and I don't have any different from you boys. I'm sure I'm treated better here than I was

when— Why, good gracious! What

Before the matron could proceed further, the door of the punishment room suddenly opened, and a crowd of juniors burst in—Handforth, Reginald Pitt, Church, McClure, Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and myself. There were some other juniors, too, and we piled into the room, and overwhelmed it so to speak.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Poulter. "You know, you shouldn't have come here, young gentlemen! It isn't allowed for you to be in this corridor at all. I shall get into trouble if Mr. Lee or the headmaster find out anything about this."

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Poulter!" interrupted Handforth. "We've only come to see that Fatty is nice and comfy for the night. My only hat! Is he going to eat all that grub before he goes to sleep?"

Fatty Little glared.

"You—you fatheaded ass!" snorted Fatty. "This is only a snack—it's no good to me at all! And it's your fault, anyhow. You brought me to this—"

"Oh, rot!" interrupted Handforth. "That's a nice thing to say! You pushed me down the stairs, and nearly broke my neck, and then you blame me!"

"Great doughnuts!" said Fatty. "Didn't you make a fuss—"

"Peace, my children—peace!" I interrupted. "We've only come here for a minute, Fatty, just to see that you're all right. Don't you worry, Mrs. Poulter; we sha'n't cause any noise or trouble. Bring out the spoils, you chaps."

"Unburden yourselves," grinned Pitt.

The juniors proceeded to produce a large number of small parcels, the majority of them containing indigestible articles of food, such as jam puffs, cream tarts, doughnuts, meat patties, and so forth. Fatty Little eyed the proceedings with a light of intense joy in his eyes.

"By chutney!" he exclaimed. "This is ripping! I never thought you chaps would have so much consideration for me!"

De Valerie looked solemn.

"My dear Fatty, we couldn't rest," he said, shaking his head. "We couldn't do anything because we were thinking about you. We pictured you up here, in the punishment room, starving, and pining completely away. So we armed ourselves

with tuck, and waited until Mrs. Poulter appeared with your supper. We knew we could get in then, and so we buzzed along. We might get into trouble because of this; but I don't suppose so. Mrs. Poulter is a good sort, and I'm sure she won't report us."

"I ought to report you, young gentlemen," said the matron severely. "But, if you go at once, I might be able to forget that this has happened. Be off with you, you young rascals!"

"Right you are, Mrs. Poulter!" I grinned. "Right about turn, you fellows; quick march!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Fatty Little, beaming.

He was sitting on the bed, and he was surrounded by small parcels of tuck. He was saved—he began to realise that he would be able to survive until the morning.

The punishment room had been simply crowded with fellows—they had been packed in like sardines. But now they trooped out, grinning and chuckling. As a matter of fact, nearly everybody in the Remove was sorry for Fatty; it had been unanimously decided that his punishment was unmerited, and that the Head had been unduly harsh.

Therefore, the juniors had put their heads together and had decided to do all they could to make Fatty's punishment easier to bear. And, of course, the one way of pleasing him was to bring him something to eat.

It was nearly supper-time for the Remove, and the fellows were soon down in the dining-hall, partaking of the meal. Fatty Little was missed, for when the supper was over, there still remained two or three slices of bread-and-butter on the table. Such a thing as this was unheard of when Fatty Little was present.

And Edward Oswald Handforth was now rather subdued. He seemed to realise that he was mainly the cause of Fatty's position. And Handforth manfully resisted the desire to discuss his wonderful detective ability with the other juniors.

Dick Goodwin was rather worried, for he declared that he was the main cause of the predicament. Fatty and Handforth had been discussing Goodwin's affairs at the time, and, arguing in this line, it was only natural to conclude that Goodwin himself was the chief cause of the disaster.

"I'm thinking of going to the Head!" said Goodwin, after supper.

"You're going to the Head?" inquired Jack Grey.

"Ah, I am that!"

"What for?"

"To ask him to release Fatty——"

"Don't you do anything of the sort, my son," interrupted Pitt. "You'll only get into hot water yourself, and the head will be firmer than ever. He's not going to be dictated to by a school-boys; and when the Head's dignity has been hurt, he's rather touchy. Take my advice and do nothing. Fatty will probably be released in a couple of days."

And so Dick Goodwin took the advice, and nothing was done. In any case, the Lancashire boy would not have achieved any result, even if he had gone to the Headmaster.

Meanwhile Fatty was in the punishment-room. Mrs. Poulter had eyed those little parcels of tuck with stern disapproval, and she shook her head as she moved towards the door.

"It won't do you no good, Master Little," she said. "There's enough food for a dozen mouths, there--and on the top of your supper, too! You'll make yourself ill!"

Fatty Little grinned.

"Not likely," he said. "You don't seem to realise, Mrs. Poulter, that my appetite is about as big as four ordinary appetites put together. I don't suppose I shall eat all this grub now. I shall save some for the early morning. I'm always hungry as soon as I wake up, and I can't possibly wait until breakfast time."

"We shall be needing a doctor before long!" said Mrs. Poulter grimly. "Over-feeding isn't good for anybody!"

"Oh, don't you worry!" said Fatty. "Good-night, Mrs. Poulter!"

"Good-night? Master Little, and I hope you won't be bilious in the morning!"

But as Mrs. Poulter left she shook her head doubtfully. She was quite unaware of the fact that such a feed as this was a mere trifle for Fatty Little.

The fat junior sat on his bed, eyeing the parcels of grub. And there was a light of joy in his eyes. He took the parcels, placed them on the table, and then sat down in the chair.

After all, being confined to the punishment-room wasn't so bad, taking every-

thing into consideration. If he was only fed on this scale during the whole week, he would be very sorry to resume his normal duties.

Fatty had his mouth full of jam tarts when he thought he heard a slight sound from the direction of the bed. He looked up with a slight start, and then his jaw fell.

"Great Yarmouth blouters!" he ejaculated.

The coverlet of the bed had moved, and a face had come into view—a face which was adorned with big spectacles.

Fatty stared at it in astonishment.

CHAPTER II.

T.T.'S STARTLING SUGGESTION.

TIMOTHY TUCKER, of the Remove, came into view.

For, of course, it was this junior who had appeared from beneath Fatty Little's bed. The duffer of the Remove crawled out, stood upright, and proceeded to dust himself. Meanwhile he blinked at Fatty Little in a benevolent kind of way. The prisoner returned the blink with a somewhat hostile glare.

"You—you silly ass!" exclaimed Fatty indignantly. "What's the idea of this?"

"My dear sir——"

"What are you doing under my bed?" asked Fatty warmly.

"Really, my dear Little, I beseech you to talk in a quieter tone!" exclaimed Tucker. "Furthermore, it is inaccurate to state that I am under your bed, for I am now standing upright. Exactly—quite so. And you must understand, my dear sir, that I ran considerable risks in order to accomplish my object."

"And that object, I suppose, is to share in this grub?" asked Fatty grimly.

"Well, you're not going to get any—not a giddy crumb! I'm a prisoner! And I can't go to the tuck shop when I like—you can! You're not going to share in this feed!"

"Really, my dear sir, I have no desire to do so!" said T.T. mildly.

"You—you don't want any of this grub?"

"Most certainly not!"

"Great doughnuts!" exclaimed Fatty, staring.

It was quite beyond his comprehension to realise that Timothy Tucker was not expecting to share in the feed. Fatty lived for food, and he could never understand why the other fellows were not interested in grub between meals. Fatty was always interested in grub. It was the finest substance on the face of the earth.

"How did you get in here?" asked Fatty at last.

"It was a somewhat difficult matter, my dear Little," replied T.T. blinking. "I seized my opportunity when all the other fellows crowded in. The position is this: I desired to get into your room, in order to have a private conversation with you. Quite so. Therefore I waited until the fellows crowded in, and then I squeezed through, and succeeded in getting under the bed without attracting any attention. H'm! That is so, my dear sir."

"Well, I think you're a silly ass!" said Fatty Little bluntly.

"Do you realise who you are talking to?" exclaimed Tucker. "Do you realise that I am he of the big head? Are you aware of the fact that I am here on important business—"

"No, I don't realise anything of the sort," interrupted Fatty. "If you haven't come here on grub you haven't come here on important business. That stands to reason. I suppose it's simply one of your fatheaded ideas. And it's always a mystery to me why you weren't sent to Colney Hatch, instead of to St. Frank's! It's a much more suitable place for you, Tucker!"

T.T. shook his head.

"Dear, dear, dear!" he exclaimed. "These insults are quite distressing. But I will let them pass. I do not fail to realise, my dear sir, that your brain capacity is limited. And we will proceed. I am greatly interested in your case, and I consider that the Head has been harsh and unjust."

"Oh, it's not so bad in here," said Fatty, with his eyes on the tuck.

"But, my dear Little, you must surely understand that this is a terrible disgrace—a shocking humiliation," said T.T. "And what did you do to merit this punishment? Nothing—the whole affair was an accident. In any case, it was Handforth who knocked the Headmaster down—not you. I am completely shocked at the whole occurrence, and I

am greatly indignant. It is my intention to start an agitation forthwith!"

"An agitation! What for?"

"To obtain your release!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Fatty. "You won't do any good—"

"Really, my dear sir, you do not appear to be enthusiastic over the efforts I am taking on your behalf!" said Tucker mildly. "To-morrow it is my intention to agitate—to arouse a feeling of revolt in the Remove—"

"You're always getting up to those games!" said Fatty. "You seem to be a tame Bolshevick, Tucker. There's no need for you to get up an agitation for me, so don't think there is! The best thing you can do is to keep quiet, and keep out of trouble!"

"It seems to me, Little, that you are sadly lacking in gratitude!" said Tucker mournfully. "I have decided to take this course, and you do not give me your support. It is distressing. But I am firm, and I shall proceed. Quite so! Yes, I shall proceed with my plan. In the morning, before breakfast, I shall make a speech—a stirring, vigorous speech. Furthermore, I have a suggestion to make to you!"

"A suggestion?"

"Exactly!"

"What about?"

"Food!" replied T.T. "A suggestion about food, my dear sir."

"Oh!" said Fatty, brightening up. "If that's the case, Tucker, you're quite welcome here. I suppose you're going to get up a scheme to supply me with all the grub I need? That's a ripping idea—"

"Dear, dear, you are quite mistaken, my dear sir!" interrupted Tucker mildly. "My intention is exactly the opposite!"

"The opposite?"

"Precisely!" said T.T. "I advise you, Little, to eat nothing whatever—in short, to refuse every atom of food that is brought to you!"

Fatty Little stared.

"Oh, you're mad!" he said briefly.

"Under the circumstances, I will overlook the insult!" said Tucker. "But, really, my dear sir, I am not mad. I am speaking seriously and earnestly when I advise you to refuse every morsel of food that is put before you. It is to your advantage to do so, my dear sir—"

"My advantage?" repeated Fatty.

"Yes."

"You suggest that I should starve?"

"In a way, yes," said T.T. calmly. "If you will listen—"

"I don't want to listen!" interrupted Fatty, his voice full of scorn and contempt and his mouth full of cream puffs.

"You must be off your rocker to come and talk to me like this, Tucker. Just as if I could go without food—just if I would! What are you trying to get at, you silly duffer?"

"I am merely suggesting, my dear Little, that you should hunger strike—"

"What?" yelled Fatty.

"My dear, sir—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Little roared—and nearly choked himself by the crumbs which went down the wrong way.

"You—you silly idiot!" he gasped, at length. "No—hunger strike! Why, even if I wanted to, I couldn't! My constitution wouldn't let me, I must have food, or I should die. If I went without grub for two or three meals I should simply fall to pieces. I should collapse and peg out!"

Tucker shook his head.

"My dear fellow, you are quite mistaken," he declared. "A voluntary fast would do you good—it would make you stronger and healthier. Most decidedly. Stronger and healthier, my dear Little. And think of the sensation you would cause—think of the stir! A hunger strike at St. Frank's. Is it not a glorious thought?"

"Oh, it's splendid," said Fatty. "You can hunger strike, if you like. I don't care. You can cause all the sensation you like, Tucker, but don't ask me!"

"It is my intention to hunger strike," said T.T. stiffly. "Yes, Little, it is my intention to do so. But I want you to do the same, and I shall come out in sympathy, so to speak. It will be my intention, also, to gain the support of the whole Remove, and the object of this hunger strike, as you will realise, is to obtain your release."

"My release?"

"Exactly," said T.T. "I am quite certain that the Head will set you free during the course of to-morrow during hunger strike. And that will be a tremendous victory for the Remove. Sacrifice yourself this once, Little—it is not much to ask—and a great blow will have been struck for the cause!"

"What cause?"

"Your brain capacity is astonishingly limited, I fear," said T.T. vaguely.

"However, we will let that pass. Yes, my dear sir, we will let that pass. A hunger strike is the best weapon you can use! And I strongly advise you to accept my advice."

Fatty shook his head.

