

Laughable Character Introduced in This Week's Story!

THE

PRICE

NELSON LEE

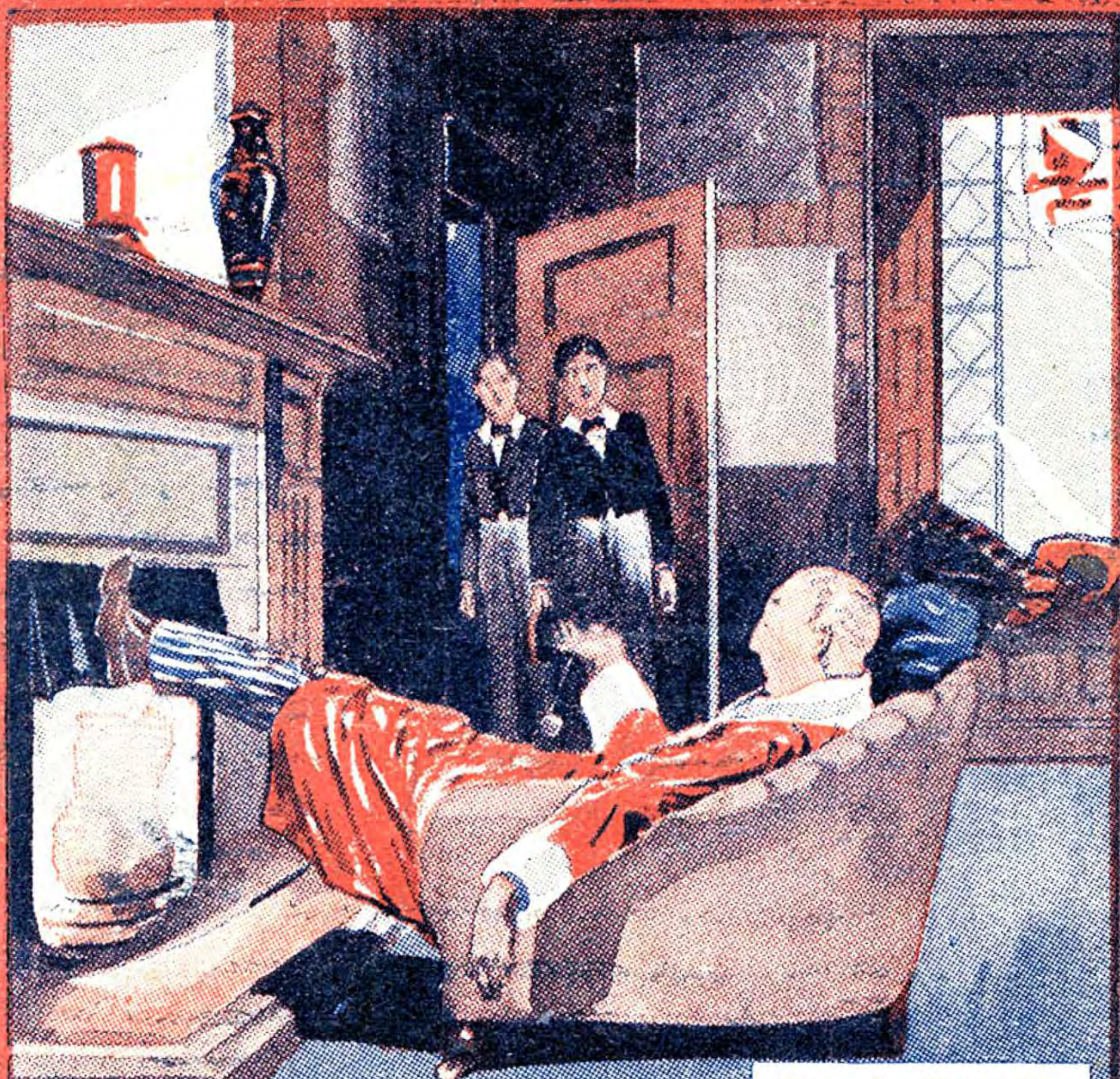
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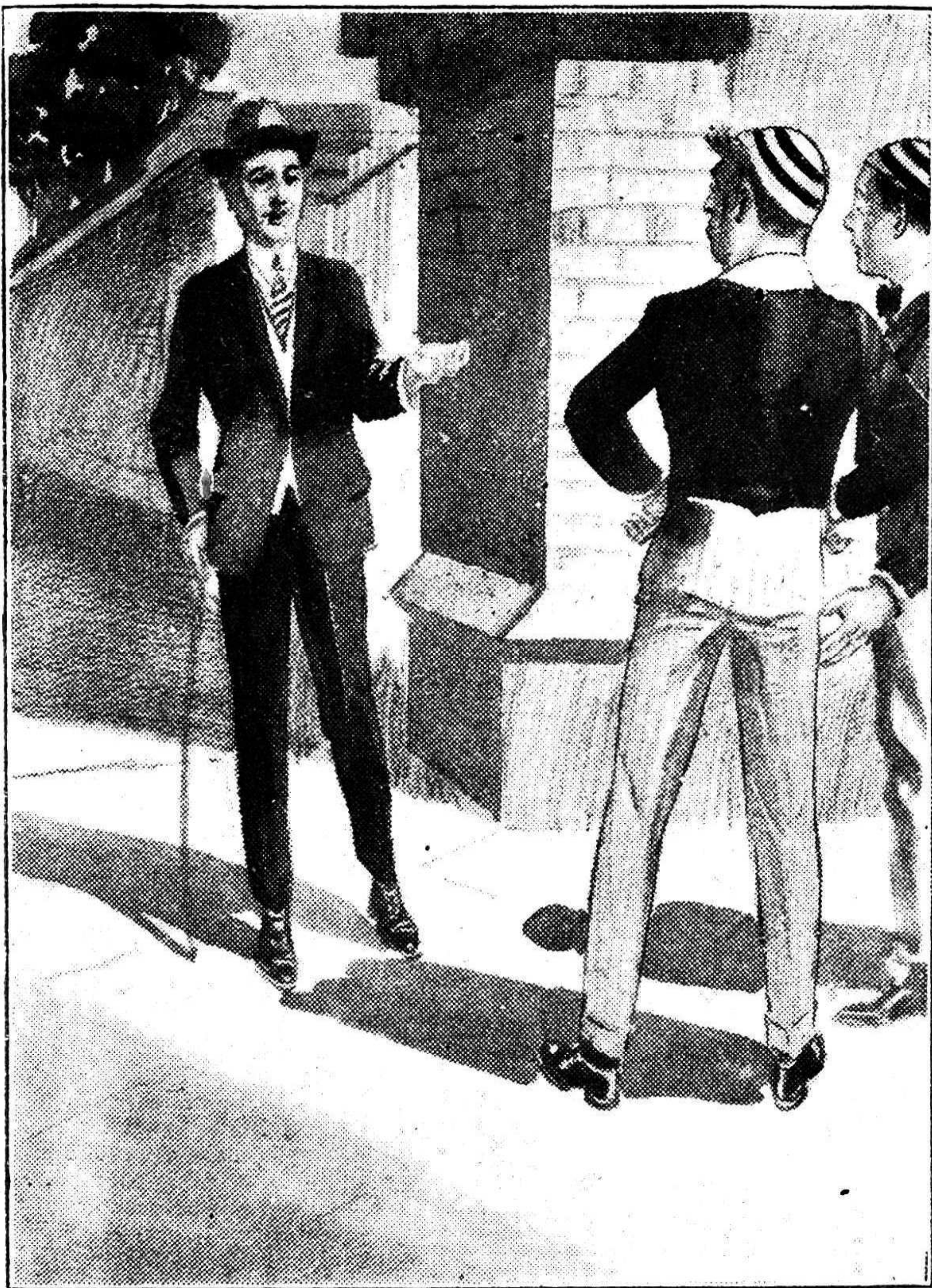
EVERY WEDNESDAY.

March 4, 1922



THE COMING OF ARCHIE

Then I observed a pair of legs protruding towards the fireplace from the depths of a big armchair.



"What the dickens do you think you're doing?" demanded Handforth aggressively. Archie Glenthorne smiled amiably, and swished his cane. "I mean to say, we've arrived, old fruit!" he remarked casually.

THE COMING OF ARCHIE



You will all like Archie. He is a knut of the first water, and his droll, happy-go-lucky manner of speech will set you laughing throughout the whole of the following story, which is mainly about Archie, who, in my opinion, is one of the best character-studies the author of our famous St. Frank's stories has ever created. When you have read this story, recommend it to your friends.—The Editor.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A NIGHT EXPEDITION !

CRACKLE—blaze—crackle !
The camp fire sent tongues of flame leaping upwards into the night sky, and it distributed a grateful warmth over a wide circle. And, squatting all round, in every kind of posture, lay the St. Frank's Cadets.

The night was clear and chilly, but the big camp fire was so cheerful, that it dispelled all the gloom and the cold. The flickering flames revealed the swiftly flowing current of the River Stowe, near by.

"Not so dusty !" remarked Corporal Pitt, languidly.

"Jolly decent, in fact," yawned De Valerie. "Upon the whole, we're doing fairly well, I think. The boathouse won't be a particularly comfy place to sleep in, but I daresay we shall manage to snooze a bit."

"It'll be your own silly fault if you don't !" growled Edward Oswald Handforth. "It was a fatheaded thing to leave the island—I've said so all along. Just because that idiotic Mr. Giddy orders us off, it's no reason why we

should tamely go ! Nipper ought to be jolly well kicked for knuckling under.

I smiled.

"Still growling about it, Handy ?" I asked. "I've explained more than once that we were absolutely compelled to give in. Giddy had the law on his side, and we simply couldn't resist without placing ourselves hopelessly in the wrong."

Sergeant Handforth sniffed.

"Possession is nine points of the law !" he said grimly.

"So it is," I agreed, "but what about the tenth point ? We could have held out against all forms of attack for days, perhaps weeks—but we didn't camp on Willard's Island with the idea of setting up a state of siege. It's not our property, and if the owner comes along and says that we've got to quit—well, it's up to us to clear out."

"That fat little pig, Giddy, isn't the owner !"

"No, but he's the owner's estate manager, and in the eyes of the law, that's the same thing," I pointed out. "No, Handy, if we'd defied old Giddy, we should have placed ourselves hopelessly in the wrong. But you needn't

think that I mean to put up with it. This'll probably be the only night we shall camp here. There'll be some changes to-morrow."

"Nipper's right," said Bob Christine. "We don't want to get the Cadets into disrepute as soon as ever the Corps is formed. And, after all, you can't call this much of a hardship. Inconvenient, perhaps, but that's all."

And Christine rolled himself more comfortably over on his blanket, and began to doze in front of the cheerful blaze. Two or three of the other juniors were already nodding off.

It was, in fact, practically bedtime.

We were just against the St. Frank's boathouse, on the banks of the River Stowe. It was the temporary camp of the St. Frank's Cadet Corps. But we had only come there that morning—having previously been securely and comfortably settled upon Willard's Island.

We had taken quite a lot of pains to make the island a first-class camp. And then, at a moment's notice, we had been turned off. Quite a number of exciting incidents had led up to this result.

The Cadets, of course, were camping out because of the recent storm disaster to the school. A part of the Ancient House roof had collapsed, causing the utter ruin of the Remove and Fifth Form dormitories.

These apartments were now under repair, with a host of workmen busily engaged on the job. But it would probably be a month before things were shipshape again. In the meantime, all kinds of temporary devices had to be adopted.

Thirty or forty fellows had been squashed into other dormitories, most of them in the College House. But this still left about thirty unaccounted for. The Head had decided to send a crowd of Remove fellows to another school. And then I had stepped in with my idea regarding the Cadet Corps.

And thus it came about that the Cadets had gone into camp on Willard's Island, in the middle of the River Stowe. It was not an ordinary river island—just a piece of wooded land jutting out of the water.

Willard's Island differed from all the others in the fact that in the very centre of it stood a sturdily built dwelling—which looked for all the world like an old time castle, with battlements, and towers, and all the rest of it.

This stone building had been constructed by old John Willard, the rich old crank who had died over ten years earlier. Willard's Folly—as the place was called—had never been completed. The old eccentric had died before his quaint dream could be realised.

We had never had the faintest suspicion that we should be turned off the island in such a peremptory manner. It had come as a complete shock to us. And now we had made another camp at the St. Frank's boathouse. Everything was upside down and in a state of confusion.

After the camp fire had died down a bit, the Cadets rose, and retired into the boathouse itself. Here a couple of oilstoves were on the go, battling valiantly with the dampness of the place.

The Cadets were soon well wrapped in their

sleeping bags and blankets, and most of them lost all interest in the proceedings. There were two sentries on duty, however.

These sentries were Church and McClure. They either paced up and down by the fire, or squatted on an old box, and yawned. They couldn't see any earthly reason why sentries should be required. But, after all, it was a Cadet camp, and so some show of military routine was required.

"I'll be jolly glad when our spell's over!" said Church, stifling a yawn. "My hat! We've got to stick it until twelve o'clock! It's hardly ten yet, and we've got over two hours——"

"Well, it's better than being up in the middle of the night, like some of the other sentries," said McClure comfortingly. "I reckon we're lucky. Chuck some more wood on the fire!"

This was done, and the fire was soon crackling up with renewed vigour. And when the time was getting on towards eleven, Church was suddenly surprised to see two figures emerge from the boathouse.

"Who goes there?" he demanded sharply.

"Friend!" I exclaimed. "It's all right, Church, old son. Keep your hair on. Watson and I didn't feel very sleepy."

"Didn't we?" growled Tommy Watson. "I was sleeping like a top when you woke me up, you ass! I think this is a dotty idea, if you ask me."

"Well, I'm not going to ask you, so it doesn't matter," I said, as I came into the warm radius of the camp fire. "Everything going well?"

"Seems like it," said McClure. "But what's the idea?"

"Gather round, children, and uncle will explain!" I said. "The fact is, Tommy and I are going to make a few investigations."

"This is the first I've heard of it," growled Watson.

"Exactly—but you're coming with me, all the same," I went on. "I seized the opportunity, because you sentries are in the know."

"In the know?" repeated Church.

"About the treasure, I mean."

"Oh!"

Church and McClure became more interested.

"There were six of us who discovered that old brass-bound box containing the cipher message and the curious old jigsaw puzzle," I said. "We found it during the height of the flood, and the other two chaps in the secret are Handforth and Sir Montie. They're asleep, and we needn't wake 'em up."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Church curiously.

"Make a few investigations—as I told you just now," I said. "You remember what happened when that old brass-bound box was found? Two rough rivermen named Captain Niggs and Ben Croke were with us, and Handy was ass enough to open the box and show that cipher message, and jaw about old Willard. He talked about Willard's missing fortune, and suggested that the cipher was a clue to a hidden treasure. We've got to thank Handy for all this trouble."

"Why?" asked Watson.