"It may be a decent idea for some chaps—but not for me!" he said. "Of course, food is harmful if you have too much of it, but I never overeat myself. I'm not a glutton."

Fatty seemed to have some difficulty in swallowing, and his face was rather red. To tell the truth, he had been overeating himself—quite an unusual occurrence for him. For he was quite right when he said he was not a glutton.

Fatty did not eat for the sake of eating, he required an enormous amount of food, he couldn't get along without it. But on this occasion, with all those good things round him, he had rather let himself go.

And he was somewhat sick of the sight of food. Tucker saw this, and he pressed his advantage. If he could only get Fatty Little to promise, all would be well. For the fat junior would certainly stick to his word, if once he gave it.

Tucker continued talking earnestly and gravely. And Fatty Little listened, with feelings of a vague pain beneath his waistcoat. He was surfeited with food, and the voice of the tempter fell upon attentive ears. Just at that moment Fatty Little felt that he never wanted to see any food again.

And, in the end, Fatty Little agreed!

The seemingly impossible had happened. The fat boy of the Remove succumbed to Timothy Tucker's arguments, and he came to an agreement with the youthful agitator.

"Very well, my dear sir, it is settled," said T.T., his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "Splendid—splendid! It will be a wonderful victory for the Remove—quite so. You will go on hunger strike, and I shall induce the Remove to support you—to hunger strike in sympathy. It will be a sensation, my dear sir, and the Headmaster will be compelled to succumb. The hated autocrat will be forced to his knees, and your terms will be granted. Do not forget that you must make your demand to-morrow—when breakfast is brought to

you. Refuse your food, and send a message to the Headmaster that you will not eat another mouthful until you are released. It is your ultimatum. You understand?"

"Ye-es," said Fatty, still holding his waistcoat. "It's—it's a ripping idea, Tucker!"

"A hunger strike!" said T.T. "It is the very thing required to wake everybody up in this sleepy place. Dear me! It will be a sensation of the finest description. And do not forget, my dear Little, that I have your promise. You have given me your word of honour that you will not touch even a crumb of the school food."

"Yes, that's right," said Fatty. "It's a promise. I won't touch a mite of any food that's brought to me by Mrs. Poulter or anybody else belonging to the school."

"Splendid, my dear sir—splendid!" said Tucker. "Give me your hand on that!"

Fatty Little extended a somewhat flabby hand, and T.T. seized it and shook it vigorously. "Remember, your word of honour!" he said grimly. "That is so!"

"Yes, my word of honour," said Fatty. "I—I suppose you haven't got any salts, or anything? I—I feel a bit queer, you know. I think those tarts were squiffy!"

"You are surely mistaken, my dear Little," said Tucker. "Those tarts, according to my belief, were quite good. But it is always possible to have too much of a good thing, and it is said that enough is as good as a feast. I am afraid, Little, that you have over-eaten yourself! Dear, dear, dear! This is bad, but the hunger strike will do you good. It will make a new fellow of you. Quite so!"

T.T. turned towards the door, but he suddenly paused, and looked rather blank.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "A difficulty, my dear Little, a great difficulty, I imagine! I am locked in!"

"Didn't you know that before?" asked Fatty. "Of course you're locked in! The only thing you can do is to hammer at the door, and attract attention."

"This is bad—this is really bad!" said Tucker, frowning. "Dear me! I might find myself in extremely hot water. I had quite overlooked the fact that I

should find it necessary to obtain an exit from this punishment-room. My brains are somewhat disturbed, I fear. But, never mind, I shall obtain my liberty. They cannot keep me here. No, my dear sir, they cannot keep me here!"

Tucker proceeded to hammer noisily upon the panels of the door. He kicked up quite a din, and kept it up without pause. It was not long, of course, before a result took place. That hammering could not go on without somebody hearing it. Within three minutes footsteps sounded in the passage, and the voice of Morrow, of the Sixth, made itself heard.

"What's the matter in there, you young ass?" he asked sharply.

"I am exceedingly sorry to trouble you, my dear Morrow, but I am locked in!" said Tucker mildly. "Will you kindly release me?"

A surprised exclamation came through the door.

"Is that you, Tucker?" demanded Morrow.

"Yes, my dear sir, it is!"

"What on earth are you doing in that punishment-room?" demanded the prefect. "How did you get in?"

"I am afraid I cannot explain without involving other fellows," replied Tucker. "Therefore, my dear Morrow, I must beg of you to release me without expecting me to go into any details."

"Open the door, Morrow, there's a good chap!" called out Fatty Little. "I don't want this silly ass in here. I'm fed up already!"

"I can't open the door. I haven't got the key!" said Morrow. "The best thing I can do is to go and fetch Mrs. Poulter. And if she reports you, Tucker, you'll get into hot water, so you'd better be prepared."

"I sincerely trust, Morrow, that you will not report me," said T.T., in a pained voice.

"No; I'll let you off," said Morrow. "But I can't guarantee what Mrs. Poulter will do. You ought to be left in there all night. That would teach you a lesson. I'll go and fetch the matron, and don't make any more noise."

Morrow walked away, and it was not long before he returned with Mrs. Poulter. That good lady was highly indignant, and her face was black when she turned the key in the lock and opened the door.

"The likes of it I never did see!" she

exclaimed indignantly. "How did you get in here, Master Tucker?"

"Really, Mrs. Poulter, I walked in," said Tucker mildly. "I came in with all the other fellows, and, somehow, I must have been missed. Most unfortunate—most distressing! But there is no need to worry, my dear madam, no need to worry whatever! I can only trust that your sense of sportsmanship will prevent you from reporting me to any of the masters!"

"You deserve a caning, you young rascal!" said the matron. "Be off with you, and perhaps I'll forget that this has happened. I'm afraid you're a little bit queer at times, Master Tucker."

"Quite so," said T.T. blinking. "Your words are correct, my dear Mrs. Poulter."

A moment later T.T. had fled down the passage, and he succeeded in getting down into the lobby without passing any master. And Mrs. Poulter relocked Fatty Little's door, and the prisoner was left to himself—until the morning.

Meanwhile Tucker was getting busy.

He entered the common-room with a set expression upon his peculiar-looking face. It was nearly bedtime, and the juniors were chatting lightly on various subjects—chiefly football. Some of the fellows, of course, were talking about the recent adventures of Dick Goodwin.

"My dear friends, I am anxious to address a few words to you," exclaimed Timothy Tucker. "I shall therefore be obliged if you will give me full attention."

Nobody took any notice of T.T.

"Really, I should like you to realise that I am speaking," went on Tucker. "It is my intention to address you, my dear friends. The time has arrived when we must make a firm stand against tyranny! That is so."

Handforth looked round.

"Who let that thing escape?" he demanded irritably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take it away, and lock it up somewhere!" went on Handforth. "I don't see why we should—"

"Really, Handforth, your remarks are insulting," protested T.T. "At any ordinary time I should protest vigorously—but just now I am attending to more important matters. It is my desire to make a little speech—"

"Go and make it in the Triangle!" exclaimed Pitt.

T.T. blinked.

"Really, my dear sir, that would be futile!" he exclaimed. "The Triangle is quite deserted!"

"That's why I told you to go there," exclaimed Pitt calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How dare you?" demanded Tucker, in his shrill voice. "Do you know who I am?"

"Oh, my hat!" chuckled Pitt. "He's asking riddles now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This levity is quite distressing," went on Tucker severely. "Really, my dear sirs, I must request you to give me your full attention. My remarks are concerning our down-trodden comrade, Fatty Little. You are all aware of the fact that he has been confined in the punishment room for the period of one week. My friends—my comrades, this is disgraceful! It is scandalous that any boy living in these enlightened days should be submitted to such harsh treatment!"

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "It'll do Fatty good. He won't be able to over-eat himself!"

"I rather fancy he's over-eaten himself to-night," chuckled Pitt. "We took him a tremendous amount of grub—more grub than is good for him. And he won't sleep until he has demolished the lot. Still, I agree with Tucker—it's rather hard lines on Fatty."

"Hear, hear!"

"The Head was rather wild when he gave that sentence," said Tommy Watson. "I don't think it was exactly the thing to shove Fatty in the punishment room for a whole week."

"Dear old boy, I am inclined to agree with that view," exclaimed Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West. "It was frightfully ridiculous of Fatty to bowl Handforth down the stairs, and it was shockingly foolish of Handforth to bump into the Head—"

"You silly ass!" snorted Handforth. "How do you think I could help it? Fatty bumped into me like a motor-omnibus! And I went flying. It's rather lucky he was there, as a matter of

fact. I might have been killed otherwise."

"The Head wasn't hurt very much," I said. "It's not that, it's the blow to his dignity which affected him. To be sent flying backwards in the lobby, and to have a crowd of juniors grinning at him, is hardly the thing that any self-respecting headmaster likes. And as Fatty owned up that he had caused Handforth to roll down the stairs—well, Fatty got it in the neck. He got it rather hot. It won't do him any harm to be in solitary confinement for a week. And it's quite on the cards that the Head will lighten the sentence, after he has cooled down."

T.T. waved his arms excitedly.

"My dear sir, you do not seem to understand!" he exclaimed. "It is only a chance that the Head will make things better for Fatty. And it is our duty to force him to grant a free pardon. By getting up an agitation we can make Dr. Stafford knuckle under. It is the same with all these autocrats—they will not shift from their position until they are forced to by public opinion. We should even be justified in striking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My friends, I urge you to support me in this matter!" went on T.T. "It is necessary that the whole Remove should organise, in order to get Little released. We must refuse to participate in any lessons—we must even refuse to eat our meals——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must go on hunger strike!" shouted Tucker firmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must show the Head that we are determined!" shouted the agitator. "Half measures will not suffice, we must do the whole thing thoroughly. From this moment onwards, we must refuse all duties, we must refuse to eat, we must refuse——"

Clang-clang!

"Well, we're not going to refuse to go to bed!" grinned Reginald Pitt. "Come on, you chaps, it's time to go up into the dormitory!"

And the Removites, laughing uproariously, streamed out of the common-room, leaving Timothy Tucker addressing thin air.

The tame agitator of the Remove had not met with much success so far!

CHAPTER III.

FATTY LITTLE—HUNGER STRIKER.

MRS. POULTER, although she could be severe at times, had rather a soft spot in her heart, and she was sorry for Fatty Little, who was imprisoned in the punishment room. The House matron was carrying Fatty Little's breakfast up to him at this present moment—and it was quite an appetising breakfast, too. And Mrs. Poulter, who knew what Fatty's appetite was, had prepared an extra large quantity—fully double as much as any ordinary junior would eat. The tray she was carrying looked very tempting, with an array of good things, and Mrs. Poulter smiled to herself as she walked along the upper corridor. She was just picturing Fatty Little's delight when he set eyes on that tray.

"Ah, these boys will get up to their tricks," said the matron to herself, "but I'm sure I don't know what Master Little has done to deserve this. I'm afraid the Head has been a bit too severe!"

She arrived at the door, set her tray down, and then opened the door of the punishment room. She entered, carrying the tray with her, and she set it down on Fatty's table with a somewhat triumphant flourish.

"Good-morning, Master Little!" she said cheerfully. "I've brought your breakfast!"

Fatty Little was dressed, and he had been looking out of the window. He turned, came across the room, and stood looking down at that tray of good things. There was a hungry light in his eyes, and just for a moment he hesitated. Then he remembered that he had given Timothy Tucker his word of honour, and he deliberately turned his back on the food so that he could not see it—so that it would not tempt him.

"Er—good-morning, Mrs. Poulter!" he stammered. "Thanks awfully for bringing that grub, but—but I don't want it!"

Mrs. Poulter started.

"You don't want it, Master Little?" she repeated, hardly believing the evidence of her own ears.

"No; I—I'm not hungry. I—I mean—— Anyhow, I don't want it!" said Fatty desperately.

"What ails the boy?" said Mrs.

Poulter, looking at Fatty rather anxiously. "Do you feel ill, Master Little?"

"No, you ass—I mean, no, Mrs. Poulter!" said the fat junior, turning red.

"Then, if you are not ill, you must want your breakfast!" said the matron. "Come, Master Little, don't be silly! I prepared it especially for you, and I've brought an extra amount, too."

Fatty Little turned, took another look at the breakfast, and then he gave a little gulp.

"Take—take it away!" he said desperately. "Don't leave it here, Mrs. Poulter—take it away!"

"But, Master Little——"

"I—I don't want it!" declared Fatty. "I—I'm striking!"

"You're—you're doing what, Master Little?"

"I'm on hunger strike!" declared Fatty. "Do you understand, Mrs. Poulter? I'm hunger striking!"

The matron almost staggered.

"Sakes alive!" she exclaimed. "You—you must be ill, Master Little!"

To tell the truth, Mrs. Poulter was astounded—even staggered. She had heard of people hunger striking, but for Fatty Little to do so was the biggest surprise of all. He was about the last person in the world she would have suspected of such foolishness.