"Because Niggs and Croke have been on the

track of the treasure ever since," I replied, "We don't even know if a treasure really exists—it might be all bunkum. At the same time, I'm pretty certain that there's something big behind it all. And Niggs and Croke are of the same opinion."

"The rotters are on the island now!" said Church indignantly.

"Exactly," I agreed. "I'm pretty certain they put old Giddy on the track of things, and their chief idea was to get us turned off, so that they could step in. They wanted to be on the island—and they're there. And Tommy and I are just going off to prow about, and see what the beggars are up to."

"Oh, so that's the idea?" asked Watson.

"Yes, my son, that is the idea," I said.

"I'm a bit puzzled. There's a third man in the game, I believe—somebody whom we haven't come in contact with yet. I think I told you about that incident at the school the other night?"

"You mean when Mr. Lee was attacked?"

"Yes. He was trying to find out the secret of that cipher," I exclaimed. "Then he was attacked by a masked man and two others, who nearly got away with the cipher and the jigsaw puzzle. That incident alone was clear proof that Niggs & Co. are hot on the track, and mean to stick to it. And they wangled things so that we were turned off the island. And now they're in possession, with a clear field to look for the treasure."

"But they haven't got any clue," objected Watson. "How the dickens can they hope to find anything without that cipher message?"

"They're trusting to chance, I suppose," I said. "Not much good, of course, but they're certainly on the spot. That's a big advantage. Anyhow, we're going along to the island now, to nose about a bit."

"When will you be back?" asked Church.

"Well, before twelve," I replied. "We must return before your watch comes to an end. The sentries who follow you don't know anything about this treasure business, and we don't want to start any jaw. Expect us back in about an hour."

A few minutes later Tommy Watson and I were off. There were several boats just on the river bank, already to be launched. We quietly slipped one into the water, and glided off.

I took the oars, and silently struck out into the middle of the stream. Willard's Island was some little distance below—black and silent in the centre of the river, which widened out at that point.

The island itself was only a small place, rising steeply towards the centre, with the

old building surmounting the whole. Trees grew thickly round about, partially concealing the old grey stonework.

It was possible, therefore, for us to land on the island without exposing ourselves. We pushed the nose of our boat into the rushes in a quiet little inlet, and a minute or two later we were creeping noiselessly through the willows towards the central building.

There was a certain amount of risk attached to this expedition, for if we were caught we should be hopelessly beaten, for both Captain Niggs and Mr. Ben Croke were powerful men, in spite of their remarks to the contrary. A battle with the rascally pair could hardly end in anything else but disaster for us.

We were not anxious for an encounter. Our sole object was to prow about, and discover what the men were doing. I should be very surprised if we found them sound asleep.

We emerged from the trees, and saw the building just in front of us. It was dark and gloomy, with the stone battlements rising grimly against the night sky. There seemed something sinister about the place now.

There was no sign of life. Not a sound, and not even a flicker of light. We waited for several minutes before advancing further. Then, step by step, we continued our way.

At last we were close against the building. And now we edged our way along the wall until we came to one of the windows. These contained no glass, and, while we had occupied the island, we had covered them with blankets, or pieces of

sacking. The old Folly was not a ruin. It had never been really completed. That part of it which had been put up was strong and sturdy as ever, with no sign of decay.

Parts of the roof had never been covered over. We had spread great sheets of tarpaulin and waterproof roofing material for this purpose. And we had made everything snug and cosy.

Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke were now getting the benefit of this.

I had expected to see some signs of a light or fire. But everything appeared to be quite deserted. I began to wonder if Niggs and Croke had taken their departure at nightfall. Or perhaps they were paying a late visit to one of the local inns—the White Harp, for example.

Just as I was coming to this conclusion, I heard a faint crackle, and, arriving at the next window, I peered in, to see the remains of a wood fire burning in one of the grates. The embers sent out a faint glow—sufficient, in that pitchy darkness, to make the objects in the apartment seem quite plain.



"Well, here we absolutely are," said Archie, chattily.
Dr. Stafford laid down his pen and adjusted his glasses.

And, upon an old packing case, I could see a much-used peak cap, and an ordinary cloth cap. Near by, there was a heap of blankets. Those two caps told their own story. Niggs and Croke were not absent. Neither were they asleep, or they would have been wrapped in the blankets.

Where, then, could they be?

I listened intently, but could hear no sounds, except for an occasional gurgle from the river. Then, faintly but distinctly, there came a kind of dull thud. It was peculiar. I felt it rather than heard it.

"Did you notice anything?" I breathed, to Watson.

"Yes. There was a sort of thud——"

"There it is again!" I interrupted. "What the dickens——"

I paused. Several other thuds had come. They seemed so far away and distant from the island that I half concluded that they were caused by some agency several miles distant—a Bannington factory, perhaps.

Then I suddenly jumped to the truth.

"Why, of course!" I whispered. "Don't you understand, old son? Niggs and Croke must be down in the cellars—right beneath us, perhaps. They're knocking on the old stonework, trying to find the treasure chamber."

"Well, I'm blessed!" breathed Tommy.

Without another word, I moved towards the door, feeling fairly safe in doing so. Watson followed close behind. We tip-toed our way across the wide central apartment, and then went down a passage until we came to a stone door. This stood ajar, and led on to a flight of stone steps which proceeded downwards into the very earth.

Here a complete set of cellars, or dungeons, had been built. Surprisingly enough, they were quite dry and well ventilated—even after the place had been disused for so many years. In fact, it had never been used at all. Standing at the top of those stairs, we peered down.

And now we could hear the thuds clearly and sharply. While we crouched there the figure of a man appeared below. He was carrying a candle, and he had a hammer in his other hand. The man was Captain Joshua Niggs.

Close in his rear came the wizened-up figure of Mr. Ben Croke. They passed out of view along the other portion of the passage. And, presently, the thudding began all over again. I gently nudged Tommy.

We retired, until we found ourselves back in the open.

"Aren't you going to do anything?" asked Watson.

"Tell me what we can do, and I'll do it," I said. "It's no good going down into those cellars. We should only find a packet of trouble. And, even supposing we'd got away, we should simply be telling Niggs that we're aware of his game. No, my son, the best thing we can do is to get back to camp. And tomorrow we've got to take possession of the island again—simply got to! We can't afford to be away from here another night!"

"But how's it going to be done?" asked Tommy.

"I don't know," I said thoughtfully. "But

I've got one or two ideas lingering in my head. Come on, we'll make a move."

As we went down towards our boat, I suddenly paused. Glancing up, I had seen a jutting portion of the island outlined against the sky. It was that portion which had collapsed during the flood. I remembered having seen some brickwork there, embedded amongst the earth.

"By the way," I whispered. "Now we're here we might as well have a look at that cliff. We've had plenty of chances, but we've never even examined it. This is a good opportunity."

We altered our direction, and climbed up towards the high projection.

CHAPTER II.

THE HIDDEN TUNNEL.



WE arrived, after a good deal of scrambling, in the loose earth.

The jutting piece of land formed a kind of cliff.

Before the flood the ground had sloped down steeply to the water's edge. But the flood had undermined the little hill, and had caused a big portion of it to collapse, carrying with it sundry trees, and a number of bushes.

"Well, here we are," said Watson. "What's the good of it?"

"Don't be so jolly impatient!" I replied, pulling out my electric torch. "We shall only be here a minute or two; I just want to have a squint round."

"Better not turn that torch on——"

"Why not?" I asked. "Those rotters are down in the cellars, and they can't see anything. We're safe enough here."

I pressed the switch, and a bright beam of light flashed out. And the light revealed the freshly crumbled earth and a mass of loose stones—big stones, squarely hewn, proving that they were not natural. It really seemed as though these big blocks of stone had been built right into the hill—hidden from the vulgar gaze, as it were. Only that little landslide had revealed the truth.

I could also see a clear space between some of the stones, and inky darkness beyond, as though some kind of cavity existed. At first sight it seemed that there was not sufficient room for the cat to pass. I touched one of the stones, and tugged at it. It fell away on the instant, almost before I had exerted any effort. A number of the blocks crashed with it.

"My goodness!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"That was unexpected, anyhow!" I exclaimed. "By Jove! But look what's happened. There's a kind of cavern here, my son. It might be a bit risky venturing in, but I'm game. You'd better stay outside——"

"Rats!" grunted Watson. "If you go, I'll go."

I led the way in, crawling on my hands and knees, and Tommy Watson followed immediately in my rear. I had a horrible kind of

feeling that the roughly constructed stone roof of the tunnel might collapse at any moment.

But nothing of this sort happened—fortunately for me. And, after a while, the tunnel increased in height, so that I found it possible to gain my feet, and proceed in a crouching attitude.

"This looks jolly interesting!" I exclaimed keenly, as we paused for a moment. "Nobody ever suspected that a tunnel led right through this part of the island. Why, it might even lead straight to the treasure!"

"That's what I was thinking," said Watson. "I say, how ripping if we locate the gold straight off, and dish those ruffians in the eye. That'll be something to shout about, won't it?"

"It will; but don't start shouting yet!" I said. "Lucky things like that only happen in stories—not in real life. You'd better resign yourself to a disappointment. It's bound to come."

"Well, anyway, we've found something," said Watson comfortingly. "And we can always hope for the best even if the best doesn't happen."

"Tommy," I grinned, "you're a true optimist."

I led the way further into the tunnel, and it was just as well that I went cautiously, and I was armed with a good light. For, without any warning, a steep flight of stone steps yawned in front of me.

If I had not been very careful I should have stepped straight off into space, and would have had a very nasty fall.

"Go careful here," I whispered. "Steps leading downwards. Surprise after surprise, my lad. The plot thickens. Beware of hidden dangers."

"Don't be an ass!" grunted Watson. "Let's go down."

The air seemed quite pure, and so we did not hesitate. In fact, a distinct draught was coming up the stairs. The air smelt a trifle musty but perfectly wholesome, for all that.

The very island seemed to be honeycombed with these strange old tunnels and underground passageways. Old John Willard had had a regular orgy of excavating before he died. He had spent two or three years building his folly, and so had had plenty of time for fancy-work, so to speak.

We descended the steps very cautiously, for they were so steep as to be treacherous. However, after a careful trip, we arrived at the bottom, and found that the passage continued onwards, but now at right angles. However, it was not very long, for we presently came into a square chamber.

"Hail!" murmured Watson. "What's this?"

"Looks like a cheery dungeon to me," I replied. "And it's apparently never been used. It seems that we've come to the end of our rope, old son."

The chamber was quite small, being only about eight foot square and less than five feet in height. At the other end there was a continuation of the tunnel—at least, so it seemed.

A very brief investigation, however told us that it was a cul-de-sac. The tunnel simply

went on for about ten feet, and then finished in a blank wall. Further progress was out of the question.

We returned to the chamber and looked round with interest.

"Not much treasure here," I remarked lightly.

"Don't be funny," grumbled Watson. "I never really expected there would be any treasure. There's nothing here at all except dust. Well, what's the good of this? We might just as well clear out. There's no sense in remaining here, and we're losing all our beauty sleep."

"Don't be in such a hurry," I replied. "We haven't had time to look round yet. It's pretty obvious that there must be a continuation of the tunnel somewhere."

"Through that solid stone wall, I suppose?"

"Very likely."

"What?"

"My dear chap, things are not always what they seem to be in places like this," I said. "Nobody would build a tunnel leading to a miserable little chamber of this sort. I'll guarantee that there is a secret door somewhere. I'm not suggesting that we should try and find it now, but——"

Thud!

"What—what was that?" gasped Watson faintly.

We both stood stock still, listening.

And then, in spite of myself, I felt my scalp tingling, and my heart began to thump with more than its usual speed. For, to my ears, there came a most peculiar sound.

It was like a moan—rising and falling—and so faint that I began to think that it was merely a trick of my imagination. And it had immediately followed that indistinct kind of thud.

"Can you hear anything now?" I whispered softly.

Tommy Watson gulped.

"Yes, a—a kind of—of groaning noise," he whispered. "There it is. Oh, my hat! Let's get out of this rotten place!"

"Don't get scared."

"I'm not scared, you fathead!" snapped Watson. "But—but it's awful, you know! What can the sound be? And that thud. It sounded just like the top of a tomb being let down."

"You'll only make yourself worse by imagining idiotic things like that," I exclaimed. "There must be some natural explanation. Perhaps it's the wind coming through a crack."

We listened again.

And now the sounds were even more distinct, but, at the same time, vague and peculiar. They seemed to be far away and yet, at the same time, hovered all about us.

It reminded me of a description I had once read of a spiritualistic seance. Faint spirit voices had been heard in the darkness. But that, of course, was different, since the "spirit" voices were probably faked. I'm no believer in spiritualism.

In this case it was even more extraordinary. For the little cavern was brilliantly illuminated

by means of my electric torch, and Tommy and I were absolutely alone. And yet these strange sounds filled the very air. Then again came a thud. It was followed by two others.

"Spirit rappings," murmured Watson shakily. "Spirit piffle!" I snapped. "Why, Great Scott! Ha, ha, ha!"

I broke off, and gave vent to a soft laugh. Tommy Watson stared at me in rather a scared way. Perhaps he thought I had gone dotty.

"You—you fathead!" he panted. "What are you going off like that for!"

"Because I've thought of the only explanation," I grinned. "We're a pair of beauties, getting the wind up over nothing."

"But—but——"

"My dear old son, there's nothing to raise your back hair about," I said. "Those thuds are caused by the hefty hammer of Captain Niggs, and the weird moans are simply the voices of Niggs and Old Croke."

Tommy Watson stared.

"But—but we're hundreds of yards away."

"No, we're not," I interrupted. "I've just been getting the hang of things, and I've realised that we've been coming along this tunnel until at this minute we're right underneath the old building. And Niggs and Croke are down in those dungeons, treasure hunting. They're probably only separated from us by one of these walls."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Watson blankly.

"Listen again, and you'll find out that I'm right."

We did listen, and the moaning sounds came again. But now that we knew the truth—or what was practically certain to be the truth—the sound had no terrors for us. It could be recognised as the rising and falling intonations of the human voice; but it was so vague and indistinct, that no words could be distinguished. Then came the thuds once more.

"Well, it's no good us remaining here," I whispered. "We might be exploring all night without finding the secret. We'll pay another visit to the place when we've got more time. Don't forget we promised to be back before midnight, and it's not far off now. We've been gone nearly an hour."

"By Jove, yes!" said Watson.

"I thought about making one or two nice wild howls," I grinned. "If we can hear Niggs, it stands to reason that he would be able to hear us. What a shock we'd give the blighters!"

"Let's do it," said Tommy eagerly.

I shook my head.

"Not now," I said. "We'll have other opportunities. It might drive the beggars up to the surface, and then they'd spot us leaving the island. That would give the whole show away."

And so rather reluctantly we made our way up the stone steps and along the tunnel, until at length we were in the open air. Upon the whole, I was feeling quite satisfied with the result of my investigations. And I was all the more resolved to be back on Willard's Island the next day.

Once in our boat we pulled silently upstream.

"Tommy we've got to get the better of these

rotters to-morrow," I said grimly. "We've been pitched off the island, and you can see the result. Niggs and Croke are in possession, and they're searching for the treasure. At any minute they might come across it by accident, villains generally have a lot of luck."

"But how can we get back?"

"I don't exactly know," I replied. "But in the morning first thing I'm going off to Colonel Glenthorne's place. This island belongs to him, Giddy is only the estate manager."

"But, my dear chap, Colonel Glenthorne is abroad!" said Tommy.

"Tell me some news," I replied. "Of course he's abroad. But surely there must be somebody at Glenthorne Manor who can countermand the orders of an officious estate steward? Colonel Glenthorne's mother, or sister—or aunt—or anybody, in fact. We can go there, state our case, and chance the result. In all probability we shall click, and Mr. Pompous Giddy will have to sing small."

"By Jingo, that's a great wheeze!" said Watson.

"It's nothing of the sort—it's simply the first thing to be done," I replied. "It's the obvious thing to be done. If we go there and find nobody at all, I've got another plan. I'll jolly well send a cablegram to the colonel, asking if we have his permission to use the island. I believe he's a sport, and he'll probably wire back that we can do as we like. A cablegram to Switzerland won't cost much. If Mr. Giddy thinks that we're going to take his rot lying down—well, he's made one large-sized bloomer."

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCING ARCHIE.



"RIPPING place!" said Tommy Watson approvingly.

We were walking up the drive of Glenthorne Manor, wheeling our bicycles. We thought it looked more

sedate to walk. It was just about ten o'clock in the morning, and the sun was shining brilliantly. The early March day, in fact, was quite springlike.

Nelson Lee had given Watson and I permission to cut morning lessons, for the especial purpose of coming over to Glenthorne Manor on the off-chance of being able to find a responsible member of the family at home. The gov'nor had suggested ringing up, but I tabooed that. Perhaps Giddy had been doing some talking, and a telephone is not a very excellent means of stating one's case.

It was far better to come personally.

Glenthorne Manor was a splendid old pile—indeed, about the finest country seat in the whole neighbourhood. The Glenthorne family was a very-ancient one. It had been a family of great soldiers for centuries, and the Glenthornes were true aristocrats. Although not titled, they probably possessed bluer blood than the majority of lords and earls.

Colonel Glenthorne himself had served in India, in South Africa, and in Egypt. He had won the D.S.O. and the V.C., to say nothing of numerous other honours and medals. I was rather glad that he wasn't at home, for I had an idea that Colonel Glenthorne was a bit of a martinet.

A couple of gardeners were at work on the flower beds in front of the mansion. The lawns were like velvet. The terrace which bordered the front of the big mansion was gravelled, and looked beautifully neat. Somehow, Tommy and I felt rather awed as we leaned our bicycles at the bottom of the wide stone steps, and mounted towards the front door.

"I say, we'd better chuck it up," suggested Tommy nervously.

"Not likely!" I replied. "Now that we're fairly on the job, we'll stick it out. Let's hope we meet with success."

We arrived at the door, and I gave the bell a hard push. We heard it buzzing faintly and indistinctly in the distance. Then followed a pause. We were just beginning to think that there would be no answer, when the massive door was swung open.

We found ourselves gazing upon a man who looked very much like an archbishop, or some staid dignitary of the Church. As a matter of fact, he was Ferris, the butler. He regarded us as a man might regard a couple of ants.

"Well, and what is it you want, lads?" he asked indulgently.

"I would like to see Colonel Glenthorne—but I happen to know that Colonel Glenthorne is abroad," I said. "Can you tell me if there is any other member of the family at home?"

Ferris shook his head.

"I'm afraid you've wasted your time, my boys," he said. "The family is all abroad. Colonel Glenthorne and his lady, and Mr. Harold, and Mr. George. They're in Switzerland, enjoying of the winter sports. At least, they was——"

"And there is nobody at home?" I inquired.

"Well, young gentlemen, there's Mrs. Glenthorne senior," said the butler dubiously. "But she's rare old, and so deaf that she can't hear anything. Besides which, I've strict orders that she hasn't got to be disturbed by no one."

"I'm awfully sorry——"

"And, of course, there's Master Archibald," said the butler, in a queer voice.

"Master Archibald?"

"Yes, my lad: Master Archibald being Colonel Glenthorne's youngest son. Master Archibald's at home——"

"Couldn't we see him?" I asked eagerly, and with rising hopes.

"Well, there's no reason why you shouldn't," replied Ferris, scratching his ear. "But I shouldn't advise you to, young gentlemen. You won't do no good. You see," he added in a confidential voice, "Master Archibald is—— Well, perhaps it wouldn't be right for me to say any more."

And the butler gave us a significant look.

"All the same, I think we'll chance it," I said. "Do you mind going to Master Archibald, and telling him that two juniors from St.



The figure of a man appeared below. He was carrying a candle, and he had a hammer in his other hand.

Frank's College would like to have a few words with him. Tell him the subject is a very important one, and he will greatly oblige us by granting an interview."

"Very good," said the butler. "If you'll just step hinside."

We stepped hinside, and waited in the wide, spacious hall while the butler walked down towards a great baize door as though next year would do. He vanished silently. We found ourselves gazing at the trophies of the hunt which decorated the great walls.

"I wonder what's wrong with Master Archibald?" whispered Watson. "The old butler seemed a bit queer, didn't he?"

"We'll soon find out," I said. "Anyway, it's the only chance. I imagine that Master Archibald is a youngster, otherwise he would have been referred to as 'Mister,' like Harold and George. If we can only get him on our side we can——"

I paused, as the baize door opened again, and the majestic Ferris appeared.

"Kindly step this way, young gentlemen," he said smoothly.

We stepped briskly, and followed the butler to a wide-open doorway. The blaze of a fire flickered from within, and Ferris stood on one side, and there was a strange smile on his face—just as though he were some stage villain luring us into a trap.

As we entered, he seized the door handle, and closed the door behind us. We found ourselves in an apartment which was of a peculiar nature. It was magnificently furnished, with lounge chairs and a soft pile carpet. But round the walls there were maps, like a schoolroom. At first the apartment seemed to be quite empty. Then I observed a pair of legs protruding towards the fireplace from the depths of a big armchair. The legs were encased in fearfully coloured silk pyjamas, and the edge of a brilliant red dressing-gown was in evidence.

Then, suddenly, Master Archibald appeared. Or, perhaps it would be better to say he appeared gradually. He raised himself out of the chair in much the same style as an old man of ninety might have done. At last he stood upright, and gazed over towards us. He was a well-set-up young fellow of about sixteen—certainly not more. He had surprisingly fair hair, and a face that was as fresh as a girl's. And his features were quite aristocratic in their cast. His grey eyes regarded us languidly and indifferently.

"Oh, there you are, then!" he observed. "That is, I mean to say, what?"

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Master Archibald," I began. "We didn't know that you were still in a state of deshabelle——"

"Don't mention it, old fruit!" exclaimed Archie. "Don't even breathe it, and all that rot. How perfectly priceless for you to drop in. I mean to say, I'm overwhelmed. Absolutely. Totally unexpected, and so forth. Fairly off my feet, in a way of speaking."

"We hope you don't mind——"

"Not at all!" said Archie generously. "Sit down. I mean to say, take a couple of chairs. Make yourself at home, and what not. Don't take any notice of me. Just stagger about and admire the views. Absolutely. Deucedly decent of you to drop in. I mean to say—that, is, you, or, to put it more plainly, I—— Of course! You quite understand, my dear old sportsmen?"

Tommy Watson looked at me blankly. I was nearly grinning, but only my inborn politeness forbade me from doing so. Master Archibald was evidently a Johnny of the most priceless order—one of the sort you read about, but hardly ever meet. He sank back into his chair, and seemed to doze off. He was apparently quite content to let us remain in the room without even troubling to ask our business. But I marched across to the fireplace and touched his knee.

He opened his eyes, and regarded me in a friendly way.

"Oh, so there you are again!" he remarked. "I mean to say, jolly decent of you to wake me up! You wouldn't care to take a stroll in the jolly old grounds? Rich pasture land, and so forth. Perfectly priceless view, don't you know. Green trees and rippling brooks, and all that kind of piffle. Absolutely charming. I mean to say, what?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but we came here with a special object," I said firmly. "That object wasn't to admire the views, or to bother you, Master Archibald. We want your help."

Archibald sat up.

"Is that so?" he asked, interestedly. "Deucedly sporting of you, and all that kind of thing. Help? Well, rather! That's just in my line, old tulip! I'm the chappy who invented the stuff! Anything you like. Absolutely! I mean to say, you've just got to tell me what's wrong, and there you are. To be quite frank, there you absolutely are!"

Tommy, who was behind the chair, touched his head significantly. But I certainly did not think that Archie was mad. He was simply too lazy to take much interest in the proceedings. And this was merely his manner of speaking.

"Splendid!" I said. "We come from St. Frank's——"

"My gratitude is appalling. That is to say, frightful!" interrupted Archie. "Eh? From St. Frank's, old onion? Of course. Ferris mentioned something about it. Deucedly smart chappy, Ferris. Knows everything. Wonderful how he finds things out—perfectly wonderful. From St. Frank's? How absolutely topping! Take another couple of chairs. Try the old lounge. Go to sleep!"

"We don't want to go to sleep," I said. "We came here to talk to you about a man named Giddy. I think he's your father's estate manager."

"Oh, good—tophole!" exclaimed Archie, clapping his hands. "How perfectly priceless! How positively stunning! And how are you feeling, old haricot? Pretty fit, and so forth? By Jove, and gadzooks! First time I noticed it! A school chappy? Pity the old pater is staggering round. Please him no end and what not. He'd fairly go into raptures. That is to say, he'd give you the glad hand, so to speak. Frightfully keen on school chappies, don't you know. Absolutely. And you've come about old Giddy? Topping!"

"I'm afraid we're wasting your time," I said. "You see, Mr. Giddy has turned us off Willard's Island——"

"Naturally," said Archie, nodding. "Mr. Giddy would turn a hair off a bald head! A wonderful man—that is to say, providing you can call him a man. And you've been turned off? Frightfully exciting, and all that sort of rot. Wish I'd been there, old fruit! Fearfully sporting to see Giddy on his hind legs, don't you know. Almost reminds me of a tub of butter."

"I think it will be far better if you listen, without making any comments," I said pointedly. "I'll tell you all about it, and then explain what I want you to do. Do you mind listening?"

"Not at all," said Archie, obligingly. "Go ahead! Bring out the flow as rapidly as you like. Listening is my favourite amusement. Could listen for hours, and all that kind of thing. Perfectly priceless of you to come and talk to me. Observe my gratitude, old bean. I'm simply pale with it. Go ahead. No interruptions. Not even one. If I open my mouth, shut it! Do what you like. Just amuse yourself to your heart's content!"

"Thanks," I said. "Well, these are the facts."

"Good!" said Archie, clapping his hands

again. "Jolly rich, and so forth, what? I'll do any bally thing I can——"

"But I haven't told you anything yet," I interrupted.

"No? That's strange!" said Archie, wonderingly. "Deucedly strange, in fact. I might even say that it's—— Well, you know, and all that kind of rot. Chilly wind blowing and so forth. Don't think I'm grumbling. Don't think so for a minute. But the fire, what? Airy pyjamas, don't you know!"

"Oh, I'm sorry!" I grinned, realising that I had been shielding him from the fire. "I didn't notice it——"

Archie held up his hand.

"Don't!" he said firmly. "Don't apologise. It's quite all right, old fruit. In fact, it's perfectly serene. No offence. None whatever. Absolutely. That is to say, absolutely not. We're pals—we're priceless sportsmen!"

"I hope so," I smiled. "Now, do listen, for goodness sake!"

"I'm all attention," said Archie. "I'm listening with both ears at once. Proceed with the jolly old narrative. I mean to say, let it rip, don't you know. If I interrupt, assassinate me."

He did his best to look attentive, and I rapidly explained the trouble that we had had. I told him all about it. How we had camped on Willard's Island; how Handforth had accidentally knocked Mr. Giddy down in Bannington High Street, and how Mr. Giddy, as an act of revenge, had turned us off the island.

Archie regarded us with puckered brow.

"Well, I mean to say, it's jolly rough," he observed. "One might even say it's positively jagged. Frightfully hard Stilton, and so forth. You have my sympathy, old walnuts!"

"You agree that Mr. Giddy was arbitrary?" I asked.

"Absolutely!"

"You think he exceeded his duty?"

"Absolutely!"

"And you'll do what you can to help us?"

"Absolutely three times!" said Archie. "What I mean is, my eyes are opened. My temper is up—positively up! I'm burning with indignation, and so forth. I mean to say, what?"

"That's all very well," I exclaimed. "Your temper may be up—although I can't see much sign of it—but how is that going to help us? Is it possibly going to reverse Mr. Giddy's decision?"

Archie frowned.

"Now you're asking me," he said. "I mean to say, you're positively putting it to me straight from the shoulder, so to speak. And talking about reversing reminds me that I'm deucedly slow at the game. It's all very well to waltz in one direction, but when it comes to reversing——"

"We're not talking of waltzing!" I interrupted.

"No, of course not," said Archie hastily.

"Not at all. Absolutely and finally, we're not talking about waltzing. Let me make that quite clear and distinct. Under no circumstances must waltzing be referred to. I'm

firm on that point—that is to say, unbending!"

"I'm glad to hear it," I said. "Now, about this Mr. Giddy——"

"Exactly," said Archie. "About him? I mean to say, there's such a lot about him that a chappie doesn't know where to start. A priceless error of nature, of course. One of life's horrid bloomers, in fact. If I've asked the pater once, I've asked him at least twice, to take Mr. Giddy and obliterate him. But, somehow, the blighter sticks round. A most pestilential nuisance—but smart, mind you. Absolutely! Deucedly smart and what not. Most reliable chappie, but he labours under the delusion that he's not only It, but That as well!"

"I got that impression, too," I said. "Is Mr. Giddy authorised to have complete control of the estate during your pater's absence?"

"Well, rather," said Archie. "Sort of Commander-in-Chief, and all that sort of rot. Giddy's word is a kind of law. Feudal business, extra quality. Rules with a rod of iron. The terror of Bannington, and so forth."

"Then it looks pretty bad," I remarked. "If Mr. Giddy is in complete control like that, I don't see that we can do anything. Even if we get back on the island, he'll only turn us off again."

"Well, I mean to say, that would be rather fruity, what?" asked Archie. "The fact is, I'd like to help you, my dear old sportsman. The dream of my life is to be useful to somebody. And you come from St. Frank's? Now, that's perfectly priceless, don't you know. I'm staggered. What I mean is, I'm fairly bowled. Middle stump, to put it plainly."