Fatty Little, with his constant grumbles about the food, with his enormous appetite—for him to go on hunger strike was positively bewildering. Mrs. Poulter thought she must be dreaming for a moment or two.

"You're—you're on hunger strike, Master Little?" gasped the matron. "Why, bless my soul——"

"Yes, I'm hunger striking!" exclaimed Fatty hotly—waxing very indignant, now that he had taken the plunge. "I decided to take this step as a protest against my unjust treatment. It's not right that I should be put in this punishment room like this, for a whole week. No, I won't touch a thing of that food—not an atom of it! If I'm kept a prisoner for a whole week I shall starve!"

"But, Master Little——"

"You needn't argue—I'm firm!" declared Fatty. "You can bring me tons of food, but it won't make any difference. I'm on hunger strike, and I'm

going to keep it up! If I die at the end of the week my blood will be on Dr. Stafford's hands!"

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Poulter faintly. "The—the boy must be insane!"

"No, I'm not dotty, Mrs. Poulter!" said Fatty. "I'm firm—I've made up my mind! Nothing will induce me to touch any food that the school provides, and I shall remain on strike until the Head releases me. And you can't force me to eat anything—that game won't work!"

Mrs. Poulter looked at the tray of food, then she looked at Fatty, and there was a kind of dazed expression in her eyes.

"But—but, Master Little, surely you must realise what you are doing?" she exclaimed. "I never expected anything of this kind; I didn't dream that you could go without any food! You've always been so particular——"

"That's finished now—ended for good!" said Fatty. "I've taken on a firm stand, and I'm going to stick to my guns. No food until I'm released! I may be hungry, I may be starving, but I shall remain as firm as a rock!"

"Oh, dear!" said the matron. "This is very silly of you, Master Little, and I will go and tell the headmaster all about it——"

"All right—I don't care!" said Fatty Little. "Go and tell the Head; perhaps it will give him a shock! I hope it does—he deserves one! And perhaps it'll make him realise that he can't treat us as though we were convicts!"

Mrs. Poulter was rather dizzy as she went out of the punishment room, and locked the door after her. She hardly knew what to do. Such a thing as this had never entered into her calculations. She had left the tray of food in the punishment room with Fatty Little.

And the fat boy eyed the breakfast longingly. More than once his resolution almost deserted him. The breakfast was very tempting, and Fatty could hardly resist its attraction.

He reached out a hand, and touched a delicately browned roll. Then he gave a little guilty start, and backed away from the table.

He had remembered his promise to Timothy Tucker. He had given T. T. his word of honour that he would not touch anything which the school provided.

And Fatty Little, although he had an enormous appetite, was an honourable junior. His word was his bond.

"Why should I suffer this torture?" he muttered miserably. "Why the dickens didn't Mrs. Poulter take the grub out with her? Great doughnuts! I've got to stand here, looking at it—and I mustn't touch it! Oh, what a silly fat-head I was to promise anything to that jesser of a Tucker! I must have been dotty!"

And while Fatty Little was suffering these tortures, Mrs. Poulter was hastening to the Head's study. The matron considered that it would be the best thing to place the facts before Dr. Stafford; therefore she went straight to the Head's study, and tapped agitatedly upon the door.

"Come in!" came the Head's voice.

Mrs. Poulter turned the handle, opened the door, and entered the study. The Head had been glancing over his morning correspondence, and he was seated at his desk. He looked up over the tops of his glasses, and there was a rather surprised look on his face. It was not usual for Mrs. Poulter to visit him at this hour of the day.

"If you please, sir, I want to tell you about Master Little!" said the matron.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Head. "Is anything the matter with Little?"

"I—I think he must be ill, or something, sir!" said the matron. "He won't eat any breakfast!"

"Dear me!" said the Head, startled.

"This was certainly a very surprising piece of news. For Fatty Little to refuse his breakfast was rather astounding.

"Does the boy say what is the matter with him?" asked the Head. "Is he bilious, or ill in any other way—"

"Master Little isn't ill at all, sir," said Mrs. Poulter.

"Not ill?"

"No, sir!"

"Then why will he eat no breakfast?"

"Master Little says that he won't touch a mouthful, sir," said Mrs. Poulter. "He was quite excited, sir, and told me that he was hunger striking—"

The Head gave a violent start.

"Good gracious me!" he ejaculated.

"What did you say, Mrs. Poulter?"

"Master Little is hunger striking, sir!" she repeated. "He says he won't take any food until he is released. He told me that his punishment is unjust,

and as a protest he had gone on strike—hunger strike, sir. He refuses to eat anything until he is released from the punishment room!"

The Head's glasses nearly dropped from his nose.

"This—this is most astounding!" he exclaimed. "A hunger strike! Goodness gracious! The boy must be insane! And Little, too! He is really the last boy in the school whom I would suspect of such behaviour! Surely, Mrs. Poulter, you must be mistaken?"

"I'm not, sir!" said the matron. "I've left Master Little's breakfast in the punishment room, but he swears he won't touch anything of it!"

The Head waved his hand.

"Very well, Mrs. Poulter, you may go," he said. "I will attend to this affair myself."

"Thank you, sir!"

The matron was only too pleased to get away, and, after she had gone, Dr. Stafford paced up and down his study, clasping and unclasping his hands.

As he walked up and down, his brow grew black. He had been startled at first, but now he was becoming angry. The Head had been reconsidering his decision about Fatty Little, and he had already decided that he would release the fat boy at the end of the day. The Head, in fact, had relented, and had realised that his treatment of Little had been somewhat uncalled for.

But now his views were becoming altered.

He hardened his heart. Since Fatty Little had taken action—since the junior had refused to eat—the Head was determined to teach him a lesson. It was absolutely unheard of—unprecedented. For a junior to hunger strike was simply startling.

"Upon my soul!" muttered the Head. "This is quite beyond endurance! Does the wretched boy think he can obtain his liberty by such means? A hunger strike, indeed! He apparently believes that he is in prison, or something of that kind. I shall certainly not release him now—not until he gives up this insane idea, at all events."

The Head touched his bell, and a moment later Tubbs, the page-boy, appeared.

"Kindly inform Mr. Lee that I require his presence in my study, Tubbs," said the Head. "You might

also mention to Mr. Lee that the matter is somewhat urgent!"

"Yessir!" said the page-boy.

He hurried away, and within a very few minutes Nelson Lee entered the Head's study. The famous schoolmaster-detective listened with considerable surprise to what Dr. Stafford had to tell him. And then Lee could not refrain from smiling. He was rather amused.

"My dear sir, this surely cannot be serious?" he exclaimed. "Little has an enormous appetite, and for him to hunger strike is positively out of the question. I can only assume that the boy was having a joke at Mrs. Poulter's expense. I understand that she left the tray in the punishment room?"

"Yes, I believe so, Mr. Lee."

"Then, by this time, the tray is no doubt empty," said Lee, with a twinkle in his eyes. "In any case, sir, there is no necessity for you to worry yourself. Little is not the kind of fellow to indulge in such foolishness—indeed, I very much doubt if he could do such a thing. His appetite is his master. For Little to hunger strike is quite impossible."

The Head nodded.

"That is what I thought, Mr. Lee," he said; "but Mrs. Poulter was very positive in what she said. Would it be too much trouble for you to go to the punishment room, and to see Little yourself? I shall deem it a great favour if you do so."

"Most certainly," said Nelson Lee.

"I will go at once, if you wish."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee—thank you!"

Nelson Lee turned towards the door, and was about to leave when the Head spoke again.

"Just one moment, Mr. Lee," he said.

"If Little is really acting in this way, I should like you to inform him that he will not be released until he acts sensibly. I had already decided to release him to-day, but I shall certainly not do so now. Since the boy has taken this defiant attitude, I have a mind to teach him a lesson."

"Have no fear, Dr. Stafford," smiled Lee. "Little is not going without food; he would prefer to remain in the punishment room for six months, I believe!"

A moment later Lee had left, and he went straight upstairs to the other corridor, and at length halted outside the punishment room. He had another key with him, and he soon opened the door

and entered. The very first thing that Nelson Lee saw was the tray on the table. And the tray was—full. Not one atom of the breakfast had been touched!

Fatty Little was at the window, gazing through the bars into the Triangle. He turned as the door opened, and he walked forward.

"Good-morning, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Good-morning, Little!" said Nelson Lee. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Of—of what, sir?"

"You know very well what I mean, my boy," said the Housemaster-detective. "Why have you not eaten your breakfast?"

"I—I don't want it, sir!" stammered Fatty.

"You don't want it?"

"No, sir!"

"Do you mean that you are not hungry?"

"It—it isn't that, sir," said Fatty.

"It—it's a matter of principle, you know! I decided not to eat anything—I'm hunger striking! I'm not going to eat any food that's brought to me—not a mite! I don't reckon that I was treated right, and I'm doing this as a protest. I'm on hunger strike, sir!"

Even Nelson Lee was startled.

"Good gracious, Little, you surely cannot be serious?" he exclaimed. "Come, my boy, do not be ridiculous! Eat your breakfast now, while I am here. Come along!"

Fatty hung back.

"I—I can't, sir!" he stammered. "It—it would be against my principles, sir. I'm hunger striking, and I can't eat anything!"

"Now, Little, I do not intend to put up with this nonsense!" said Nelson Lee sternly. "I may tell you that I am absolutely amazed at your attitude. In any case, I did not credit you had such will-power. Come over to this table, and eat your food!"

Fatty Little shifted his feet, and he flushed red.

"I—I'm sorry, sir, but I can't!" he said. "I—I'm not going to eat anything, sir—I mustn't!"

"I do not wish to be severe with you, Little, but I am firm!" said Nelson Lee. "I command you to come and eat—"

"I'm not going to eat if I don't want to, sir!" said Fatty defiantly. "You can't force me to—you can't shove the stuff down my throat! I'm not going to

touch anything, sir! I've made up my mind to it. I'm on hunger strike!"

Nelson Lee began to see that Fatty was indeed firm.

"My boy, it is very foolish of you to act in this way!" said Lee gently. "It will do you no good, I can assure you; and you will only make yourself look ridiculous. When dinner-time comes you will be very hungry indeed, and all your resolution will go——"

"It won't, sir!" said Fatty firmly. "I'm hunger striking until I'm released—~~they~~ they are my terms!"

"Your terms?"

"Yes, sir!" said Fatty grimly. "It's not fair that I should be kept here, in the punishment room, and I demand that I shall be released. And I won't eat anything until I am released! If the Head likes to starve me, and if I die, it will be his fault!"

"What ridiculous nonsense!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "If you refuse your food, Little, any after results will be entirely your own fault. But there is no question of that—you will not keep up this foolishness for long, I am certain. I think the best thing is to leave you to your own devices until dinner-time—and then, no doubt, you will have changed your mind!"

"No, sir; I shall be just as firm as ever!" declared Little stoutly.

Nelson Lee took the tray away with him, for the schoolmaster-detective was rather grim now, and he had no intention of letting Fatty touch that breakfast. It would teach the foolish lad a lesson.

Outside, in the Triangle, and down in the lobby of the Ancient House, the juniors were talking excitedly. It was not yet breakfast-time for the boys, and the news regarding Fatty Little had already leaked out. Nelson Lee had said nothing, and so Mrs. Poulter was obviously the culprit. As a matter of fact, she had mentioned something to Tubbs in the passage, and Teddy Long had been near by. The sneak of the Remove had very keen ears, when it came to overhearing something, and it did not take him long to spread the news throughout the Remove.

Hardly any of the juniors believed the story.

"What absolute rot!" said Handforth, grinning. "Fatty Little — hunger striker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's the last chap in the school to do a thing like that!" grinned Pitt. "Why, Fatty can't go an hour without something to eat. It's positive agony for him to attempt lessons in the class-room. Who started this joke about Fatty refusing his grub?"

"Teddy Long!" said Jack Grey.

"I didn't think Teddy had such a sense of humour!" said Pitt.

"But it's true!" declared Long indignantly. "It's absolutely true, you ass!"

"Rot!"

"I tell you——"

"Piffle!"

"Mrs. Poulter said so!" roared Long. "She took Fatty's breakfast up to him, and he wouldn't touch it—he wouldn't eat a thing!"

"How do you know, anyhow?" demanded Handforth. "Did Mrs. Poulter tell you anything?"

"I—I happened to hear Mrs. Poulter talking——"

"Oh, that's enough!" interrupted Tommy Watson. "We don't want to know what you happened to hear, you little worm! Somebody's been pulling your leg—that's about the truth of it!"

"Dear old boys, it is certainly somewhat tall!" remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I cannot believe that Fatty Little is hunger strikin'. Such an idea is frightfully preposterous, begad!"

We were strolling along the passage, with the intention of going to Study C, but just at that moment I caught sight of the guv'nor, walking slowly and thoughtfully along towards his own study. I ran forward, and grabbed his arm.

"Good-morning, sir!" I said.

"Eh? Oh, good-morning, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee. "Do you wish to ask me something?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "Somebody has been spreading a yarn about Fatty Little—they say that he's hunger striking. It's all rot, isn't it?"