"Well?" I asked.

"My dear old tulip!" protested Archie. "I mean to say, what? My pater was keen—positively babbling—with the idea of my going to St. Frank's. Begged of me, don't you know. Kneeling business, and so forth. But I was firm—nothing doing whatever. I put the bar up, and padlocked it!"

"In other words, you objected to being sent to St. Frank's?"

"Absolutely!" replied Archie, brightly.

"But for what reason?"

"Well, really. Delicate birth, and all that sort of thing," explained our host, vaguely. "A rose among thorns, don't you know. An orchid in a bed of nettles, as it were. I was keen on living. Frightfully painful thing to see a hopeful young life blighted."

"Why, have you got an idea that St. Frank's is a training establishment for hooligans?" I grinned.

"To be quite frank, I have," said Archie. "That is to say, I had! But I'm a chappie who is open to conviction. Absolutely. And I'm impressed—I might even say, I'm overwhelmed. I don't mind admitting that my impression was not only twisted, but suffering from convulsions!"

"You were, in fact, labouring under a delusion?" I asked.

Archie shuddered.

"I mean to say, that word!" he protested. "Labouring!" Reminds me of work, and using a chappie's energy. Tricky feeling down

the spine, and so forth, don't you know. Pray be careful, old fruit!"

"Don't you like work?" I asked.

"Work?" replied Archie, "has a blighting effect on me. I get up in the morning, bright, cheerful, and all that, and then—zip! Work! Energy goes—interest in life vanishes. Fairly vacates the premises. Empty void, and so forth."

"But surely you've been to College?" asked Tommy Watson.

Archie stared dreamily into the fire.

"I have a vague and appalling recollection of early days at school," he murmured. "What I mean to say is, nightmare visions, and what not. It gives me a pain to think about it. I'm taking a rest cure, don't you know. Frightfully boring, and all that sort of thing."

"I gather that you are under a private tutor?" I said, glancing round.

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely!" he agreed. "Your gathering apparatus is in full working order, although somewhat rusty. Well, rather! Deucedly rusty, in fact. I mean to say I had a tutor. But the poor chappie is down and out. At least, he probably will be before long. Shockingly sad case, and all that."

"I suppose you were too energetic for him?" asked Watson, sarcastically.

"That is to say, no!" replied Archie. "Smither—that's the chappie's name, you know—Smither was what one might call a five hundred volt battery. Absolutely bursting with juice, don't you know. Energy flashing out on all sides, and so forth. In other words a live wire. But the poor fellow's name blighted him. A chappie called Smither couldn't possibly exist for long. He was doomed from his first day on earth."

"What actually happened to him?" I enquired.

"Oh, what happened?" asked Archie. "Now you've got me! Now, to be perfectly honest, you have fairly placed me in the jolly old corner! That's just the question—what did happen? Something, I might say, went 'zing' in the poor chappie's interior. He crumbled. He faded out. He ceased to enjoy life!"

"You don't mean that he pegged out?"

"Absolutely—what I mean is, absolutely not!" said our host. "Smither—the name makes me feel queer—was one of those frightfully clever chappies. Reeking with knowledge, don't you know. Absolutely disgustingly clever. Knowledge by the yard, oozing out of him. Absolutely out of every pore. A perfectly priceless individual. In other words, a walking encyclopædia. But I must be just. Honesty compels me to be fair. Smither was one of the best. Absolutely!"

"But even now we don't know what happened to him——"

"But, my dear old walnut, I've explained!" protested Archie. "He faded out. He developed something horrible called appendicitis. Naturally, he asked for it. I warned him—I saw it coming. Work was the cause of his downfall, and only yesterday he was carried away with

an ambulance. And I was carried away with grief, don't you know."

"You look it," I remarked. "I believe you're jolly glad. It simply means that you've got nothing to do now. And this, I suppose, is the place where you worked?"

"What I mean is, it's the place where Smither worked," explained Archie. "A most painstaking fellow—always trying to get me on the job. And always failing, don't you know. But we're straying. We're wandering away from the subject. In fact, we're absolutely side-tracked."

"And we shall have to be going," I said.

"How appalling!" sighed Archie. "I mean to say, what? Enjoyment comes only at intervals. This, as it were, is one of them. Decidedly and distinctly, it is one of them. You chappies are the best—absolutely. In other words, the richest in cream. I like you—I shall wither away after you've gone."

Archie suddenly sat forward, with a look of almost intelligence in his eyes.

"A brain wave!" he announced. "A positively priceless idea! A scheme with gilt edges and bronze knobs on it! Absolutely! You—er—that is to say, I—or, in other words—we—. No, I'm getting mixed! Let me hasten to add, I'm getting mixed! I didn't mean to say that at all!"

"What's the priceless idea?" I asked, grinning.

"Well, that's it!" said Archie brilliantly. "Absolutely it! You're here—not only on the spot, but all over it! Rooms empty by the dozen and at your disposal. Stay here, and make life worth living. Remain with me, and save a derelict soul from straying into the jolly old wilderness. You catch on, what?"

"I'm afraid it's impossible," I said, with a chuckle. "We can't stay, Archibald——"

"Certainly not!" chuckled Watson.

"The darkness has fallen," said Archie, with a sigh. "My dream is over—the skies have clouded with murk——"

"Never mind the sky," I interrupted. "Not long ago you said that you'd like to help us. I'm talking about old Giddy now, and Willard's Island. Your pater is away, and Mr. Giddy is in control of the estate. Do you think it will be possible for us to get back on the island?"

"Not if Giddy is already there!" replied Archie, solemnly. "I mean to say, a chappie must have some room! One Giddy—one island, so to speak. But don't despair—don't let the mellow light of hope fade from your optical vision. Keep smiling, and so forth. Do the cheering stuff, and all that sort of rot. By this afternoon I will get on the job. Absolutely and positively, I will stir myself. And before the day is over you will hear from me."

"You mean that you will see Mr. Giddy, and do what you can?" I asked.

"In other words, not at all!" replied Archie. "Seeing Mr. Giddy is not what a chappie could call a pleasure. Personally, I'd rather see a funeral. Much more cheering, and so forth! But there are other ways. Once I start, I—I—Well, what I mean is, I start! I commence—I absolutely plunge! Stopping wild horses is child's play in comparison! Leave it to me,

my dear old beans, and the world will revolve again."

"Thanks very much!" I said heartily. "I know you'll do all you can."

"More than that!" said Archie, generously. "Twice as much, old fruit!"

"Well, we'll be going," I said. "And we'll expect to hear something from you before the evening."

"That," replied Archie, "is absolutely it. But must you go? Must you trickle away? Must you bring sadness upon a young life? Why stagger forth, and emerge into the cold world when luxury and comfort surround you?"

"Thanks all the same, but we must go really," I said. "Do what you can, Archie; get a real hustle on, and——"

"You've said it!" interrupted Archie, dramatically. "I mean to say, absolutely! You've choked up the jolly old word! Hustle! That's me! I'm the chappie who manufactured the word."

And Archie, to show us what a keen hustler he was, lounged back in his chair and dreamily closed his eyes. He waved a feeble hand to us as we retreated towards the door, and by the time we passed out he was snoring musically. And when we finally found ourselves on the drive, wheeling our bicycles towards the big gates, we looked at one another enquiringly.

"Well?" said Tommy Watson.

"I'm blessed if I know what to say?" I grinned. "The chap's a knut—one of the special three star brand. I don't think I've ever met such a complete example of the Piccadilly Johnnie."

"He's a hopeless ass!" said Watson. "A blithering chump!"

"I'm not quite so sure about that," I remarked thoughtfully. "And you can say what you like, he's as amusing as a giddy comedian! And at the back of all his priceless talk, there's a grain of commonsense."

"A jolly small grain!" growled Watson. "I couldn't spot it."

"We've got to forgive him a lot of things!" I said. "He's a kind of hothouse plant. He's never been to a proper school—always had a private tutor, by what I could make out, and he'd be like a fish out of water at St. Frank's. It would be rather decent if we could have him there, though. He'd be a shining ornament to the Ancient House."

And we mounted our bicycles—and hoped for the best.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENIAL ASS ARRIVES.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH stared. "A stranger within the gates," he observed. "Just like the cheek of the ass, to come wandering in here as though he owned the place."

Well, I'm jiggered. I'm blessed if he ain't coming further in!"

"Well, it's not a crime," said Church.



Archie languidly jabbed the end of his stick upon the bell-push of the Head's door.

Handforth & Co. had just come out of the Ancient House. Afternoon lessons were over, and the juniors were, of course, attired in Etons. The Cadets did not wear their uniform during school hours.

Although thirty of us were encamped, we nevertheless came to St. Frank's to attend lessons, in the ordinary way.

The Cadets had been very anxious to learn the result of my visit to Col. Glenthorne's place. I had not told them many details—in fact, there were not many to tell. I could only say we might hear something before the evening. But, on the whole, I was not very optimistic

in my attitude. There was no sense in giving the fellows hope when, in all probability, Archie Glenthorne would be unable to do anything.

Handforth and Church and McClure looked across the Triangle at the stranger with considerable interest. Handforth always seemed to regard strangers with suspicion and aggression.

In the first place, he wanted to know what a stranger was doing within the sacred precincts of the school? He looked upon it as a sheer piece of nerve that anybody should dare to set foot inside the Triangle.

And yet, as a matter of fact, the school grounds were open to any sightseer who cared to wander in.

"Seems quite a respectable looking chap," remarked Church. "In fact, a bit of a knut. And by the way he's lounging about one might think he had a personal interest in the show. I wonder who he is."

"We'll soon find out!" said Handforth grimly. "If this fathead thinks he can intrude like this, he's made a bloomer."

"But he's not intruding," said Church.

"Isn't he inside the school property?"

"Yes——"

"Then he's intruding!" said Handforth.

"But any stranger is allowed——"

"I don't care about that!" snapped Handforth. "We'll soon make this chap right about turn and do a quick march. Watch me!"

Church and McClure were rather anxious. Handforth, without really intending to be so, had a knack of making himself not merely officious, but positively objectionable. He only reserved this for strangers. Except when Handy was on the high horse, he was a most amiable, good-natured fellow.

He stalked across the Triangle, and Church and McClure hurried along with him to pull him up, if he happened to go too far. And as they drew nearer to the stranger, they could see that he was a rather tall youngster of between fifteen and sixteen, with fair hair, a fresh complexion, and aristocratic features. True, his nose was rather large, and his chin correspondingly small, but he was aristocratic, nevertheless.

He was attired in a superbly cut lounge suit, fastened by a single link-button. He wore a high collar, a neck-tie that positively shimmered with silken glory, and containing a beautiful diamond pin. A soft hat was set at a somewhat rakish angle at the back of his head, and he swung a whippy cane over his arm. His feet were encased in patent leather shoes which glittered like jet, and his ankles literally glowed in a pair of socks with green and yellow checks.

"What the dickens do you think you're doing?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

The stranger looked round calmly, and with an air of extreme boredom. He surveyed Handforth with a kind of languid interest.

"Well, here we are, what?" he remarked casually.

"Eh?"

"I mean to say, we've arrived, old fruit!"

Archie Glenthorne smiled amiably, and swished his cane. Handforth gazed at Church and McClure, and then turned his attention back to the vision of perfectly fitting garments and silken adornments.

"Old fruit!" he repeated grimly. "Are you talking to me?"

"What I mean is, absolutely!" said Archie. "Allow me to admire the view. I just trickled in, don't you know. Jolly sort of place and so forth, and all that rot. Topping architecture."

"Well I'm blessed!" said Handforth blankly. "Is it human?"

"Don't be rude, Handy!" murmured Church.

"Don't interfere!" snapped Handforth. "I want to know who this lunatic is, and what he thinks he's doing."

Archie was still surveying the picturesque old buildings of the school. He gazed chiefly at the Ancient House and the Head's House, and the superb old clock tower which reared its magnificence high above all.

"This," observed Archie, "is the stuff to give them. Ivy growing round the door and what not. Positively tophole—absolutely. Well, sorry to leave you, old walnuts! I must depart. I must away. In other words, I've got to stagger in, and do the Sherlock Holmes act."

"Do which?" asked Church, grinning.

"Locate my pals!" explained Archie.

"What I mean is, I was frightfully careless, don't you know. Clean forgot to ask their names. Positively overlooked the importance of learning their labels. But I shall know them at first sight. My eyes are like those of a what-do-you-call-it! A jolly old lynx! That's the merchant—that's the chappie!"

"Hold on!" said Handforth curtly. "What's all this piffle about staggering in, or going on the links, or something——"

"You've said it!" interrupted Archie, holding up his hand. Links! What a perfectly priceless pun! Two medals with bars! A jolly old laurel wreath required. Links reminds me of golf! I mean to say, my pater—a regular sportsman, and all that—my pater is hot on golf. Mustard, in fact. Cayenne, and Chili beans and curry knocked into one, don't you know!"

"Who's talking about beans?" bellowed Handforth. "You silly ass, I want to know who you are, and what you're doing here?"

Archie staggered slightly.

"Well, I mean to say, deafness doesn't run in our family," he observed protestingly. "We've all got priceless hearing. Keen as anything, and what not. But we'll let that pass. We'll allow it to fade away. Of course, I haven't introduced myself. Shocking for-

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getfplaess, and all that piffle. By the way, do I see aright, or is my vision impaired? Your face, my dear old sportsman. Awfully striking, don't you know. A masterpiece——"

"You leave my face alone!" roared Handforth. "You fathead, what are you talking about?"

"Nothing—absolutely!" said Archie mildly. Handforth gulped.

"My face is nothing?" he thundered.

"Well, what I mean to say is, you ain't like mother's only," explained Archie. "Handsome, and so forth. Were you born like that, or did you meet with an accident in youth? Ghastly things, accidents. I mean to say, what?"

The leader of Study D took a deep breath.

"I'm keeping my temper fairly well," he said deliberately. "I've got a sort of idea that you're half human. And probably you've got a name, and it's possible that you'll be able to tell us what you're doing here?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said the newcomer. "I've got you, old tulip! I've gathered the trend of your illuminating remarks. Well, rather! Introductions, and all that piffle. The fact is, I, as it were, have staggered in. That's just it. To be quite candid, I'm here. Absolutely on the spot. What I mean is, I've arrived, and all the rest of it."

"Can't we see you've arrived, you babbling lunatic," howled Handforth. "You're just about the limit——"

"Cheers, loud and long," observed Archie, gazing past Handforth as though he didn't exist. "In the offing I perceive my dear old tins of fruit! Like a beautiful dream, they have appeared. I mean to say, the dear old chappies have hit me in the vision."

He lifted his cane, and waved it enthusiastically. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I had just strolled up through the Ancient House doorway, and I noticed the wagging cane at once.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "Archie's arrived!"

"What!" shouted Tommy. "Archie himself! Why, I never thought he'd be able to stagger across that room of his, let alone come out! But you're right! It's him! Well I'm blowed!"

"Dear old boy, what's all the excitement about?" asked Sir Montie. "You're frightfully noisy—you are, really——"

"We told you about Archie, old son," I put in. "He's a knut like yourself, but about fifty times more so. He places you in the shade, Montie—he casts you in the background. In other words, beside Archie, you're a wash-out!"

I waved my hand, and went across the Triangle at the double, with Tommy Watson by my side. Tregellis-West followed in a more leisurely manner.

"Good for you, Archie!" I exclaimed, as I came to a halt in front of him. "How on earth did you manage to get here?"

"Well, I mean to say, what?" said Archie, taking my hand. "I just trickled to the train, as it were, and came rushing through the balmy countryside. Then I staggered up the lane

and—and—— Well, there it is! I'm here—I've located myself positively on the map!"

Handforth grabbed my arm.

"Who's this blithering chump?" he asked fiercely.

"There's no need to insult a visitor by calling him a blithering chump," I said severely. "You ought to apologise——"

"Not at all!" put in Archie. "That is to say, nix, and all that sort of thing. Nix absolutely! Or, in other words, absolutely nix! Apologies are unnecessary. So far we are strangers. In later years we shall learn to know one another's habits and customs. We might even become pals. More staggering things have happened in this world. Greater marvels have come to pass!"

I grinned.

"Look here, Handy, don't start any of your rot," I said. "You see, Archie, this chap is Handforth. He's always like this—he can't help it. When he was a baby he used to knock his nurse down and empty the bath water. When he was five years old he amused himself by knocking trams over——"

"You—you babbling lunatic!" bawled Handforth.

"There you are—an example of what he can do," I went on. "That, of course, is only a quarter of his voice, Archie. When he really lets himself go, he can act as a fog signal for steamers on the other side of the Channel."

Archie regarded Handforth with new interest.

"What I mean is, how deliciously priceless!" he observed. "And this voice is really emerging from that space at the top. Wonders will never cease! Miracles in the twentieth century! Reminds me of the Bay of Biscay, don't you know! Pardon me, and all that, but doesn't it hurt? I mean to say, what?"

Handforth, by this time, was nearly ready to commit murder on the spot. But a crowd of other fellows had collected round, and he found himself held. I was pleasantly surprised. Archie was proving himself to be very ready to chip Edward Oswald, and to give him as good as he gave.

"Lemme go!" howled Handforth. "Lemme ——"

"Pray allow me to express my regret!" said Archie, bowing. "No offence, my dear old carrot—no offence whatsoever. There is utterly no necessity to apologise. I wouldn't dream of it—absolutely."

The crowd of juniors grinned with joy.

"Now, Handy, dry up," I said crisply. "This young gentleman is Archie Glenthorne, and he's our pal."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Every time, dear old sportsman!"

"Glenthorne!" put in Reginald Pitt. "Any relation to Col. Glenthorne?"

"I mean to say, exactly!" exclaimed Archie. "A son, three times removed, don't you know. In other words, there are two brother chappies with more years of wisdom than myself. Delighted to meet you all. Congratulations, and all that rot. May you have long life and chunks of prosperity. I mean to say, I've blown in. That, to be exact, is the posish!"

The juniors couldn't possibly keep their faces straight. There was something about Archie Glenthorne which placed him on good terms with everybody on the spot. Even Handforth began to melt. His rapid brain was grasping the fact that Archie was not in the same class as other fellows.

"I won't punch your head now!" he growled. "I'll let you off!"

"An angel in human guise!" remarked Archie pleasantly. "All is forgiven and forgotten, don't you know. The clouds roll by, and the sun shines. The pash. of the moment has passed, and so forth. Well, here we are. I might say, here we absolutely are. I bring tidings, dear old fruit!"

"That's what we've been waiting to hear!" I exclaimed. "Bad tidings or good tidings?"

"Tidings of joy and gladness," responded Archie. "Perfectly priceless news, and all that rot."

"Can we go back to the island?" I asked quickly.

"What I mean is, absolutely!"

"Old Giddy is beaten?"

"To be exact, not so!" replied Archie, shaking his head. "Giddy, to be truthful, knows nothing. Ignorance itself is a seat of knowledge compared to dear old Giddy. He wallows in sublime darkness. That is to say, I deemed it unwise to seek an interview."

"Then nothing has been done?" I asked, frowning.

"Not yet—but events will move," said Archie. "What I mean is, other things will move, too. You'll move—I shall move. In fact, we'll do the jolly old stagger. Back to the island home—the return to the cheery old log shack!"

"What on earth is the ass talking about?" demanded Pitt.

"He's reckoning that we can go back to Willard's Island," I said.

"But how about Giddy?"

"He's Colonel Glenthorne's agent—but Archie is Colonel Glenthorne's son," I explained. "What I'm afraid of is that the colonel won't uphold Archie's actions. He'll rely on his estate manager——"

"Pray allow me to intervene," put in Archie. "Permit me to break in upon the old debate. I mean to say, Mr. Giddy is out of the landscape—he doesn't even come into the horizon. You're going back to Willard's Island—that is, we're going. And then the news will trickle out. It will reach the ears of dear old Giddy. To be followed by sundry explosions and outbursts of the jolly old temper!"

"But Giddy will come and turn us off——"

"Giddy will come—but Giddy will go!" said Archie calmly. "The dream of my life is to be realised, old walnut! There I shall stand, like one of those priceless heroes. And I shall proceed to tick off Giddy in no unmeasured tones. In other words, I shall put him through it. I shall cause the undulating writhe to shudder down his spine. Under my lashing tongue, the Giddy bird will shrivel!"

"But look here, Archie, I can't quite get the

hang of this," I put in. "Do I understand that you'll be there?"

"What I mean is, absolutely!"

"On the island?"

"Every ounce of me," said Archie. "Ears included!"

"You mean you'll just see us comfortably settled, and then fade out of the picture?" I asked. "Is that it?"

"That, my dear old sportsman, is not it," replied Archie. "You are sadly removed from the truth. Which reminds me, don't you know. I don't think I've told you, have I? Absolutely not! Not a word has passed my lips—not a murmur has escaped my jolly old larynx!"

"Not a word about what?"

"The decision—the fateful, priceless old decision!" said the genial Archie. "This, so to speak, is where I take the dangerous path. This is where I leave the well-trodden road, and embark into the wilderness."

"What does that mean, in plain English?" inquired Watson.

Archie looked round at the school buildings, and at the fellows.

"Topping!" he observed. "Surprising how a chappie can get a wrong impression, you know. Not a bit like I pictured. No barracks—no prison bars, and all that rot. A cosy little nook, as you might say. And here shall I rest my weary bones. Here shall I linger!"

"You can linger as long as you like," I said. "Why not come in, and have a look round?"

"This," replied Archie, "is not the only moment of existence. There are others. And, as I have intimated, I have arrived. And here I mean to stay, and what not. I mean to say, I'm joining the merry old party."

"You're coming to St. Frank's—as a scholar?" I asked quickly.

Archie Glenthorne nodded.

"Zing—right on the old head!" he observed. "You've hit it!"

"Why, has your pater arranged it——"

"At the moment, old fruit, my pater is arranging parties, and so forth, in Switzerland," replied the visitor. "In the meantime, I have decided upon action. The unfortunate Smither is lying in torment, with inflamed appendixes, and all that sort of thing. The young mind cannot be allowed to stagnate. I mean to say, something must be done, as it were. Something is being done. And now, really, you must allow me to stagger in and locate the jolly old Head, what?"

Archie waggled his cane, and lounged across the Triangle with an elegant swagger. I hurried after him, and caught his arm.

"I say, is this honour bright?" I asked.

"Absolutely!"

"You've really come here to join the school?"

"Absolutely, twice!"

"Good for you!" I said heartily. "Splendid, old man! Everybody will be delighted to have you; and don't forget to mention to Dr. Stafford that you want to come into the Ancient House. And let's hope you are placed in the Remove."

CHAPTER V.

INTERVIEWING THE HEAD.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE regarded me with interest.

"I mean to say, what?" he remarked. "The jolly old brain, so to speak, fails to follow the trend of your cheery remarks."

"I said, I hope you are placed in the Remove," I repeated.

"Exactly—oh, absolutely!" said Archie promptly. "The Remove? Something to do with the Spanish Inquisition, no doubt? Frightfully priceless old fellows, don't you know. Experts in the removing game, and what not. Two prisoners, forward! Removal business commences."

I chuckled.

"You don't quite get the hang of it," I said. "The Remove at St. Frank's is really the Fourth Form——"

"Enough!" said Archie, holding up his hand. "Sufficient is plenty! No explanations required. I comprehend—the jolly old brain has awakened to life. The Fourth Form is called the Remove? I've got it—it's there—embedded upon the plates of memory. And when I trickle into the Head's department, my game is to become ancient—that is to say, to join the Ancient order of Removers?"

"Something like that," I grinned. "Tell the Head you want to board in the Ancient House."

"A board in the Ancient House?" repeated Archie, horrified. "I mean to say, ain't we allowed to have beds? Feathers, and what not? Pillows, and snowy white sheets, and all the rest of the business?"

"My dear fathead, I didn't tell you to ask the Head for 'a board in the Ancient House.' Tell him you want to board there—to live there, my son."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "I tumble—I comprehend the old idea. Right on the nail, old top! It shall be done!"

"I don't know how you stand as regards knowledge——"

"That is to say, not so far as that!" interrupted Archie. "I'm still sitting, old fruit. I might even say I'm lying down! Frightfully low, and all that—ignorance personified. I shall probably skate into the fags' division. In five years I shall stagger forth into the Removal department!"

"I'll bet you're not so bad as that," I said. "Anyhow, buzz along and have a jaw with the Head. That's his door over there. Rap on it, and when it's answered, say you want to see Dr. Stafford on business. Tubbs, the page, will probably answer the door."

"It is done!" said Archie. "Toodle-oo, old stick of rhubarb! In other words, pip-pip!"

And the genial ass wandered off to the Head's door. I wondered how the dickens he would get on, and for a moment or two I half thought

of accompanying him, just to see that everything went all serene.

But, on second thoughts, I decided to let Archie steer his own craft. It would be all the better, perhaps. And I joined the other juniors. They were standing in a big group, discussing the remarkable new boy.

"I mean to say, what?" I grinned, as I came up.

"You ass!" said De Valerie. "Does that chap always speak like that, or did he put it on?"

"It's a gift," I replied. "The fellow's a born comedian. He can't help himself. And I don't think he's half so soft as he makes himself out to be. A regular knut, of course, and a genial ass. But not quite dotty."

"But the Head will never let him enter the school," declared Pitt. "Hang it all, a chap can't walk in and say he's going to become a scholar." What about fees? What about arranging things with his parents?"

"Archie is different to other fellows," I said. "He's made up his mind, and I fancy the Head will have a bit of trouble if he wants to send Archie back home. In any case, we needn't discuss that. He's a good sort, and he's going to help us."

"About Willard's Island, you mean?" asked Church.

"Yes," I said. "It was a good idea of mine to go over to Glenthorne Manor this morning——"

"Of course, I thought about it first," remarked Handforth casually. "I was going over myself, but——"

"It didn't occur to you until Tommy and I had gone, eh?" I chuckled. "I quite understand, Handy. Well, Archie is Col. Glenthorne's son, and his defiance of old Giddy will be different to ours. When the colonel hears about it, he can't kick up much of a dust, seeing that his own son is the cause of it. So I think we can consider ourselves pretty lucky. I think the one and only Archie is going to assist us right royally."

"Let's hope so," said Pitt. "I'd give quids to see old Niggs and Croke pitched off the island. Our present camp is all very well, but beastly inconvenient. The island's the place every time."

"Well, before we leave for camp, we'd better wait until Archie comes out—or, as he would put it, wait until he staggers forth," I said. "He's a sportsman, and he'll see this thing through. But we can't very well move without him."

Under any other circumstances, Archie Glenthorne would not have been considered a person of much importance. But, as matters stood at present, he was really the one great man in the case. Upon him depended everything. Accordingly, he dropped into the middle of things, as it were.

He lounged up the steps to the Head's door, and languidly jabbed the end of his stick upon the bell-push. Then he waited. A certain nervousness attacked him. He felt a trickly sensation down his spine. He was about to interview the Headmaster of all St. Frank's,

and for the first time he realised that it might be an ordeal.

However, it had to be done.

And Archie braced himself up and squared his jaw. At all events, there was nothing to fear at first. He was merely faced by the page-boy. And, while he was thinking in this way, the door opened, and Archie stared.

"Well, I mean to say, what?" he remarked mildly.

The pageboy struck him as being enormously large, and, as he would have expressed it, he was somewhat staggered, and all that. Also, the pageboy was smoking a pipe. To be quite exact, the individual who had opened the door was no less a person than Nelson Lee himself. But Archie didn't know this.

"I don't think I've seen you before, my lad," said Nelson Lee pleasantly.

"Absolutely not!" replied Archie. "That, of course, is imposs., old tulip! That is to say, there's either a frightful mistake, or you've grown. You've sprung up like the jolly old mushroom, don't you know?"

"What are you talking about, my boy?" asked Lee, in surprise.

"That is to say, absolutely!" replied Archie. "The chappie distinctly told me that the merry old portal would be flung open by a pageboy. In other words, I'm somewhat adrift. Lost my moorings, don't you know?"

"You expected the door to be opened by Tubbs?" asked Nelson Lee, smiling. "That, perhaps, is quite natural. But I happened to be passing along the passage, and so I opened the door personally. I am Mr. Lee, the House-master of the Ancient House."

Archie stepped back, and bowed low.

"That is to say, a large apology is required," he said. "The large apology has arrived. Pray allow me to offer you my humble pardon, my dear old fruit—or, I should say, sir, la youth. I was taught to respect my elders and so forth. I mean to say, this, I presume is the entry into the lion's den? To be quite precise, the portals of the Headmaster's sacred sanctum?"

"Do you wish to see the Headmaster?" asked Nelson Lee.

"That," replied Archie, "is the idea."

"And what is your name, my boy?"

"Glenthorne, sir; if you have leisure, I will state it in full," said Archie. "Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne. I have hied me away from the jolly old ancestral home."

"That, Master Glenthorne, is fairly obvious," said Nelson Lee. "Come, I will take you to Dr. Stafford. Probably he is expecting you."

"Something tells me that such is not the case," replied Archie. "I have a peculiar nosh that my visit is unannounced, sir."

"You have no appointment?"

"I mean to say, not exactly," said Archie. "Considering that I only staggered in horthly before, sir, an appointment is hardly on the programme. But here I am—absolutely on the jolly premises. As large as life, and what not!"

"You appear to be a most peculiar young man, Glenthorne," said Nelson Lee, smiling.