"Up to the present it is not rot, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "Little is a hunger striker at the present moment. The foolish boy has refused to partake of any breakfast, and he positively declares that he will not eat anything until he is released."

"Begad!"

"My—my only hat!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

We stared at one another, and then I stared at Nelson Lee.

"Oh, my goodness!" I exclaimed. "Then—then it's really true, gov'nor?"

"Yes; but it is very unlikely that Little will keep up this preposterous attitude of his for long," said Nelson Lee. "His appetite will get the better of him, Nipper—we may be sure of that. Possibly he over-ate himself last night, and he is feeling the effects this morning. He might be slightly bilious, and, not wanting his breakfast, he is making capital out of the fact. When dinner-time comes, however, I fancy there will be a different story to tell."

We went back into the lobby, and, when we told the other juniors of what we had heard, there was general amazement. Nobody doubted Nelson Lee's word; they knew that the story regarding Fatty Little must be true.

"There you are!" crowed Teddy Long. "What did I tell you?"

"Well, it's amazing!" said Reginald Pitt. "For Fatty Little to go on hunger strike—ye gods and little fishes!"

"My dear friends——"

"Oh, dry up, Tucker; we don't want to hear you now!" said De Valerie.

"Really, my dear sir, I must insist on speaking!" said T. T., blinking round at the juniors in a somewhat excited way. "This news regarding our comrade, Little, is indeed wonderful. Quite so; it is wonderful. He has had the courage to go on hunger strike. It is a protest against his unjust treatment at the hands of the tyrant——"

"You—you ass!" said McClure. "If you let any of the prefects hear you call the Head a tyrant, you'll get into terrifically hot water."

"The Head is a tyrant! He has treated Little in a most unjust way!" shouted Tucker. "We're all agreed upon that point, my friends. Listen, comrades—listen to my advice! I suggest that we support Little—and I suggest that we support him to the utmost limit!"

"How, you ass?"

"We will strike in sympathy!" replied Tucker. "I, for one, will lead the way. When we go into the dining-hall for breakfast, we will sit there, and we will eat nothing——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We will eat nothing!" shouted Tucker. "My suggestion, my dear friends. The whole Remove must go on hunger strike—every single one of us! It is by this means that the Head will be defeated—Fatty Little will obtain his freedom. Let the Remove hunger strike, and then—— Dear me! My dear friends——"

Tucker blinked round him with indignant bewilderment, for, somehow or other, the lobby had suddenly become empty. And T. T. found himself addressing the staircase; the juniors had melted away.

The reason for this was quite obvious. The bell for breakfast had gone at that moment, and healthy appetites were required in the dining-hall. Timothy Tucker had evidently been expecting a miracle to happen—for it would have been a miracle if he had obtained any supporters. The juniors would probably have been willing enough to support Fatty in any other way; but to refuse food—never!

It was all the more astounding regarding Little himself. Fatty, who was the biggest junior in the Remove—Fatty, whose appetite was never satisfied—was hunger striking! It was beyond belief, and a large number of fellows in the junior school could not possibly credit the story. It was positively too much for them.

During morning lessons there were many whispered conversations carried on in the Form-room, with the result that Mr. Crowell was obliged to distribute lines somewhat liberally. Everybody was curious to know what would happen at dinner-time, and it was generally predicted on all sides that Fatty Little would cave in. It was positively impossible for him to remain a hunger striker for more than a few hours.

Mrs. Poulter was feeling rather uncertain as she carried up the tray containing Fatty's dinner. She found quite a crowd of juniors collected at the corner of the upper corridor—beyond that point was out of bounds, and the juniors dared not venture any way near the punishment room. But they were waiting there, anxious to hear the result of Mrs. Poulter's visit.

"Oh, he'll never resist that lot!" said Handforth, as he eyed the tray. "Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, potatoes and greens, and tons of gravy. My hat!"

The very sight of that grub will make Fatty jump at it!"

"Rather!"

Mrs. Poulter went along the passage, and a moment or two later she was within the punishment room. Fatty was sitting on the bed, looking rather forlorn and miserable. He started up as the matron appeared, and he held up his hand at once.

"Take that grub away!" he said huskily.

"Come—come, Master Little; you mustn't go on like this!" said Mrs. Poulter. "I've got a very nice dinner for you——"

"I don't want it—I don't want it!" said Fatty grimly. "I'm not going to eat anything; I won't even look at the stuff!"

"But, Master Little——"

"I'm getting resigned to it by this time—I'm not even hungry!" said Fatty. "I don't need any grub at all. Hunger striking isn't so bad as I thought it would be. And you needn't bring me any tea, either. I sha'n't eat until I'm released—so you can go and tell the Head all about it!"

Mrs. Poulter was staggered. The most amazing part of the whole affair was that Fatty did not look hungry. There was a very well-fed appearance about his countenance, and he regarded the tray of appetising food with quite a contemptuous look. He turned his back and walked towards the window.

"Do be sensible, Master Little!" said the matron, in alarm. "You didn't have any breakfast, and you must be nearly starving by this time——"

"All right—I'll starve!" said Fatty. "I don't care! I'm hunger striking, and I'm not going to touch any of this school grub until I get my liberty! It's no good arguing, Mrs. Poulter; I'm as firm as a rock."

Mrs. Poulter sighed.

"Very well, Master Little," she said, "I'll take the food back, but I must report the matter to the Head."

"All right—report it," said Fatty. "It doesn't matter to me—it doesn't make any difference. You can't force me to eat if I don't want to. The only thing that will make me take any grub will be to set me at liberty. I demand to have freedom! I'm not going to be shut up in a prison like a giddy criminal!"

Mrs. Poulter said no more. She left the punishment room with the tray, re-locked the door, and passed down the passage. She came into sight, and the knot of juniors who were waiting there regarded her, and the tray, with amazement.

"Great pip!" said Handforth, holding on to Church and McClure for support. "Hasn't he had any dinner, Mrs. Poulter?"

"No, Master Handforth."

"Do you mean to say he refused it?"

"Wouldn't he eat anything?"

"Is he still hunger striking?"

"Master Little says he won't eat anything until he's set free!" said Mrs. Poulter. "It's a rare puzzle to me, young gentlemen; I can't understand it at all. Master Little is usually so careful about his food. And this dinner is particularly appetising, too! I never thought Master Little had such a strong will!"

The juniors were positively staggered.

"It's—it's altogether too much for me," said Reginald Pitt. "Refusing his breakfast wasn't particularly startling; he might have been suffering from a bilious attack. But to refuse his dinner, too—well, it fairly takes the biscuit!"

"There's only one explanation," said De Valerie. "Fatty must have some food in the room. He must have an enormous supply of tuck, and he's been feeding himself on the quiet. That's all I can think of, anyhow!"

When the Head heard this fresh item of news, he at once sent for Nelson Lee. And Lee decided that it would be better to wait until tea-time. As he pointed out to Dr. Stafford, it was quite possible that Fatty Little was hoping for a visit from either the Head or Nelson Lee, and Lee thought it would be better to leave Fatty to himself. It would be a lesson to him, and by tea-time he would be ravenous, and ready enough to accept his food.

Practically the sole topic of conversation in all the Forms at St. Frank's, and in both houses, was Fatty Little's hunger strike. Hardly any of the fellows could believe it, and certainly it was regarded as an absolute certainty that Fatty was being fed in some way or other.

To think that the fat junior would go without food altogether was quite out of the question.

When afternoon lessons were over, the



"Take—take it away!" said Fatty desperately. "Don't leave it here, Mrs. Poulter—take it away!"

juniors hung about the passages and in the upper corridor, waiting for developments. They were waiting until tea was taken to Fatty; they were waiting to see whether Little would refuse food now. Even taking it for granted that Fatty was obtaining food from some other source, it was still amazing that he should refuse the grub which the school provided. Fatty generally demolished everything that came in his way—and he never had too much.

At about five o'clock there was a tap on the door of Nelson Lee's study, and when the Housemaster-detective had invited the caller to enter, he found that it was Mrs. Poulter.

"I've come straight to you this time, sir," said the matron. "It's about Master Little."

"You have taken the boy's tea up to the punishment room, Mrs. Poulter?" asked Lee.

"Yes, sir: and Master Little won't eat anything!" said Mrs. Poulter. "It's fair amazing, and I can't understand. He's rare obstinate, and won't touch anything. The poor boy will starve if he goes on at this rate!"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"All right, Mrs. Poulter, I will go up to Little at once," he said. "You may leave this matter to me."

Mrs. Poulter looked relieved.

"Thank you, sir!" she said. "I do hope you'll persuade the poor lad to have something!"

There was a somewhat grim look on Nelson Lee's face as he went up the passage, and proceeded towards the punishment-room. Lee was determined to investigate this matter thoroughly. Like the boys, he could not possibly believe that Fatty was going without food altogether. The only explanation for his present conduct was that he was obtaining supplies from some other source. This was the only conclusion that Nelson Lee could come to.

When the detective arrived in the upper passage he found quite a number of juniors there—waiting at the corner.

"There is no need for you to be here, boys," said Nelson Lee sharply. "In any case, there is nothing for you to see."

"But we're anxious to hear the result, sir," said Reginald Pitt. "We want to know where Fatty is getting his grub from!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He must have supplies somewhere, sir," said Tommy Watson. "We're not going to believe that Fatty is going without food altogether. Not likely! I'll bet he's got a cupboard full of grub in that room."

"Or hidden away under the bed," said Handforth.

Nelson Lee passed on, smiling to himself. He arrived at the punishment-room, and admitted himself. Fatty Little was sitting on the bed, looking rather forlorn. He was holding his waistcoat, and he was looking up dolefully as Nelson Lee entered. Then his expression changed, and he became rather eager.

"Have you come to let me out, sir?" he asked.

"I have not, Little!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "I want you to tell me the truth about this, my boy. Why have you refused your breakfast, your dinner, and your tea?"

Fatty Little looked dignified.

"It's a matter of principle, sir," he replied. "It's not fair that I should be shut up like this, and so I'm hunger striking until I'm released. I don't want to be disrespectful to you, sir, so please don't misunderstand me. It was the Head who ordered me to come here, and—"

"That makes no difference, Little," said Nelson Lee. "I really cannot understand why you should refuse your food—unless you are obtaining supplies from some other source."

Fatty looked startled and shocked.

"Food from another source, sir?" he repeated. "What rot—I—I mean, where could I get food from, sir? I'm locked up here in the study, and the window is barred. There is not an atom of food in the place—not a morsel! I'm surprised, sir. I refused my meals because I don't think it's right that I should be kept here!"

Lee looked at the fat boy sharply.

"Do you assure me, Little, that you have no store of food in this room?" he asked.

"There's not a single crumb, sir!" replied Little indignantly. "Just as if I should do a thing like that; just as if I should have a store of food, and then pretend to be hunger striking!"

Apparently Nelson Lee was not quite satisfied, and he proceeded to make a

very close examination. And he left no stone unturned during this process. He examined the cupboard most carefully. But the cupboard was empty, and the wall behind was solid. There was no secret cavity, or anything of that nature.

The bed received Nelson Lee's attention next, and this proved barren of result.

The space under the bed was quite bare, and it was perfectly obvious that no food could be there. In short, Nelson Lee looked into every corner and crevice of the apartment, and the result was the same. He found nothing! He even went so far as to look at the boards, in case Fatty had some food hidden between the rafters. But this was not the case. There was not a single crumb of food anywhere.

Neither was there any sign that there had been any food.

In a very thoughtful mood Nelson Lee went to the window, opened it, and looked out between the bars. In this direction, also, he drew a blank. It was not possible for Fatty to have received supplies through the window, for straight above the Triangle, any movement would have been seen at once—by dozens of eyes.

Furthermore, it was quite impossible that any food could have been hoisted up from the ground.

Nelson Lee was satisfied with the result of his investigation. He came to the conclusion that Fatty had indeed received no food from any outside source. It was, therefore, clear that the fat junior was hunger striking in earnest.

"I shall say nothing further to you now, Little," said Nelson Lee. "Your very appearance tells me that you have come to no harm. And, if you choose to continue in your present course, you are at liberty to do so. But I strongly advise you to accept your supper when it is sent up."

"Do you think the Head will let me go, sir?" asked Fatty eagerly.

"I do not intend to discuss that point with you, my lad," said Nelson Lee. "But I am your Housemaster, and I urge you to drop this absurd behaviour."

Nelson Lee said no more, but passed out of the punishment-room, and re-locked the door. When he got to the end of the passage many juniors asked him questions—including myself.

"Well, sir?" I said. "What results?"

"There is no result, Nipper," replied the gov'nor. "I am satisfied in one direction, however. Little is not receiving any food from any outside source. Neither has he a supply in his room."

"Then it is a genuine hunger strike, sir?"

"Yes, Nipper, apparently it is."

"My only hat!"

"Begad!"

"Great Scott!"