"But you certainly have quite a large amount of assurance. This is the Headmaster's study. Perhaps I'd better come in with you——"

"Absolutely," said Archie, hastily. "Or, I should say, absolutely not! Confusing, and so forth! Puts a chappie off his stroke, don't you know. Frightfully sorry, and all that sort of thing, but I hope you don't raise the jolly old objection?"

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee. "Here you are."

He opened the door, and Archie stepped in. Then the door closed.

Looking up, the visitor found himself facing Dr. Malcolm Stafford, who was seated at his desk, regarding Archie over the tops of his glasses.

"Dear me!" said the Head mildly.

"Well, here we absolutely are," said Archie, chattily. "How are you, sir? Feeling fit, and so forth? Looking tophole, I might say. Or, to be precise, the health business is going strong."

Dr. Stafford laid down his pen, and adjusted his glasses.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "Who are you, my boy? And who brought you to my study in this manner?"

Archie held up a finger.

"That, my dear old top, is just it!" he said mysteriously. "Quite a ripping sportsman steered me along. A priceless chappie named Nelson, I believe—probably a descendant of the jolly old Trafalgar Square merchant. You know, the genial old bluffer who stands on a column."

The Head regarded this extraordinary visitor in amazement. A youth who talked in such a manner, and addressed him as "old top," was decidedly a novelty. Dr. Stafford was more curious than annoyed.

"Come, come!" he said. "Why don't you talk in plain English, my boy. What is your name?"

"Glenthorne, sir—Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne," replied Archie. "I mean to say, I've got it! All in one bally mouthful, don't you know. Created a record and so forth."

"Upon my soul!" said the Head. "Glenthorne? Now, let me see—— Yes, of course! I was in communication with a gentleman named Glenthorne for some little time during the autumn term. Yes, yes—Col. Glenthorne, of Bannington."

"The jolly old pater," said Archie nodding.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Head. "So you are Col. Glenthorne's son?"

"That is to say, humble apologies," said Archie mildly. "Do not be hard on me, sir. The fault is not mine. Such things will happen, I came, as it were, without being consulted. I arrived—and, well, here we are!"

"I can see quite well that you are here, Glenthorne," said Dr. Stafford. "But now that you're here, what do you want?"

"Nothing—absolutely."

"You want nothing?"

"That, sir, is precisely it."

(Continued on page 25.)

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 15. THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S
Edited by Nipper.

March 4,
1922.



THE HEADMASTER'S HOUSE, ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE.

(The above sketch is taken from the Triangle and shows part of the Ancient House in the background.)



PECK'S BAD BOY

AND HIS "PA".



HIS GIRL GOES BACK ON HIM.

The Bad Boy's Heart is Broken—Still, he Enjoys a bit of Fun—Cod-Liver Oil on the Pancakes—The Servants Made Victims—The Bad Boy Vows Vengeance on His Girl and the Telegraph Messenger.

"NOW you git right away from here!" said the grocery man to the bad boy, as he came in with a hungry look on his face, and a wild light in his eyes. "I am afraid of you. I wouldn't be surprised to see you go off half-cocked and blow us all up. You may have a billy-goat, or a shot-gun, or a bottle of poison concealed about you. Condemn you, the police ought to muzzle you. You will kill somebody yet. Here, take a handful of prunes and go off somewhere and enjoy yourself, and keep away from here." And the grocery man went on sorting potatoes, and watching the haggard face of the boy. "What ails you, anyway?" he added, as the boy refused the prunes, and seemed to be ill.

"Oh, I am bad!" said the boy, as he grated his teeth, and looked wicked. "You see before you a shadow. I look back at the happiness of the past two weeks, during which I have been permitted to gaze into the fond blue eyes of my loved one, and carry her goloshes to school for her to wear home when it rained, to hear the sweet words that fell from her lips as she lovingly told me I was a terror: and as I think it is all over, and that I shall never again escort her, I feel as if the world had been kicked off its base and was whirling through space, liable to be knocked into a cocked hat. My girl has shook me."

"Sho! You don't say so," says the grocery man. "Well, she showed sense. You would have blown her up, or broken her neck, or something. But don't feel bad. You will soon find another girl that will discount her, and you will forget this one."

"Never!" said the boy, as he nibbled at a piece of cheese that he had picked off. "I shall never allow my affections to become entwined about another piece of calico. It unmans me, sir. Henceforth I am a hater of the whole girl race. From this day I shall harbour revenge in my heart, and no girl can cross my path and live."

"I want to grow up to become a he-school ma'am, or a he-milliner, or something, where I can grind girls into the dust under the heel of a terrible despotism, and make them woe for mercy."

"To think that girl, on whom I have lavished my heart's best love, and over a shilling, in the past two weeks could let the smell of a goat on my clothes come between us, and break off an acquaintance that seemed to be the forerunner of a happy future, and say 'ta-ta' to me, and go off to a dancing-school with a telegraph messenger boy is too much, and my heart is broken."

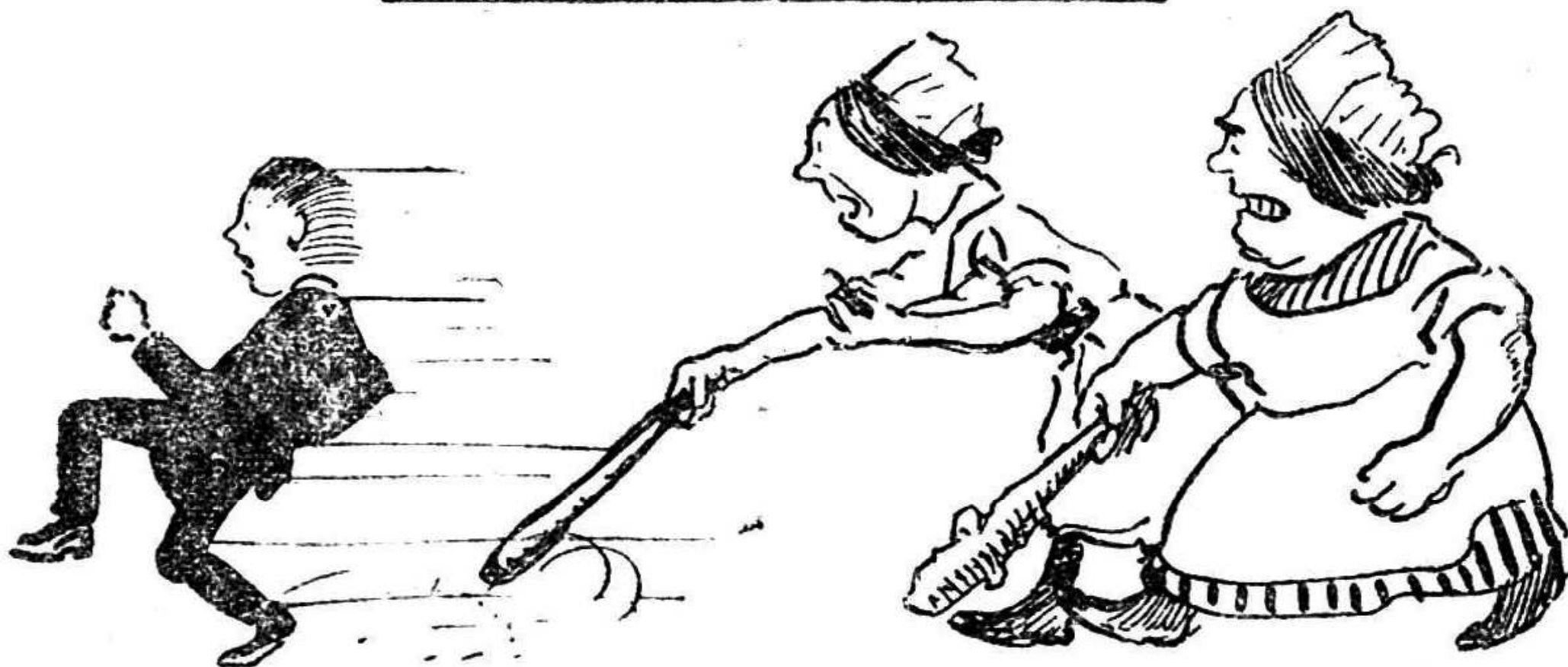
"I will lay for that messenger some night, when he is delivering a message in our road, and I will make him think lightning has struck the wire and run in on his bench. Oh, you don't know anything about the woe there is in this world! You never loved many people, did you?"

The grocery man admitted that he never loved very hard. "But your father must be having a rest while your whole mind is occupied with your love affair," said he.

"Yes," says the boy, with a vacant look. "I take no interest in the pleasure of the chase any more, though I did have a little quiet fun this morning at the breakfast table,



"I could see by Pa's face that the cod-liver oil was nearly killing him."



Then they talked Irish and Dutch, and got clubs, and started to look for me.

"You see Pa is the contrariest man that ever was. If I complain that anything at the table don't taste good, Pa says it is all right.

"This morning I took the syrup jug and emptied out the white syrup, and put in some cod-liver oil that Ma is taking for her cough. I put some on my pancakes and pretended to taste of it, and I told Pa the syrup was sour and not fit to eat. Pa was mad in a second, and he poured out some on his pancakes, and said I was getting too confounded particular. He said the syrup was good enough for him, and he sopped his pancakes in it and swallowed some.

"I could see by his face that the cod-liver oil was nearly killing him, but he said that the syrup was all right, and if I didn't eat mine he would break my back, and I had to eat it; and Pa said he guessed he hadn't got much appetite, and that he would just drink a cup of coffee and eat some toast.

"I like to die, and that is one thing, I think, that makes this disappointment in love harder

to bear. But I felt sorry for Ma. Ma ain't very strong, and when she got some of that cod-liver oil in her mouth she went right upstairs, and Pa had to help her, and she had nooralgia all the morning.

"I eat pickles to take the taste out of my mouth, and then I laid for the servants. They eat too much syrup, anyway, and when they got on to that cod-liver oil, and swallowed a lot of it, one of them, an Irish girl, she got up from the table and went out in the kitchen, as pale as Ma is when she has powder on her face; and the other girl, who is Dutch, she swallowed a pancake and said, 'Mine gootness, vas de matter from me,' and she went out and leaned on the coal-bin. Then they talked Irish and Dutch, and got clubs, and started to look for me, and I thought I would come over here.

"The whole family is sick, but it is not from love, like my illness, and they will get over it, while I shall fill an early grave—but not till I have made that girl and the telegraph messenger wish they were dead."

THE EDITORS' DEN.

IMPORTANT.—Correspondence to the Editor of the Magazine should be addressed to the Editor, The Nelson Lee Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Editorial Office,
Study C,
Ancient House,
St. Frank's.

My Dear Chums,—Archie's meteoric descent on St. Frank's could not have created a bigger stir had he issued from a film of smoke like the fabulous genie of the Arabian Nights. A fish out of water, he is as strange to his newly found comrades as they are to him. But we fellows at St. Frank's can forgive a great deal in a new-comer provided he can take a ragging in a good spirit.

Nothing seems to daunt or diminish the cheery optimism of the Genial Ass, and, I fear, nothing will cure him of his easy-going outlook on life. In fact, Archie is a problem far too difficult for the Remove to tackle. You can't ruffle him or hurt him, and you cannot help liking him.

Next week's pen-picture of St. Frank's will be a splendid drawing of the College House, showing another side of the Triangle. Look out also in our next issue for an important announcement of another grand new feature.

Your sincere friend,
NIPPER (The Editor).

THE BORROWING FIEND.

By REGINALD PITT.

**Nothing Doing.**

HE presented himself in Study E. just as I was settling down to do my prep. To be exact, the Borrowing Fiend had arrived. He takes all sorts of shapes and forms, all sizes, and varies in age. But he remains the same—

constantly and consistently, he is the Borrowing Fiend.

On this occasion he took unto himself the bodily shape of Handforth of the Remove. He put it to me quite bluntly, and, indeed, authoritatively. He didn't even ask. He demanded. The Borrowing Fiend in the guise of Handforth is like this. He wanted to know how many cups I had to spare, and how many saucers to go with them.

I regarded the Borrowing Fiend coldly. I had, as a matter of fact, come to a positive decision. I had had enough. The thing had been going on so long that I was fed up. I told the Borrowing Fiend calmly but patiently that there were no cups in Study E to spare, and that saucers were as scarce as golden sovereigns. To be quite brief, there was nothing doing.

Again He Comes.

The Borrowing Fiend glared at me, proceeded to call me a babbling lunatic, and then seemed rather anxious to know if I was looking for a thick ear, or asking for a punch on the nose. I told him that I required neither of these presents, and reminded him that the door needed closing—after he had departed, of course. He retired, still uttering threats. But the cups and saucers still remained safely in the cupboard. I could afford to ignore ignorant remarks concerning meanness and selfishness, and similar failings.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed before the Borrowing Fiend turned up again. This time he insinuated himself into the study with a sneaky kind of motion. And he had now taken on the outer appearance of Teddy Long. He regarded me uncertainly, and with decided nervousness.

As it happened, I was in the middle of an appalling sum in algebra—a kind of problem that is set by masters in order to test whether a fellow's hair is liable to turn grey. I regarded the Borrowing Fiend not coldly, but quite the reverse. I was hot. I felt like blowing off steam. And, in rapid sentences, I told him to clear out, and to keep out.

But the Borrowing Fiend, nothing daunted, hovered near the door and made certain sug-

gestions concerning a problematical half-crown. He supposed—quite wrongly—that the said coin existed in my pocket. And the trend of his argument seemed to be that this coin should be transferred into his own pocket. In the end I pushed back my cuffs, rose from the table, and the Borrowing Fiend faded away. The only indication of his recent presence was the sound of scurrying feet in the passage.

He Multiplies Himself.

Before the evening was out the Borrowing Fiend returned to Study E at least six times. He wanted a story-book. He wanted some lump sugar. He wanted a ruler. He wanted a lead pencil. He even wanted such insignificant articles as pins. The latter he received, since pins can be lent without any qualms as to their safe return.

At this juncture—rather a good word, that—at this juncture, I repeat, Grey thought it advisable to turn out the bottom of the cupboard. This was a kind of lumber space, where all sorts of truck was collected together. The result was something startling—even disconcerting.

A Borrowing Fiend Myself.

Among the various articles which came to light were the following:

A bicycle pump which was recognised as the property of Tommy Watson. With a shock, I remembered that I had borrowed this a week earlier. A book on physics which had the name of the Hon. Douglas Singleton on the fly-leaf, and which I had annexed from Study N over a month since. Panic seized me, and then I discovered that at least four other articles in the lumber cupboard belonged to fellows who had no connection whatever with Study E. A story-book belonging to Armstrong; a jug which was recognised as rightly belonging to Study M; a frying-pan which Fatty Little had been vainly inquiring about for several days.

And all these things had been borrowed by myself. In fact, I was the Borrowing Fiend in all these instances, and as I sank limply into a chair I realised that I possessed the same qualities which I had just been condemning with a fine show of scorn and indignation.