"A—a real hunger strike!" said Handforth faintly. "Then—then Fatty hasn't eaten anything since last night!"

It was astounding, and the juniors were rather thunderstruck. Nelson Lee had been in the punishment-room, and it was now quite clear that Fatty was hunger striking in earnest. The juniors believed that Nelson Lee was positive in his own mind regarding the matter.

But Nelson Lee was not positive. He had made no such statement to the juniors. He had said that it was "apparent" that Fatty was genuinely hunger striking, but nothing more than that. And Nelson Lee stationed a prefect in the upper corridor to keep watch. Lee could not really believe that Fatty was going without food all the time. It seemed too absurd to be true.

But when supper time came it was reported to Nelson Lee that not a single human being had been near the punishment-room. And, what was more to the point, Fatty Little had refused his supper!

Once again he had declared that he would not eat anything!

Not a morsel of the school food had passed Fatty's lips all the day. And he had received no supplies from any other source. What could the explanation be?

Was it possible—was it feasible, that Fatty Little was really and truly hunger striking?

CHAPTER IV.

CALLING IN THE DOCTOR.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD curled his lips contemptuously.

"Rotten, I call it—bally rotten!" he exclaimed. "I can't think what the Head is doin' it for. It'll be a disgrace to the whole of St. Frank's!"

"Rather!" said Gulliver. "We don't want the chap here, an' if he does come we'll jolly well show him that we don't want him. It's an insult to every other fellow in the school!"

"Of course it is," agreed Bell. "If there's any truth in this Fully, I think we ought to get up a protest, an' show the Head quite plainly that we won't have anythin' to do with it!"

The Nuts of Study A were standing on the Ancient House steps, chatting. It was morning, and they had not been down long. They were apparently very indignant about something, and they were discussing the subject animatedly.

"It's the limit," said Fullwood. "A Jew, mind you—a dirty, rotten Jew! By gad! Just as if we would stick a chap of that sort in the Remove—mixin' with us! I should hope St. Frank's is a better place than that. We don't want any beastly Petticoat Lane rotter in the Remove!"

"Rather not!"

"We won't stand it, anyhow!"

Fullwood and Co. were quite agreed upon that point.

"And look at his name!" went on Fullwood indignantly. "His name is enough to make you think of money-lenders and hooked noses. Solomon Levi!"

"Awful!" said Gulliver.

"Horrid!" agreed Bell.

"I draw the line at mixin' with a bally Jew!" said Fullwood firmly. "We won't stand it. If that beastly cad comes here, we'll make his life a misery! Jews ought to be kept to themselves, they oughtn't to be allowed to walk about as if they were ordinary human beings——"

"Eh? What's that?"

Edward Oswald Handforth came out of the lobby, having heard Fullwood's last remark. And Handforth was looking rather aggressive.

"I wasn't talkin' to you!" snapped Fullwood.

"Perhaps not, but I heard what you said," said Handforth grimly. "You were talking about Jews."

"Yes, I was," sneered Fullwood. "What's it got to do with you?"

"Nothing; but I'm going to punch your nose!" said Handforth. "I'm not a Jew, and I haven't got any pals who are Jews, but I'm not going to have

them run down and insulted by a beastly cad like you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church and McClure.

"Perhaps you haven't heard the news," he sneered.

"I've heard that there's a new kid coming into the Remove in a day or two," said Handforth. "His name's Solomon Levi, or Isaac Levinsky, or something like that, and he's a Jew. Well, there's no reason why he shouldn't be as good as anybody else. And he certainly won't be ragged here unless he turns out to be a rotter. Every chap's got a fair chance when he comes to St. Frank's."

"Dear old boy, I fully agree with you!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, strolling from the lobby. "I really shouldn't waste any time on a frightful rotter like Fullwood. Personally, I shall go out of my way to give this Jewish boy a welcome. It is more than probable that he will turn out to be a rippin' sort. It is only an exhibition of shockin' narrow-mindedness to be down on a fellow just because he happens to be a Jew!"

"Good for you, Montie," said Handforth. "I'm going to punch Fullwood's nose for being such a cad. He's a fine chap to criticise other fellows! Why, the worst Jewish chap in England couldn't be half so bad as Fullwood!"

Ralph Leslie scowled again.

But he only turned on his heel and walked away. As a matter of fact, he was rather speechless at this insult. Furthermore, he had an idea that Handforth meant to carry out his threat with regard to the punch on the nose. And Fullwood was not anxious for that.

Several juniors were talking about the story which had got round that morning. According to reports, a new fellow was soon coming into the Remove—in the Ancient House section. His name was Solomon Levi, and he was said to be the son of a rich London merchant.

His name was quite sufficient to show that he was of the Hebrew fraternity.

Of course, a number of juniors were inclined to share Fullwood's view, but, on the other hand, all the decent fellows in the Remove declared that Levi should be treated just the same as anybody else.

Why shouldn't he be? The fact that he was a Jew made no difference at all.

"And just as the knot of fellows were interestedly discussing the question, Nicodemus Trotwood came hurrying downstairs.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it!" he exclaimed, in a wondering voice. "It's a mystery!"

"What's a mystery?"

"Fatty!" replied Trotwood. "He's been my study mate for two or three terms, and I've never known him to refuse any grub. He's eaten everything—his own share, and somebody else's as well. For him to go on hunger strike simply proves that he's dotty, or in a trance!"

"Has he refused his grub this morning?"

"Yes," said Trotwood.

"What!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Mrs. Poulter took his breakfast up about ten minutes ago," went on Trotwood. "But Fatty wouldn't touch a bit. He still sticks to the same story, and vows that he won't eat a thing until he's been released!"

"Phew!" whistled Pitt. "This is getting a bit serious."

"It's mysterious, anyhow," remarked Grey.

"No breakfast this morning, and not a bite all day yesterday!" said Trotwood frowning. "Why, it's unbelievable. I didn't think Fatty could go for more than three hours without something to eat! It's a wonder to me how he can sleep through the night!"

"There's something uncanny about it!" said Pitt. "What I can't understand is how Fatty can live without grub. I should think that he'd got a lot of tuck there, but Mr. Leo searched the place thoroughly last night, and proved that Fatty couldn't have any secret store."

Timothy Tucker came across the Triangle thoughtfully, and there was a worried expression on his brow as he passed up the steps into the Ancient House. He seemed strangely absent-minded.

"The great man is thinking!" remarked Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear friends, let me address a few words to you," said T.T., awakening at the sound of that laugh. "You have all seen the splendid example Little is

giving. Let us rise, let us do our utmost to get the unfortunate fellow released. I suggest that we go on hunger strike at once—in support of Little——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be a most effective strike, my dear sirs," went on Tucker. "If we band ourselves together, and——"

"Dry up, you ass!"

"No hunger striking for us!"

"Rather not!"

"Nothing doing, T.T.!"

Tucker found it impossible to obtain a hearing, and, with a somewhat weary shake of his head, he passed on into the House.

And, meanwhile, Dr. Stafford was very worried. The news had been brought to him that Fatty Little was still hunger striking. This was rather a shock, for the Head had been quite certain that Little would partake of breakfast that morning.

This time the Head did not appeal to Nelson Lee. Instead, he rang up Dr. Brett, in the village. And, less than twenty minutes later, Dr. Brett himself appeared, coming up in his little run-about. He went straight to the Headmaster's study, and he was told of Fatty Little's extraordinary conduct.

"Well, Dr. Stafford, the boy cannot come to any harm," said the doctor. "At all events, going without food yesterday did him no harm; on the contrary, it ought to have been decidedly beneficial."

"But what if he keeps it up?" asked the Head anxiously.

"Then, of course, it might be serious," said the doctor. "But I do not think there is much likelihood of that, sir. By all that I have seen of Little, he is hardly the kind of junior to go without food for long. It is surprising enough that he had nothing to eat all yesterday."

"And, on the top of that, he has refused breakfast this morning!" said Dr. Stafford. "Do you mind going to the punishment room at once, Dr. Brett? I should like you to examine him."

"Certainly; I will go at once."

Dr. Brett was escorted to the punishment room by Tubbs, who seemed rather amused over the whole affair. Brett had a key, and he let himself in, and found Fatty Little lounging on the bed in a most comfortable attitude. Fatty Little

rose to his feet at once, and appeared very surprised to see the doctor.

"Hallo, Dr. Brett!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"I have come to examine you, my lad," said the doctor grimly. "What's all this I hear? What's this I hear about you refusing your meals?"

"Well, it's all right!" said Fatty. "It's a matter of principle with me. I'm hunger striking, you know——"

"So I hear," said the doctor. "Well, it'll do you good, my boy—it'll do you a lot of good!"

"Do me good?" said Fatty bluntly.

"Of course! As a rule, you eat altogether too much, and a fast of this kind will improve your general health. Let me have a look at you."

Fatty was thoroughly examined, and, when Dr. Brett had finished, he eyed the junior rather suspiciously.

"I'm told that you didn't eat anything all day yesterday," he said. "Is that true, Little?"

"Great doughnuts!" said Fatty. "I refused my breakfast, I refused my dinner, I refused my tea, and I refused supper! Doesn't that prove that I've eaten nothing?"

"Not necessarily," said the doctor. "You might have had some food concealed in the room, or you might have had some brought to you."

"Oh, rot!" said Fatty indignantly. "Mr. Lee knows that I've got nothing in the room, and he knows that I couldn't have had anything brought, either."

"Well, it has done you no harm," said the doctor. "You can keep it up, if you like; you appear to be thriving on fresh air!"

Dr. Brett took his departure, and returned to the Head's study.

"Well?" said Dr. Stafford quickly.

"My dear sir, there is no necessity for you to worry whatever," said the medico. "There is nothing whatever the matter with Little, and I really cannot understand the case."

"You cannot understand it?"

"No, sir, I cannot!" said Dr. Brett. "If I had not been told the facts, I should express the opinion that Little had been eating very heavily—and quite recently, too. I should judge that he has had a very substantial meal this morning!"

"My dear Brett, that cannot possibly be!" said the Head. "I know that Little has not eaten an ounce of food to-day. He could not have received any before Mrs. Poulter arrived with his breakfast—and Little refused to partake of this."

"Well, you needn't worry, sir," said Brett. "Little is in no danger, and being without food for a day or two will probably strengthen his constitution."

And Dr. Brett took his departure rather mystified.

Nelson Lee went up to see Fatty just after breakfast, but the hunger striker was as firm as ever. He demanded that he should be released, that there should be no further delay, and that he should be allowed to leave the punishment room at once. Otherwise, he would continue the hunger strike for days.

Fatty was rather disappointed when he failed to see any sign of dismay in Nelson Lee's expression. On the contrary, Lee seemed inclined to think that Fatty would be kept a prisoner for the whole week. And when the Head was informed, he became somewhat angry.

"I shall certainly not release the boy!" declared Dr. Stafford firmly. "He has no sympathy from me, and if he likes to keep up this foolishness he can do so. I have Dr. Brett's assurance that the boy is in no danger, and I am rather angry with him for taking up this obstinate attitude."

Meanwhile, the other juniors were still discussing the matter. In Study C, I was talking with Sir Montic Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson.

"I can't believe it, you know," I said. "It's quite beyond me, you chaps. I'm willing to bet anything you like that Fatty isn't really hunger striking. He's getting some grub from somewhere."

"But how?" asked Watson.

"That's what we've got to find out," I said. "In any case, I want to bowl the spoofer out; I want to show him up. He needn't think that he's going to bluff us!"

"But, dear old fellow, I really fail to see how Fatty Little can obtain food!" remarked Tregellis-West. "It is most astoundin' to me!"

"Well, we haven't given the matter serious attention, so far, but we will to-day," I said. "And I'm pretty sure that we shall be able to—— Come in!"

A tap had sounded upon the study

door, and, in response to my invitation, the gleaming spectacles of Timothy Tucker appeared. The duffer of the Remove looked in apologetically, and he gingerly stepped inside.

"My dear sir, I sincerely trust that you will pardon me for intruding?" he said mildly. "Quite so! I am just wondering if I could say a few words. The position is this. I am rather pressed for money, and——"

"Eh?" I said, staring. "You're pressed for money?"

"Unfortunately, yes!" said Tucker. "If I could possibly loan a few shillings, I should be extremely obliged!"

"But, my dear chap, you were rolling in money yesterday!" I said. "Why, I saw you with a pound note, and at least eight shillings in silver! It's not my business, of course, and if you want to borrow a bit, we're quite ready."

"Thank you, my dear sir—thank you!" said Tucker. "Your beauty is only superseded by your generosity. Ahem! Quite so—quite so!"

T. T. was rather flustered, and I regarded him curiously.

And then, at that moment, I got an idea and I was fairly certain that I had solved the mystery of Fatty Little's hunger strike!

CHAPTER V.

STOPPING THE SUPPLIES.

TIMOTHY TUCKER had had plenty of money on the previous day. I knew this for a fact. And now he was going round the studies, asking for loans. What had he done with his money? How had he spent it so rapidly?

As a rule, Tucker was rather careful, and he very seldom wasted any money on tuck. His one weakness was lemonade. Mrs. Hake, of the school tuck shop, kept a special brand which was particularly fizzy, and T. T. was extremely fond of this, even in the cold weather.

I lent him five shillings, just to get rid of him, and then I remained rather thoughtful. Tucker was borrowing money, and he had had plenty on the

previous day. This was significant. And it was all the more significant when I learned, by inquiry, that T. T. had apparently developed an extraordinary appetite, for it seemed that Mrs. Hake had supplied Tucker with large quantities of food on the previous day.

T. T., in fact, had spent every penny of his pocket money in the school shop—all on food. I grinned, and I confidently informed my chums that the mystery was explained.

"How is it explained?" asked Watson.

"Why, it's as clear as daylight!" I chuckled. "Somehow or other, Fatty Little has been obtaining food from an outside source. We suspected that all along; now we know it for certain—and T. T. is the agent."

"The agent?" said Sir Montie. "I am afraid I do not understand, dear old boy!"

"I mean that it is through Tucker's agency that Fatty is being fed," I explained. "How Tucker has been getting the food into the punishment room is more than I can imagine; but he's been on the job."

In order to put my theory to the test, I lent Tucker a further pound, for which he was extremely delighted. I then decided that I should keep my eye on Tucker for the rest of the day. I felt that I should be repaid for so doing.

Directly morning lessons were over, Tucker disappeared, and I soon found that he had gone straight to the village. Two minutes later, Tregellis-West and Watson and I were out in the lane, and it was our intention to go to the village, to find out what T. T. was up to. We could easily guess, but we wanted to make sure.

And we had not proceeded far before we observed a stumpy, bow-legged figure approaching from the village. We recognised that figure at once, and we were rather surprised.

"Old Cuttle!" said Watson. "I wonder what he's doing here?"

The figure was, indeed, that of Mr. Josh Cuttle. We knew him well, for he had been at St. Frank's quite recently. Mr. Cuttle had been connected with the case of Dick Goodwin; he had, in fact, been at St. Frank's for the especial purpose of acting as a kind of bodyguard to the Lancashire junior. But Mr. Cuttle's duty had come to an end, and he had left St. Frank's in order to return to Lancashire.

He was a curious old sort, being extremely gloomy at all times. He had never been known to smile, and he was always full of gloomy predictions.

"Well, Mr. Cuttle, this is a surprise!" I said, coming to a halt. "What are you doing down at St. Frank's again?"

"There was rough times ahead!" said Mr. Cuttle heavily. "There was some men which are sensible, and there was other men which was fools. I was one of the fools. And why was I one of them fools? Ask me! Because I was coming to St. Frank's for good!"

"For good, dear old boy?" inquired Sir Montie politely.

"Them was my words, young gent!" said Mr. Cuttle solemnly.

"That's frightfully interestin'," remarked Sir Montie. "I'm sure we shall be delighted to have you among us, Cuttle, old fellow!"

"Them was cheering words, Master Tregellis-West. But I was not cheered!" said Mr. Cuttle sadly. "Things was bad, and I was suffering from foolishness; otherwise I wouldn't be here. And I was here for good. Why was I? Ask me! Because I was the new porter!"

"My hat!" said Watson. "Are you going to take Warren's job?"

"It was took!" said Mr. Cuttle, nodding. "That job was mine, Master Watson."

"Well, that's fine!" I exclaimed. "We shall be jolly pleased to have you, Mr. Cuttle. Warren always was an ill-tempered bounder, so we're not at all sorry to see the last of him."

I had forgotten all about Warren for the time being. He had been the school porter at St. Frank's for a good many years, and at last he was going. He had not been dismissed, but had heard of a better job elsewhere, and had given notice accordingly. And now, apparently, Mr. Josh Cuttle had come to St. Frank's to fill Warren's shoes.

"The job was empty," said Mr. Cuttle. "I was anxious for a change; therefore I was here—which was silly of me. But some men was silly at times, which couldn't be helped. Boys was a trouble, and I was coming among boys. Why was I? Ask me! Because I wasn't in my right senses."

Of course, it was quite like Cuttle to say that. As a matter of fact, I think he was very pleased at the prospect of being the school porter at St. Frank's.

In any case, he had accepted the post, which had been offered to him through the agency of the gov'nor. Cuttle had greatly enjoyed his stay at St. Frank's, and it had benefited his health considerably, and he had been extremely pleased when he had been offered a permanent job at the old school.

When my chums and I arrived in the village, we were just in time to observe Timothy Tucker emerging from the school tuck-shop, and he was loaded up with heavy parcels, all of them containing, no doubt, food. We allowed Tucker to go on his way to the school without allowing ourselves to be seen; then we made a few inquiries, and learned that T. T. had spent nearly every penny he had on an enormous stock of grub!

We knew well enough that Tucker did not require this feed for himself, and the very fact that he was acting secretly proved that something was wrong.

We hurried as quickly as we could to the school, and arrived just in time to see Tucker creeping into the Ancient House by means of a rear door—which, strictly speaking, was out of bounds for the juniors.

Further astonishment was caused throughout the school by the fact that Fatty Little had refused his dinner. The majority of the fellows were more strongly of the opinion that the fat janior was hunger striking in earnest—that there was no spoofing about it. I knew differently, and I decided to keep on the alert.

Tea-time came at length, and it was now very dim outside. The evenings were drawing in rapidly. All the lights were blazing in the Ancient House, and most of the fellows were busily preparing tea, or inviting themselves to somebody else's tea.

I knew that Tucker had gone into his study, so I hung about the passage in a careless kind of way, waiting for something to happen. It was not necessary to wait for long. Less than five minutes had elapsed before T. T. emerged. He looked up and down cautiously, then walked towards the lobby. He was quite unaware of the fact that three juniors were following him—Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself.

Tucker went straight upstairs to the dormitory passage, and then he continued upwards until he arrived on the top landing. It was not a very difficult

matter shadowing Tucker, for the junior was short-sighted, and he was a bit of a duffer, too. It was simple enough to get right behind him, and he knew nothing of our presence.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Watson. "I believe he's going on to the roof!"

"Begad!"

"This is what I expected, my sons," I whispered. "We've got to be careful now; don't make any noise. We are going to find out the sinister secret!"

Tucker had certainly gone on to the roof of the Ancient House—this was flat in this particular part, with high parapets forming an ornamental surround.

When we emerged on to the roof, in single file, and walking with extreme caution, we saw no sign of Tucker. But then, after a while, we spotted him. He was over near one of the parapets, crouching low. Beside him were several parcels, and he was disposing of these in a somewhat surprising fashion.

I knew at once what Tucker was doing.

At that spot there was a gutter pipe leading downwards. It was not exactly a pipe, but a kind of wide chute. It was joined up with a big pipe some distance down the wall of the Ancient House. And, quite suddenly, I saw the truth, and it was only with difficulty that I repressed a desire to shout with laughter.

For the whole thing was astonishingly simple.

That sloping gutter. I remembered, went straight downwards to the junction pipe, which carried off all the rain water to the sewers in the earth, and I remembered that this junction pipe was only just outside the window of the punishment room. Without actually seeing what was occurring, I knew precisely the nature of Tucker's occupation.

He was sliding his parcels down the sloping gutter—and Fatty Little, no doubt, had his hand stretched out through the bars of his window, and was catching the parcels as they came down.

No doubt he had been fed in this way all the previous day. And all Timothy Tucker's pocket money had gone, to say nothing of Fatty Little's money, too. So it was quite on the cards that Fatty Little had given Tucker all the money he had. It was scarcely to

be wondered at that Fatty was refusing the school food, for, by what we could see, T. T. was supplying him with enough grub to feed a dozen.

"The awful spoofer!" I exclaimed. "By Jingo! We'll bring him to his senses!"

"But, dear old boy, I don't quite understand—"

"You'll understand in a moment," I chuckled. "We're going to collar T. T. now. And mind you don't make any noise. But wait! The best thing we can do is to creep up quietly and pull the young ass out and prevent him from making an outcry."

As we crept forward I could not help wondering why T. T. was taking any part in this affair. I could only conclude that his sole object was to cause an agitation. This was a perfect craze with him, and he would go to almost any length if there was any prospect of stirring up strife. T. T. was an agitator of the first water.

He was not particular what he agitated for, or whether it was right or wrong. He was just dotty on the subject, and that was all that was to be said.

We reached the spot without him knowing that we were anywhere near, for he was paying great attention to his task. Then suddenly at the word we pounced upon him.

T. T. was too completely startled to offer any resistance. And as I had clapped my hand over his mouth he couldn't very well say much. We hauled him back, and did not release him until we were a good distance from the gutter pipe. We certainly did not want Fatty Little to hear anything that was going on.

"This—this is unwarrantable!" gasped Tucker. "Really, my dear sirs, I protest—yes, I protest! How dare you lay fingers upon me. You know who I am? Do you know who you are dealing with?"

"Yes, we're dealing with a silly fat-head!" I replied promptly. "We're dealing with a spoofer—the famous hunger strike agitator!"

"My hat!" said Watson. "That's right: he was going to get us all to go on hunger strike. He wanted us to copy the example of Fatty Little!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "What a frightful swindle, dear old boys!"

"Really, my dear sir——"

"It's no good you trying to give any explanation, Tucker," I interrupted. "We know the truth, we've been watching you."

"Dear me, is that so?" said Tucker, blinking. "Is that so, my dear Nipper? You surprise me!"

"You have been supplying Fatty Little with grub—all day yesterday and to-day. And Fatty Little has been posing as a valiant hunger striker."

"You see, my dear sir, he positively refused to hunger strike unless I provided him with food secretly," explained Tucker, rather plaintively. "It was my wish that Fatty should do the thing properly, but he was not content. Thus I have been compelled——"

"Yes, we know all about it," I said. "How much stuff did you drop down that gutter just now?"

"Only one parcel, my dear Nipper."

"Enough for Fatty's tea?"

"Dear me, no!" said Tucker. "Only a mere portion of his tea."

"Good!" I chuckled. "Well, Fatty won't get any more, and he won't get any supper, either. He'll go on hunger strike in real earnest, simply because he won't be able to get any grub."

"Good!" grinned Tommy Watson. "That'll teach him a lesson!"

"Rather, dear old boys!"

"The position is this——" began Tucker.

"We know the position, old chap," I interrupted. "Fatty won't get any tea and he won't get any supper. By to-morrow morning he'll be practically starved, according to his own ideas, and I'll bet he'll collapse like a pricked toy balloon—that is, his hunger strike will collapse. We have cut off his supplies, and he'll find himself in the cold."

And this is precisely what happened.

We removed all the food from the roof and gave Timothy Tucker to understand that under no circumstances was he to communicate with Fatty, and that he was to keep his mouth shut. Tucker agreed readily enough, for he was about fed up with the whole scheme. And it was a relief for him to be free from his duties.

Half-way through the evening Fatty Little was in an awful state.

He had only received a small parcel of three sausage rolls for his tea—just a bite for Fatty. Naturally, he had expected many other parcels to come down

that pipe. But, for some unaccountable reason, they failed to do so.

Consequently, Fatty was nearly frantic. He could not appeal for assistance, and he could not communicate with Tucker in any way. All he could do was to wait in a frightful state of anxiety. He had refused the tea which Mrs. Poulter had brought up, and now he was left deserted. Tucker had failed him!

As a genuine hunger striker Fatty Little was not exactly a success. He had received only a meagre tea, and this caused him to go into a terrible state of alarm. What if Tucker did not turn up? Fatty turned almost faint at the thought of it.

And, as a matter of fact, no supper did turn up!

The reason for this was quite simple. I took the precaution to be in the upper passage when Mrs. Poulter came along with the supper tray. I had a few words with the matron, informing her confidentially that Little certainly required no supper.

"You see, Mrs. Poulter, he's hunger striking," I explained. "It's a certainty he won't accept this supper even if you take it to him; besides, I've got an idea that he'll collapse in the morning."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Poulter, "that will be terrible!"

"I mean that his hunger strike will collapse," I hastened to put in. "In any case, going without his supper won't do him much harm."

I had rather a difficulty with the matron, but she agreed at last, and took Fatty Little's supper away without having asked the junior if he required it. And, of course, no food came to Fatty down the gutter; he discovered this to his dismay a little later on. And now he was not only frantic, but positively wild with anxiety. He was feeling terribly empty, and he told himself repeatedly that he would never last out until the morning.

But it certainly seemed that he would be required to do this. For in the distance he heard the bell clanging for the Remove to go up to the dormitory, and then Fatty Little groaned with misery.

For T. T., of course, would go to bed with the rest of the fellows, and Fatty's last chance of getting any food had vanished.

Meanwhile, Sir Montie Tregellis-West

and Tommy Watson and I were chuckling together. We knew what had happened, and we knew that Fatty Little was hunger striking now in earnest. We were rather curious to see what would happen at breakfast time on the following morning.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF THE HUNGER-STRIKE.