Which, all rolled down into one terse sentence, simply means that every blessed one of us—unless he happens to be a walking marvel—at certain intervals dons the cloak of the Borrowing Fiend. In fact, he is ubiquitous—which means (as I have discovered by looking in the dictionary) that he's everywhere.

And now if the Borrowing Fiend arrives in Study E he generally goes away satisfied. It is simply a case of one Borrowing Fiend meeting another.



SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS.

Being a series of humorous stories about scholars of various schools throughout the country.

WHY HE WAS SORRY.

A certain teacher, on the assembling of his scholars in the morning, noticed that one of them was crying.

Calling him out of the class, he asked:

"What is the matter with you,

Mason? Why do you come to school crying?"

"Pl-pl-ease, sir," blubbered the lad, "father was t-tacking down a new car-carpet, and he hit his finger with the ham-ham-mer!"

"So," said the schoolmaster, rather surprised, "you are sorry for your father's mishap! Is that it?"

"N-no, sir," cried the lad, "that ain't it. But it was me-me as handed him the hammer!"

"Yes, my boy; but surely your father was not so unjust as to punish you for that?"

"N-no, sir; n-no, sir."

"Then why was it?"

"P-please, sir, 'twas cos I—I couldn't help laughing at him!"

* * *

THE LOST SHEEP.

The master of a village school in a farming and grazing district was one morning giving the lads a lesson on the three parables contained in Luke xv., namely, "The lost sheep," "The lost piece of money," and "The lost (or prodigal) son."

In his discourse on the first of these parables—"The lost sheep"—he asked the question:

"Why was it, boys, that the shepherd left the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness—left them all to themselves without anyone to look after them—and went straight away in search of the one that was lost?"

And one ruddy-faced little yokel in fustian and corduroy, whose very smell

betrayed him as being connected with pigs and sheep, answered confidently:

"Why, sir, it 'ud moost likely be a prize one!"

* * *

THE PASSIVE VOICE.

One of the most difficult subjects to teach elementary school children is English etymology and syntax; and, unquestionably, the hardest part of it is the passive construction.

A teacher was setting his fifth standard boys some exercises in this branch of the subject; and, amongst other questions, he requested them to convert the following subject from the active to the passive voice:

"The cruel owner then seized the poor donkey, and kicked him unmercifully."

And one of the lads, after much mental effort and torture, reproduced the extract as follows:

"The cruel donkey then seized the poor owner, and kicked him unmercifully."

* * *

WHAT IS A "MARINER"?

And this reminds me of a whimsical answer I once received from a lad in connection with the meaning of a word which, it seemed, was unfamiliar to him.

The word "mariners" happened to occur in the passage he was reading for me, and, after he had finished, I asked him to give the meaning of the word. I may say that I suspected he did not know it, because he had stumbled over its pronunciation.

After thinking for a moment the lad's face brightened up, and he hazarded the answer:

"Please, sir, it'll be a man what's done courtin'!"

"Done courting!" I said, "whatever do you mean?"

"Why, married, sir!" he replied.



THE PROBLEMS OF TRACKETT GRIM

*The Amazing and Staggering Adventures
of the World's greatest Criminal Detec-
tive and his Boy Assistant, Splinter.*

By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

THE CASE OF THE RED PIRATES.

ON THE HIGH SEAS.

SPLINTER regarded Trackett Grim anxiously.

"You look worried, sir," he said. "You look seedy, in fact."

"It is nothing, my boy," replied Trackett Grim, the celebrated detective. "I am bored—that is all. We have been on this liner for two days, and my amazing brain has been unable to find the necessary exercise. I shall remain bored until we arrive at New York."

"And then, sir?" asked Splinter eagerly.

"Then, of course, we shall get on the track of Blue Nosed Harry, the notorious pickpocket," said Trackett Grim. "Only last week he stole a gold watch from Major Firebrand, and I have been commissioned to capture this daring crook. I am convinced he is to be found in New York."

"What clues have you got, sir?"

"Clues!" repeated Trackett Grim curtly, as he leaned over the deckrail. "I have made numerous deductions, and the thing is obvious. Blue Nosed Harry was last seen in a shipping office. He was making inquiries regarding a passage to America. Therefore, the man has gone to America—and we are on his trail."

There was something sinister and determined in Trackett Grim's voice. He and his young assistant were seated in their cabin on the superb paddle steamer "Royal Sovereign." The mammoth vessel had started her trip from London Bridge two days earlier, and was now in mid-Atlantic. The skyscrapers of New York would soon be in sight, projecting above the horizon like the masts of scores of ships.

And then suddenly a hail sounded—a grim, menacing hail.

THE RED PIRATES.

In a trice Trackett Grim and Splinter were on deck. The great paddles had ceased to revolve. Passengers were streaming over the decks. And there, quite near by, rocking up and down on the stormy seas, lay a fearsome looking submarine! It was painted red all over, and on the funnel could be seen a skull and crossbones.

"Pirates!" gasped Splinter huskily.

"They do not know that I am on board!"

exclaimed Trackett Grim curtly. "The fools! The pitiful blockheads! They could not have chosen worse—for themselves. This, Splinter, will turn out to be a big case!"

And Trackett Grim, without another word, hurried downstairs, and locked himself in his cabin. What was this? Cowardice? Was it possible that the most celebrated detective in history had got an attack of funk? No!

Ah, wait! Just wait, and the full cunning and ingenuity of Trackett Grim's masterly stratagem will be realised. Trackett Grim's brain was like no other brain. He thought of things in a flash.

And in the meantime the great vessel lay still on the glassy sea. The great triple screws had ceased to revolve. And the submarine had come close, and now six awful figures came on board the liner.

They were attired in long cloaks, blood red in hue, with hoods over their heads, and with the skull and crossbones designed on their chests. And each man carried a fearsome looking club with a studded knob at the end. One blow from such a weapon was sufficient to scatter human remains like chaff before the wind.

"What is the meaning of this?" roared the captain. "Crew! Buck up, and chuck these fatheads overboard! It's likely we're going to be raided——"

"Silence, Captain Swabdeck!" shouted the leader of the pirates. "We have come on board to skin you! We intend taking every valuable that this vessel contains. All the passengers will line up, and submit to a search. If there is any sign of treachery, I'll have no mercy!"

And then the grim business commenced. Splinter was amazed and sadly disappointed. His famous master had skulked off below while this dreadful scene went on. But Trackett Grim was not quite such a fool. In less than five minutes every person on deck had been searched.

And then the pirates came below, with the intention of plundering the cabins. The red-cloaked figures distributed themselves throughout the mighty liner. One of these pirates entered Trackett Grim's cabin.

A moment later there sounded a wild howl

and a noise which resembled a fist thudding upon a nose. Then came grim silence. But a red-cloaked figure came out almost at once.

Trackett Grim had failed! It was he who had fallen—the red pirate had done his awful work. At least, so it seemed. Perhaps there was something behind all this—something which Trackett Grim had planned out in his wonderful brain. It may as well be stated at once that a great and stunning surprise will soon be sprung upon the reader like a bombshell.

ON THE PIRATE CRAFT.

The red-cloaked figures gathered together on deck, each man loaded and staggering under his ill-gotten booty. But there was one pirate who acted a little differently now. He was the man who had entered Trackett Grim's room. Somehow, he seemed bigger.

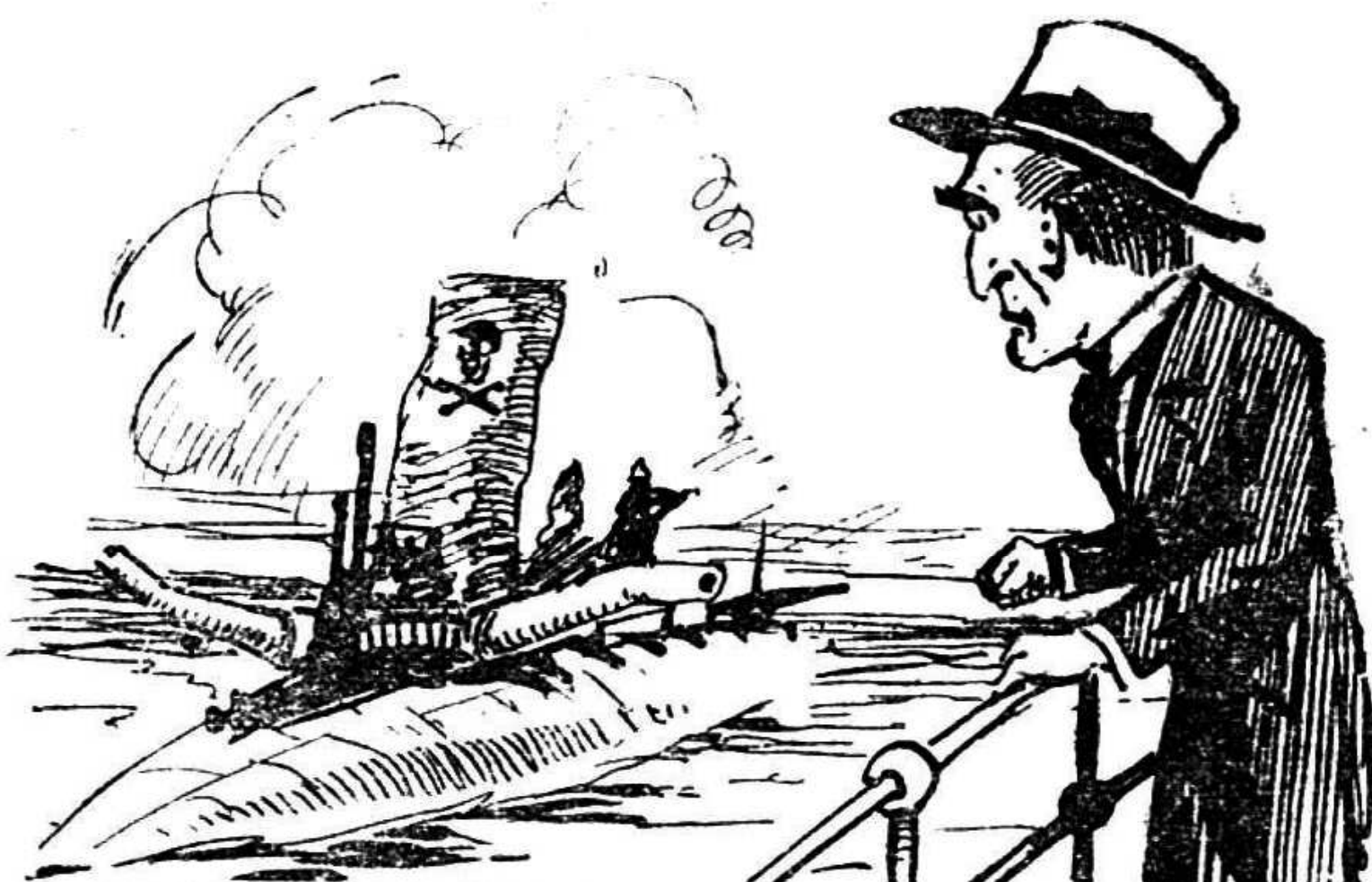
And the pirates descended on to their submarine, and in less than a moment the vessel had disappeared beneath the surface of the sea. The "Royal Sovereign" was left to continue its journey to New York, with every passenger penniless.

The pirates, down in the cabin of their own vessel, piled the table with their loot. And then, suddenly, one of the terrible scoundrels ripped off his hood. The other uttered gasping cries.

Astounding—impossible as it seemed, the man was Trackett Grim.

A SINGLE-HANDED TRIUMPH

His amazing plan had been intricate and daring. He had, in fact, laid in wait in his own cabin. And when the pirate had entered Trackett Grim had, with one lightning-like, well-placed punch on the nose, felled his



And there, quite near by, lay a fearsome looking submarine!

enemy. It had been the work of a moment to don the red cloak and hood.

And now he stood before the pirates "Hands up!" he roared. "Surrender! I am your master!"

And the desperate pirates were defeated. They could do nothing against this strong, resolute detective. He held them in the hollow of his hand. They crumpled up and surrendered. The rest is soon told.

Trackett Grim forced the pirates to rise to the surface, and the vessel was brought alongside the "Royal Sovereign." All the stolen property was restored, and Trackett Grim's fame was doubled and trebled. The world rang with the news of this amazing exploit.

But Trackett Grim remained calm. Such matters he regarded as trifles. And he went on his way to New York—hot on the trail of Blue Nosed Harry, the King of Pickpockets.

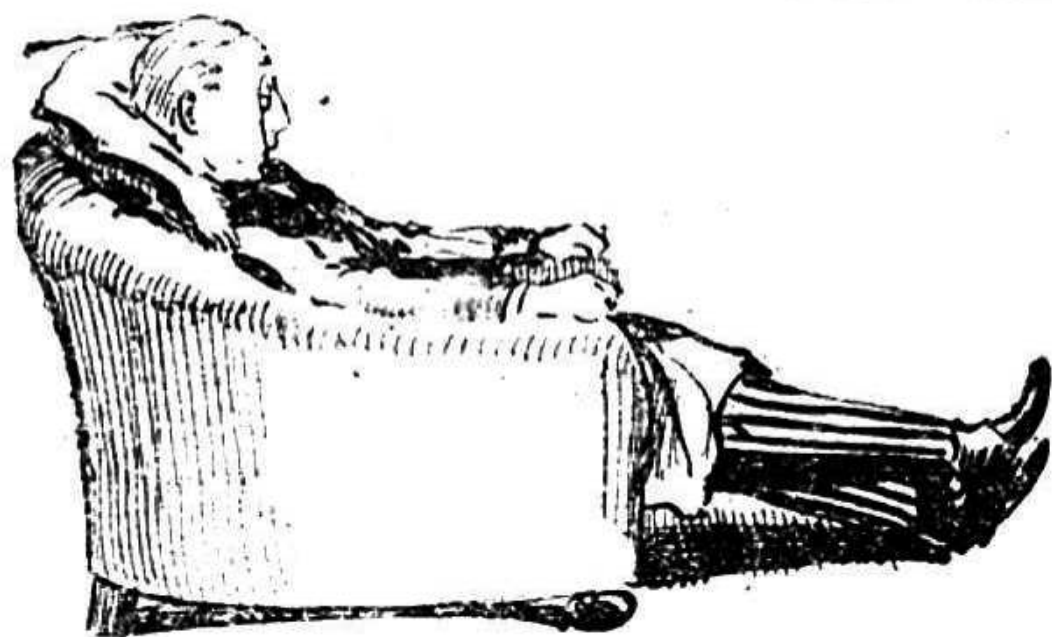
Next Week:

BLUE NOSED HARRY, THE PICKPOCKET KING.