"GREAT PIP!"

Edward Oswald Handforth made that remark, and he spoke in a sleepy, surprised, kind of tone. He was sitting up in bed in the Remove dormitory, and he had been listening intently for a moment or two.

There were strange sounds proceeding from some distant part of the Ancient House.

I had heard them first, and I had awakened at once, only to discover that McClure was aroused from sleep a moment later. McClure did not keep quiet, but nudged Handforth at once and woke him up. And now a good many other juniors were sitting up in bed listening.

"What the dickens can it be?" asked Reginald Pitt.

"Goodness knows," said Handforth. "It sounds like somebody being murdered."

"Oh, rot!" said De Valerie.

The fellows listened again.

The commotion outside was rather terrific. Somebody appeared to be hammering forcibly upon a door, for dull, rapid thuds were heard. Not only this, but wild yells sounded—shouts and howls. Undoubtedly it seemed that somebody was in trouble.

"Dear old boys, somebody is havin' a fit," remarked Tregellis West.

"You ass!" I whispered, bending near to him. "It's only Fatty!"

"Eh?"

"It's Fatty telling everybody that he's hungry," I grinned.

"Begad!"

"Oh, my only topper!" muttered Watson. "Do you think that can be the explanation, Nipper?"

"I'm jolly sure it is," I replied. "I thought Fatty would wait until the morning, but it seems that he can't. I expect he's grown desperate after being without food for two meals."

"Oh, crumbs!" grinned Tommy Watson.

It was certainly somewhat ludicrous. Fatty Little had been pretending to be on hunger strike for two whole days. And just because he had been left without any food for two meals—tea and supper—he was arousing the whole Ancient House!

For him to think about waiting until the morning was quite out of the question—unthinkable! The pangs of hunger were so great that Fatty cared nothing for the consequences. All he wanted was food—anything that could be eaten, in fact.

"Oh, I shall die—I'm dying already!" groaned Fatty, as he paused in his yells for assistance. "I'm going to half slaughter that ass of a Tucker when I get out of here, the little rotter! Leaving me in the lurch like this!"

He continued his hammering, his sole object being to bring somebody to the punishment-room. He didn't care what the consequences might be, so long as he obtained some food.

Fenton and Morrow, of the Sixth, had been aroused with the others, and they immediately sallied out of their bedrooms to investigate. The two prefects had only just got into the corridor when they saw somebody coming up the stairs. They recognised the figure as that of Nelson Lee.

"Morrow—Fenton!" exclaimed Nelson Lee sharply. "What is the meaning of this commotion?"

"We don't know, sir," said one of the prefects. "I think it's Little in the punishment-room; he seems to have been taken bad."

"At any rate, his lungs are in perfect condition, to judge by the noise he is making," said Nelson Lee. "His muscles do not appear to be exceedingly weak, either."

"Well, sir, there seems to be something the matter with the young ass," said Fenton.

Nelson Lee made no reply, but went along the passage, and presently he arrived at the punishment-room. He flung the door open and entered the apartment. Fatty Little, hot and flustered, rushed into the Housemaster's arms, and Nelson Lee was almost bowled over backwards.

"Little!" he exclaimed sharply. "How dare you! What is the meaning—"

"I—I'm starving, sir!" gasped Fatty desperately. "I—I want some food, sir!"

"Indeed!"

"Gimme some grub, sir—anything!" panted Fatty. "I'm not particular, sir!"

"It appears that your hunger strike has come to a sudden termination, Little," said Nelson Lee grimly. "How is it that you have changed so abruptly? Your determination seems to have deserted you."

"It has, sir, but I can't help it," said Fatty weakly. "I—I'm dying, I believe! I haven't had anything to eat since dinner-time—since, I—I mean, since —"

"I think I understand, Little," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Well, I will see that some food is brought——"

"Hold on, sir!" said Fatty. "Can—I can I see Tucker, of the Remove?"

"I am afraid not."

"But I must see Tucker, sir, before I can eat any food!" said Fatty desperately. "Pleaso let me see Tucker, sir—I must!"

"If you will explain why——"

"I—I can't, sir—really, I can't, sir!" panted the fat junior. "Great pancakes! I'm dying—I'm starving to death! And I can't eat anything until I've seen Tucker; I mustn't touch a morsel of food!"

"You are acting very strangely, Little, but I suppose I must humour you," said Nelson Lee. "Morrow, will you kindly fetch Tucker here as quickly as possible!"

Morrow went off, grinning, and presently he returned with T. T., who was looking scared and ill at ease.

"I've brought you here, Tucker, because Little is anxious to speak with you," said Nelson Lee. "The poor boy is dying, according to his own story, and he must see you before the end!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed T. T. "This is distressing, my dear sir—it is most distressing. If I can be of any assistance—— Really, Little, I—I——"

Fatty had suddenly jerked Tucker into the punishment-room, and he took T. T. right across to the other side, near the window. Then he jammed Tucker against the wall and whispered fiercely into his ear.

"You—you rotter!" hissed Fatty. "Why didn't you bring my grub?"

"Really, Little, it was not my fault!" protested Tucker. "I was prevented——"

"You've got to release me from that promise," said Fatty threateningly. "If you don't, I'll half slaughter you! Am I released from that promise—that fatheaded promise I made to you not to eat any of the school grub?"

"Little I do not think I am justified in releasing you!"

"Am I released?" hissed Fatty, pushing a plump fist under T. T.'s nose. "Am I released, you bounder?"

"My dear sir, I—I—— Yes, my dear Little, you are released: I have no alternative but to agree!"

"Good!" said Fatty, rushing across the room. "Can I have some grub now, sir? I want a tremendous lot, sir, because I'm nearly starving; I—I believe I'm dying!"

"I think you had better wait until the morning, Little," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I do not think it is so very long since you had a meal, and it will not hurt you to——"

"Ow—yow—yarroooh!" yelled Fatty suddenly. "I—I'm feeling bad, sir! Oh! Yarroooh!"

Fatty flopped himself on the bed, nearly causing that structure to collapse, and then he proceeded to gasp wildly, kicking his legs about while he was doing so. Then gradually he subsided, and weakly demanded that food should be brought to him.

Morrow and Fenton were grinning hugely, and a crowd of juniors who had crept up to the door simply could not contain themselves. They knew quite well that Fatty was only putting it on, and they couldn't keep their laughter within them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you can laugh!" groaned Fatty. "I—I'm dying! I've been hunger striking for so long that I've got as thin as a rail!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's awful; I haven't tasted anything to eat since dinner-time," moaned Fatty. "And then I only had a few—— Great doughnuts! I—I mean, I haven't eaten any of the school grub for two days!"

"I agree with you on that point, Little," said Nelson Lee sternly. "But, by what I can understand, you

have been partaking of other food. You must explain to me how you received it. You have hoaxed poor Mrs. Poulter in a most disgraceful fashion, and I shall punish you, Little. Furthermore, you have deceived me, since you pretended to be hunger striking while you were actually obtaining food in large quantities."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The awful spoofer!"

"The fat swindler!"

"He ought to be starved for two days now as a lesson!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'm sinking rapidly!" groaned Fatty Little, rolling from side to side. "If I don't have some grub soon I shall fade away and die! I—I can't last much longer!"

However, a funeral was prevented by the timely arrival of a tray full of food. And the manner in which Fatty Little demolished this supply was rather an eye opener even for Nelson Lee, who was well acquainted with Fatty's appetite. The fat junior had been without food for only two meals, and now he was eating as though he had starved

himself for a week. As a hunger striker Fatty Little was not precisely a success.

On the evening of the following day Fatty Little was released, by the Head's order. And when he came among the other juniors in the Remove he was chipped unmercifully. He was submitted to a perfect storm of chaff, and he was only saved from being frog-marched round the Triangle by reason of his enormous weight. The juniors did not feel quite capable of the task.

It was just as difficult to bump him, and so Fatty Little escaped scot free. And after that there was nothing more heard of his famous hunger strike.

The following afternoon, which was a half holiday, marked the beginning of a somewhat astonishing period at St. Frank's, for Master Solomon Levi arrived at St. Frank's.

The coming of the Jewish boy was destined to be something of an event, and, further, Levi of the Remove turned out to be a most remarkable junior, and his arrival at St. Frank's was to be merely the beginning of an exceedingly stirring time for the Remove.

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Next week will see the commencement of another grand new series, in which Solomon Levi, the new Jewish boy at St. Frank's, will play a prominent part. Some of the boys—notably Fullwood and his supporters,—attempt to make hostile demonstrations against the newcomer; but the better spirit of the rest of the school prevails against unfair prejudice, and Levi is given a chance to prove himself worthy of their friendship.

Levi, indeed, turns out to be quite a decent chap. More than that, he has amazing business abilities, as will be seen when he opens a large cinema in Bannington for the boys of the school, in opposition to a disreputable concern which the Head has placed out of bounds. The rivalry between the two cinemas will form a strong feature in the forthcoming series, the first story of which begins next week with: "THE JEW OF ST. FRANK'S!"

THE EDITOR.

Thrilling New Serial of Brother and Sister Detectives!



KIT & CORA

Mysterious Detectives

A TALE OF DETECTIVE
ADVENTURE IN LONDON,

INTRODUCTION.

LIN FLEET, a lad of fifteen, wrongfully accused of stealing, loses his job at a motor garage. His parents being dead, he lives with an unscrupulous pair known as Uncle and Aunt Pawley, the former being better acquainted with the thefts at the garage than he would care to admit. Lin meets a stranger in a grey suit, who takes an interest in him, and the boy nicknames him "Mr. Mysterious." The stranger sends him on an errand to deliver a packet to a Mr. Crawson-Crake, who behaves like a madman and threatens to shoot the lad unless he discloses the name of his employer. Lin escapes and recounts his experiences to "Mr. Mysterious," at the latter's house in Hampstead. As a proof of his capabilities he is entrusted with a diamond pendant to take to a jewellers for a repair. After some exciting adventures the pendant is returned to the detective, and Lin is told that he will be needed for another and much more dangerous job.

(Now read on.)

A Drama of the Night.

BUT he is young for such work as this of to-night; and it is not his courage, but his memory that may fail, under the strain of excitement. But, Kit, are you sure of this man's identity?"

"Can you doubt it, Cora?" said Twyford. "What other man but the right one would have known the meaning of those seeming trifles in that little cardboard box? Or have displayed such fearful emotions at the sight of them?"

"True," said Cora; then asked rather anxiously, "But will he keep the appointment? Will he come? Suspecting danger, he may keep away."

"Suspecting danger, he will come!" declared Kit. "He will obey the summons in that brief note I enclosed with those toys, because he will hope to discover the enemy who thus threatens him, and to silence that enemy by bribery—or some more violent means! Oh, he will come, Cora, have no doubt about that—he will come!"

"Well, I know my part, and I quite thrill to play it!" Cora murmured, a keen light in her expressive eyes. "But what is Lin's? Have you planned his part, Kit?"

"Perfectly," answered her brother. "And I am now going to give him his instructions."

"I will leave you to it, then," said Cora, as she turned towards the door. "Good-bye, Lin!" she called out. "We shall probably meet again to-night!"

And she gave the boy a peculiar smile, friendly, yet with a grave shadow lurking in its depths. Lin did not understand it then. He did afterwards, when that night's work was come and gone!

"Now, Lin!" said Twyford, when they were alone. "I am going to give you your orders for to-night. Pay attention to every word, for not one word is unimportant!"

After the first word or two Lin could not have helped himself had he tried. He simply had to listen; for they were surely the strangest instructions that ever a boy received! He heard them with an interest which fast deepened into wonder. At moments he longed to ask questions; but there was something now in the stern, commanding tone and look of the man in grey that seemed to forbid it. He felt that, like a soldier, it was his part to take his orders without asking explanations—and then to obey them.

And he meant to obey them, to the letter. Such was the power of "Mr. Mysterious."

"Now," said Twyford, "the call. Listen, and try it after me."

He gave a low, peculiar whistle; a call of only three notes, yet so strange that it might have been distinguishable, amid a medley of other sounds, by expectant ears that knew it.

Lin tried it, failed, and tried again. He had a sensitive ear for musical sounds, and soon got the call perfectly.

Twyford nodded approval.

"Good!" he said. "You have it now! See that you do not forget it if the moment for it comes to-night! For to-night I am entrusting to your watchfulness and care something more precious than diamonds—a life dearer to me than my own!"

What was the mystery at the back of those strange words? What was to happen that night? Lin marvelled; but whatsoever it might be, he meant to do his part!

At midnight the Embankment seemed almost deserted, if only by contrast with the great arteries of traffic so

near, where the stir and bustle of life was still going strong, the great business of pleasure still in full swing.

There Night was denied, as though there were no such thing.

But there are no shining palaces of pleasure to bring such throngs to the Embankment, and Night had taken possession of it, as she had of the river that flowed darkly under its steep wall. So it seemed deserted—by contrast. It had traffic of its own, of course. The big, noisy electric-cars clattered down their iron rails out in the wide roadway; motors buzzed swiftly past; and now and then a horsed vehicle went by more slowly, adding the beat of hoofs and the rattle of harness.

But that was out in the broad roadway, and seemed so far off from the bare, shadow-flecked pavement over by the river, that the Embankment had nothing to do with it, any more than had the river itself.

The tide of light and motion did not reach thus far. The wide, dully-glistening pavement over by the river-side was bare and empty—or seemed so.

Now and then a belated pedestrian, or two or three together, would hurry along to catch a bus, tram, or train—homeward bound after a night of pleasure, or a late spell at work. These, with fireside or bed awaiting them, did not loiter, but passed quickly, and were soon out of the picture.

But there were others, who never hurried, having nothing to hurry for.

They had no business anywhere. Pleasure, to them, meant only to be allowed to slink into a corner and sleep—and forget. No bed or fireside awaited them. There was nothing to hurry for.

For they were the vagrants—scraps of human driftwood stranded on the lee-shore of Life!

They never hurried, but moved with a slinking gait all their own; moved, like shadows themselves, seeking a lodging for the night where the shadows were closest and most friendly.

Lin Fleet watched them curiously, but not without pity, and even a queer touch of fellow feeling. He remembered how he had felt, only a few hours ago, when he had suddenly realised that he was homeless in vast, night-shrouded London!

For all that, he was glad when several of those slouching figures had passed quite close to him, and yet not glanced his way or paused to accost him. But he seemed to be quite unnoticed in the black patch of shadow where he stood.

His post had been well chosen. His respect for the strange powers of "Mr. Mysterious" deepened to something like awe again, as he thought of that part of his instructions:

"The lamp-standard between the third and fourth seat past Cleopatra's Needle," had been the words. "There is a shadow at its base which, if you lean close against it and make no movement, will screen you completely."

And it was so. Drawn up close to the

broad base of the iron standard, the boy's slim figure seemed to become part of it, and was invisible to the casual glance.

"Now how did he know that?" mused Lin, who was a shrewd and thoughtful boy. "He must have eyes for everything, everywhere he goes, and notice, and store all sorts of queer little facts up in his mind, ready to bring out and make use of when he wants 'em. Thousands of people have passed this lamp-post, and not many, I reckon, ever bothered to notice how its own shadow wrapped it round like a long cloak at the bottom. But he did! Mighty strange sort of man! I wonder what his business is."

Just then Big Ben boomed out twelve.

It was the appointed time. Lin had a queer feeling that he was at the theatre, and the play about to begin. But for some minutes there was little to see. The two seats he had been told to watch, on either side of the lamp-post, were vacant, although nearly all the other seats, he had noticed as he came, were already claimed by tenants for the night. But these two remained empty.

And this was not by chance. More than once a slinking figure approached one or the other of those two seats as if to secure accommodation there. Then instantly a silent-footed policeman appeared—as if from nowhere—and with a motion of his gloved hand warned the intruder off. And when the vagrant had gone the policeman vanished, too, back into the shadows out of which he seemed to have come.

This happened several times; and then, as though a word of warning had been given, and passed from one to another, no more of these forlorn figures approached either seat, or appeared anywhere upon the broad stretch of pavement before them, which it tickled Lin's excited imagination to look upon as "the stage."

For quite a long interval—or so it seemed to the eager and expectant boy—"the stage" was empty. Then, from the roadway, a man approached the spot.

No ragged vagrant this time, but a man clad in a heavy, dark travelling-coat, with its high collar pulled well up about his ears, and a cap to match drawn closely over the upper part of his face. Lin noticed that he walked with a nervous, halting step, quite out of keeping with his age and appearance. For he was a big man, of powerful physique, and looked to be in the prime of life. He appeared to have been counting the seats as he came along, for Lin heard him mutter:

"This is it—the third. And it's vacant for a wonder—all the others seemed full up—and that's curious, come to think of it. Well, I'm here! Now—"

He had paused before the seat to the westward of Lin's post of observation, and now, with a nervous, furtive glance around, dropped heavily into it.

Presently, with a hand that was far from steady, he got out a cigarette and struck a vesta to light it. As the match flared up, it lighted the man's features strongly. And

then Lin very nearly betrayed his presence by a startled movement.

For he knew that face, with its strongly-marked, heavy lines, and its curious leaden pallor! Those bloodshot, mad-looking eyes had once glared into his with a threat of death!

For it was the face of the man to whom he had carried that queer box of toys—Crawson-Crake!

"That I should see him here to-night—of all men!" thought the amazed boy. He was so struck with wonder that he almost forgot why he himself was there, and lost himself, trying to imagine what next might happen—what it would all lead to.

Then he remembered the impressive words with which the man in grey had closed his instructions: "Do not let your thoughts wander, or give way to surprise. Do not wonder at anything you see or hear, but watch and listen, and hold yourself ready to give that signal on the instant, if it is needed. That is your part. See that you do not fail in it!"

He remembered, and collected his thoughts just in time to be aware that the second character in this strange act had appeared upon the scene. A slight and frail-looking old woman, in rusty, beggarly black, and with a queer, old-fashioned black bonnet, which just showed the lower portion of her thin, weazened face, and wisps of grey hair straggling from beneath its brim.

She had approached so quietly that she had actually seated herself quite close to Crawson-Crake before he noticed her. When he did so, it was with an exclamation of annoyance or disgust. Throwing away his cigarette, he half-rose as if to go. But the old woman put a thin, clawlike hand upon his coat-sleeve, and said, with an odd little simpering laugh:

"What, you're not going to run away! Why, what's come over your nerves? You—a great, big, strong man—can't be afraid of a poor little old woman like me!"

Crawson-Crake resumed his seat, but edged a little farther from her.

"What do you want with me?" he demanded, in a hoarse, deep undertone. "Why have you come—an old scarecrow like you?"

"Because he could not come himself," said the old woman. "Unless," she added—"unless he is here, only we cannot see him with our living eyes. He might be to-night, for you are here; and this is the very seat whereon that journey was planned from which he never came back, but went to his death! He might be here—who knows?"

The big, strong man threw a shuddering glance around him, like a child frightened in the dark.

"Ah, your nerves!" tittered the old woman. "That's bad nights, isn't it? Bad nights, bad dreams—and cocaine!"

He gave her a startled glare at that—a threatening glare. But she merely tittered again, and went on:

"Why have I come? I have come to tell you a story—the story of young Charlie

Hearne. You knew it once—who should know it better than you? But you may have forgotten; you have been trying to forget—with the help of cocaine."

Again he threatened her by a look. She did not move or even flinch.

"Charlie Hearne's mother kept a small news-shop out Romford way. She worked hard, and did pretty well in a small way; and might have done better if her son had put his heart into the business and helped her. But, although not bad at heart, Charlie was a weak sort of young man, and too fond of pleasure. He would wheedle out of his mother all the money she could spare—and sometimes more than she could spare—and go off to London on what he called a 'sprees.' It was in London, and on one of those 'sprees,' that he must have picked up with you, and with your crony at that time, James Markel. It was a black, bad hour for him, when he met the pair of you!"

Another threat of the eyes, which she calmly ignored, as before.

"After one of these outbreaks—which often lasted several days and nights—Charlie Hearne would creep back home, stripped of every penny, and broken in health. And always his indulgent fool of a mother would take him in, forgive him, and nurse him back to health."

"Why am I fool enough to sit here and listen to all this rot!" Lin heard Crawson-Crake growl, with an added oath.

"Listen! You may have forgotten, or may not even have heard the bit that I'm going to tell you now. And it's so interesting!" tittered the old woman.

"Mrs. Hearne had a lodger, a man who had been a great rover in his time—been everywhere, and been everything, and come to nothing at last. A tropical fever had ruined his constitution, and in middle-life he had come back to England to linger out his days on a small pension, or something of that sort. Spicer—that was his name—was taken very ill just about the time that Charlie Hearne came back home from one of those 'sprees' in London; the longest—and the last, as it turned out.

"Young Charlie was ill himself, and very penitent. As he got better he showed it by staying at home, helping his mother in the business, and taking a turn with nursing the lodger. They were both very kind to Spicer, and he was grateful. He said that he had nothing to give in return, but a secret he had kept for years, hoping to use it one day. But that, he said, was out of the question now, his days were run out. But the secret, he declared, was worth a fortune—a huge fortune—and if only young Charlie had the pluck and enterprise it might be his."

The old woman paused; then, actually laying her hand upon the arm of the grimly-silent man beside her, said with a crooning chuckle:

(Continued on page III of cover.)

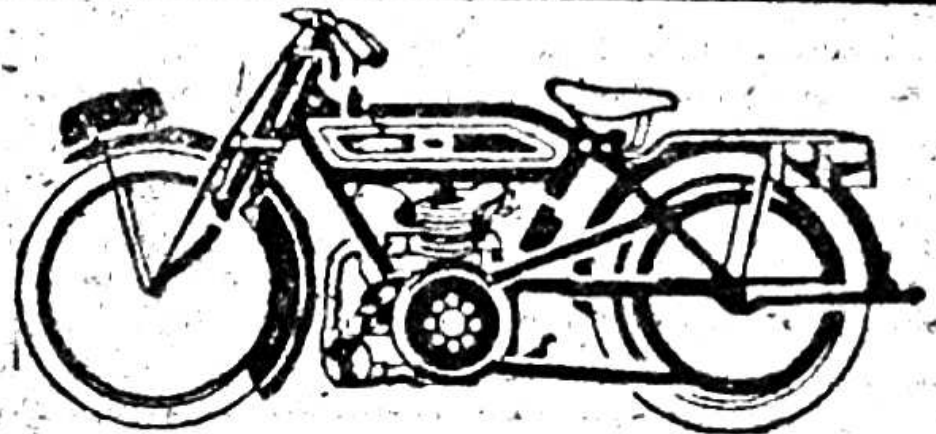
"Aren't you burning to know what that secret was, Mr. Crawson-Crake? It is so interesting—quite thrilling! For to one man and another it brought great riches, and to a third it brought only a fearful death!" The man growled an oath, and throwing

off the old creature's shrivelled hand, raised his powerful arm as if to strike her. Lin's blood fired up. He gathered himself to spring to her aid!

(To be continued.)

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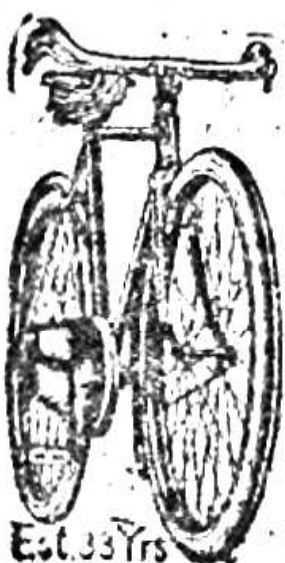
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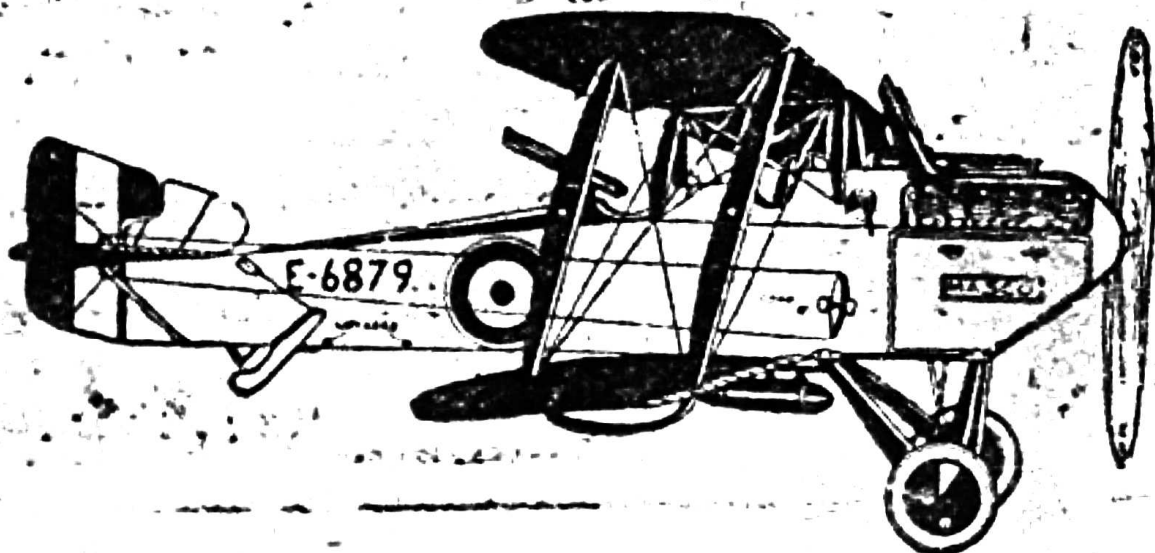
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