WHO'S WHO AT ST. FRANK'S

ALBERT GULLIVER—Fullwood's chief friend and adviser. There is little difference in character between Gulliver and his leader. Perhaps Gulliver is a shade less despicable than Ralph Leslie, and will draw the line where the other will continue in his devilry. Compared with Fullwood, Gulliver's people are very well off. Consequently, there is not the same mercenary motive behind Gulliver's associations with his chief's swindling proclivities. When roused, Gulliver can use his fists to

advantage. But for the evil habit of smoking, he might have won honours in athletics. Gulliver is extremely vindictive by nature, and never forgets an injury, which he hoards up until an opportunity comes for revenge. He is cowardly at heart, and on this account prefers underhand methods of getting his own back. It is fear of the consequences also that restrains him from going the extreme lengths of villainy proposed by Fullwood. He appears in most of the yarns in which Fullwood is mentioned.



IMPROVING THE JOLLY OLD BRAIN.

By ARCHIBALD WINSTON DEREK GLENTHORNE.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—*Archie did not write this article. It is doubtful if he possesses the necessary energy to do so. Archie, however, told me exactly why he decided to leave Glenthorne Manor and come to St. Frank's. What follows is a faithful record of the very words Archie used, taken down by myself.*—NIPPER.

WELL, of course, there you are. That is to say, here I am, old tulips! I have arrived, and with luck and good fortune and all that rot, here I shall remain. St. Frank's is the place for little Archie. Absolutely.

I mean to observe, don't you know, that this is the jolly old spot for a chappie to get busy on the brain improving business. Of course, my brain isn't exactly what it ought to be. That is to say, old Smither didn't imagine so.

You don't know Smither? A cheery soul—one of the ripe and fruity merchants with a top story fairly bulging with the plates of knowledge, and so forth. Positively a human encyclopedia. Absolutely.

Well, Smither, to give you the yarn well and truly, was my what-do-you-call-it. Deucedly queer how a bally simple word slips from the scrolls of memory—— Tutor! That's it—that's the fellow! Smither was my tutor. A priceless sort of chappie in his own way, but frightfully pestilential.

You know what I mean. It's all very well for a youth, in the full bloom of life, to pass the weary hours by staggering forth on a sunny day for a round of the merry old golf links. It's perfectly serene for a chappie to have a quiet nap in an armchair before the fire—before the cheery old pile of logs, and so forth. Nothing more comfortable, don't you know.

But there you are. That's it. To be more exact, that's absolutely it! Smither was pestilential—a frightfully good sort, mind you, but a nuisance who ought to be removed. Well, between you and me and the little birds, Smither has been removed. Retribution has fallen upon his thinly covered thatch. The poor old chappie is now undergoing certain internal alterations in the place where they do these frightful things.

Smither, let me explain, was one of those buffers who wander about like an uncorked bottle of fever germs. Wherever he went he spread trouble. A bally old electric battery, shoving sparks everywhere. That is to say, the fellow made my life a misery. A positive nightmare, and what not. Grammar, geography, history, and all the rest of the bally tribe.

Well, one day, Smither crumpled—positively crumpled. Like the twig in the full blast of the east wind, he withered. A part of the inside machinery stripped a thread, or one of the gear wheels got loose. Well, anyway—zing! Off went poor old Smither. Ambulances, doctors, and so forth. As far as I can understand—although on these subjects I'm frightfully ig.—

it seems to me that Smither is suffering from a considerable quantity of appendicitis, and all that sort of rot.

Well, there you are! The young mind cannot be allowed to stagnate. The jolly old brain mustn't grow fungus, and all that sort of thing. To be quite precise, that's the reason I staggered to St. Frank's, and joined the forces, so to speak. The posish was somewhat complicated.

You see, my pater, a frightfully decent sort, but inclined to be somewhat liverish, is away in Switzerland restoring the jolly old tissues, and what not. The mater is with him. And my elder brothers—two chappies who learnt the art of slacking from Uncle Cuthbert, who's in a Government Department—are in Switzerland, too. Which leaves Archie quite alone and all that.

Well, there it is—in a nutshell, that's it. Absolutely. I had a sort of idea that St. Frank's was a kind of home for evil doers, and so forth. I pictured the jolly old place as a kind of prison, never having trickled over to gaze around. My apologies. Such is not the case. St. Frank's, as I have perceived, is IT. Absolutely and unmistakably IT. If you know what I mean—cheery faces, and bright words, and ripping scenery, and what not.

So I thought I might as well drop in. In other words, I concluded that St. Frank's was just the ideal spot for a chappie to improve his upper section. And so, laddie, I staggered in. And now I'm one of the merry old band. I'm a member of the Removal Committee—that is to say, the Remove. Deucedly confusing, this queer habit of making forms and classes and removes, and what not. Takes a fellow off his stroke, don't you know. Makes him feel a frightful chump.

I've got an impress that I shall startle the natives. At St. Frank's a fellow can expand, and so forth. His tissues have got a chance to expand, and his brain can simply let itself go. Nothing to stop it, my dear old sportsman. And a chappie is always assured of decent company. Plenty of other chappies knocking about, and trickling over the landscape, if you know what I mean. No chance of a fellow to be lonely.

Well, I mean to say, what? That's all there is—absolutely. I'm here—and there it is. Naturally, old Smither will have about five fits and sundry rounds of convulsions when he hears the news, but my pater will square him. My pater's a priceless chappie for squaring people, don't you know.

Well, how about it? Shall we reel forth into the merry old Triangle? Shall we do the trotting stunt?

(Continued from page 16.)

"But, my dear boy, you cannot mean to tell me that you have come to St. Frank's for the sole purpose of telling me that you require nothing," exclaimed the Head. "You must have had some specific reason——"

"Well, as you might say, absolutely," put in Archie. "A reason? Well, rather! I'm here! I, as it were, have become planted on the jolly old spot. The Ancient House for me, and so forth."

"Am I to understand, Glenthorne, that you have an idea of remaining at St. Frank's for good?" asked the Head.

"The old brain is working rapidly," replied Archie. "You have grasped the priceless idea with both paws."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "What an extraordinary manner of speaking! I cannot allow you to address me in such a manner, my boy. Try and be a little more conventional."

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely," he said. "Anything to oblige, sir. Well, to proceed with the business of explaining. Pray allow me to congratulate you, sir."

"Indeed!" said the Head. "For what reason?"

"Well, I mean to say, the school, and the chappies, and all the rest of it," said Archie, waving his hand. "Ripping, and so forth. Perfectly priceless spot, don't you know. A jolly old haven of peace, and all that piffle."

"Really, Glenthorne, you are a most peculiar boy——"

"Absolutely," interrupted Archie, leaning forward, and gazing at the Head in a fixed kind of way. "Peculiar? Smither—my what-do-you-call-it, don't you know—told me that at least a dozen screws were loose in the old bean. The cheerful old attie, don't you know. Works a bit loose, and so forth. Tightening process required——"

"I really cannot understand what you are driving at," interrupted Dr. Stafford impatiently. "I am beginning to suspect, Glenthorne, that you have come here with the deliberate intention of playing a joke."

"That, my dear sir, is unkind—not to say cutting," exclaimed Archie reproachfully. "The idea is absolutely and positively ridie. I am wounded. I am suffering torment."

"I think, Glenthorne, that your father desired you to come to St. Frank's at the beginning of the term?" asked the Head.

"Col. Glenthorne was in communication with me, and, in fact, made every arrangement. But, you, I believe, objected to the suggestion?"

"Absolutely," replied Archie. "That, my dear old top, is exactly it. In other words, I jibbed. I baulked at the first fence, don't you know. But I have seen the error of my ways, sir. The old brain has got the right perspective of the situation. And here I am."

"In other words, you have come to St. Frank's with the intention of staying here?"

"That, as it were, is positively the wheeze," said Archie calmly.

Dr. Stafford pursed his lips, drummed his

fingers upon the desk, and then shook his head.

"I'm afraid it is quite impossible, Glenthorne," he exclaimed.

"But, really! I mean to say, look here—that is, dash it all!" protested Archie, looking alarmed. "Imposs.? I say, have a heart, don't you know! Allow the kindly feelings to have the good old upper hand."

"You do not seem to realise, Glenthorne, that it is most extraordinary for a boy to arrive at St. Frank's with the express idea of becoming a scholar," said the Head. "These things must be arranged beforehand."

"But the old pater was busy on that job weeks ago."

"The negotiations fell through," said the Head. "Col. Glenthorne finally wrote me, stating that you were under the care of a private tutor, and that all idea of your coming to St. Frank's was at an end."

Archie smiled patiently.

"Events have been moving," he observed. "Passage of time, and so forth. Many things have happened, and poor old Smither the tutor chappie, has gone West! That is to say, he's well on the road. And I have been left sad and forlorn, and the stagnation business is setting in. The brain cogs are becoming deucedly clogged, and all that rot. So I thought I'd just reel along, and drop in here. I took a single ticket, don't you know, and——"

"I quite understand, Glenthorne, that it is your intention to remain at St. Frank's," put in Dr. Stafford. "But I really cannot see that such a thing is possible. I must, at least, communicate with your father before you can enter the school as a scholar."

Archie sighed.

"I mean to say, what rot," he exclaimed.

"How dare you——"

"No, don't get angry, sir," interrupted Archie hastily. "Just my manner of speaking, don't you know. No offence, sir. No intention of ruffling the jolly old temper. When I say rot, I mean to observe what positive piffle! Or, to be exact, the whole bally objection is senile."

"Good gracious!" grasped the Head.

"Allow me to explain the pos'ish," went on Archie. "Of course, I'm frightfully ig. on these matters, as it were. But I've got a perfect pash. to stay here, and if you want to get rid of me, well—— The fate of my youth is sealed. Positively corked. In other words, absolutely. I shall stagger forth, and pollute the first river with my merry old carcass. Suicide for me!"

"You—you absurd boy."

"Well, there you are—that's it," said Archie. "And you can avoid this shocking disaster to a deserving chappie by extending forth the glad hand. All you've got to do is to say the jolly old password. Give the sign, don't you know. You can flood the postal department with letters and telegrams to the pater as soon as you like. But Archie remains, absolutely!"

Dr. Stafford regarded the genial ass with a worried frown. He really didn't know what on earth to do. Archie was so good-natured, so complacent, that it was quite impossible to deal with him as if he were an ordinary junior.

It simply couldn't be done. He had planted himself down, and it seemed that nothing would shift him.

"Well, what about it?" asked Archie, genially. "I perceive that the manly furrows have appeared on the good old dome. Many thoughts have been busy. Shall we conclude that peace has been declared?"

The Head didn't answer for a moment. For the first time in his life, he felt rather nervous in the presence of a junior schoolboy. Instead of the Head causing awe to the boy, it was the boy who was causing awe to the Head.

Dr. Stafford thought hard for a few minutes. After all, Col. Glenthorne had been quite keen upon Archie coming to St. Frank's. Archie himself had been the only stumbling block in the scheme. But now he was quite willing to become a scholar. And it would, indeed, be easy enough to communicate with the colonel.

"Well, Glenthorne, I will tell you frankly that I do not approve of this action of yours," said the Head. "But I will allow you to remain in the school until I have heard from your father. If he is in agreement, you shall remain permanently at St. Frank's."

Archie softly clapped his hands.

"Victory!" he observed calmly. "The enemy routed, don't you know. That is to say, I'm booked, as it were. Massive thanks, my dear old tulip—Er, my dear sir! Gratitude in chunks! Well, what about it?"

"You are the most peculiar boy I have ever met!" said the Head.

"Distinction, and all that sort of thing," remarked Archie. "Out of the common rut, so to speak. Shall we proceed with the biz.? Of course, I'm shockingly ig., and I shall probably qualify for the C 3 class—that is to say the fags' department. I'm frightfully anxious to start the jolly old examinash!"

"You are anxious to do what?" asked the Head curiously.

"I mean to say, the qualifying stunt," said Archie. "In other words, how about it? The examinash, old haricot! Do we proceed now? Any old thing you like. I'm not particular."

And Archie sank down into a chair and closed his eyes. Dr. Stafford looked at him angrily for a few seconds, then concluded that he could not treat this strange youth in the ordinary way.

"Come, come, Glenthorne!" he said sharply.

"Eh? What? Oh, so there you are!" yawned Archie, opening his eyes. "Still doing the good old brain exercise, what?"

"I want you to be serious, Glenthorne," said the Head. "I will briefly examine you if you will give me your attention. Then I shall know approximately which Form you are fitted for."

Dr. Stafford didn't forget the ordeal for several weeks. Archie was a most difficult fellow to examine. He took a tremendous time to answer the various questions—but curiously, enough, he gave correct answers.

(Continued on next page.)

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He was not nearly so ignorant as he had made out. The Head was pleasantly surprised. Archie was appallingly lazy and helpless—but his wits were all there. He knew things.

"H'm!" said the Head at last. "I think that will do, my boy—"

"Cheers, and all that sort of thing!" said Archie languidly. "Saved, don't you know. Another five minutes and faintness would have arrived. I could feel it coming—I could detect the jolly old symps. I frightfully curious feeling, and what not. Makes a chappie feel washed out. Absolutely!"

"Will you please be quiet?" said the Head severely.

"Oh, rather!" replied Archie. "Just like the luscious old oyster. That's me! Proceed, my good sir. Allow the words of wisdom to flow freely. They will fall upon attentive ears, and sink into the brain department!"

"I can see that it is quite hopeless to alter you, Glenthorne," said Dr. Stafford. "As a result of the examination I think I shall be justified in placing you in the Fifth Form. You will be somewhat backward there, but Mr. Pagett will soon take you in hand."

Archie sat forward, looking alarmed.

"I mean to say, the Fifth Form!" he exclaimed. "My dear sir, but that's imposs.—it's out of the ques. Absolutely! There are some deucedly fine chappies in the Remove section, don't you know. Priceless pals, and so forth. The Remove for me every time. The Fifth interests me not!"

"You must go into the Fifth Form, Glenthorne," said the Head firmly.

Archie nearly turned pale. He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and then produced a monocle. He jammed it into his eye with some show of agitation, and then turned the monocle full upon the Head.

"There it is!" he observed. "Gives a chappie confidence and all that sort of rot. Calms down the agitated nerve centres. What I mean is, I want to go to the Remove, sir. Every time. I should make a deuced mess of things in the Fifth—absolutely. You look kind-hearted, my dear old top! There's a gleam in your eye which brings comfort to me. On my bended knees I beseech you. The Remove is my future home. Absolutely!"

Dr. Stafford could not refrain from smiling.

"Upon my soul, Glenthorne, what a strange boy you are!" he exclaimed. "You are most persistent in demanding your own way. It may be weak of me to give in, but I suppose I had better do so, as you are hardly up to Fifth Form standard. I will let you go into the Remove."

"My blessings upon you!" said Archie cheerily. "Thanks of the most priceless kind. That is to say, large consignments of gratitude and so forth. Well, what about it? Something tells me I ought to be staggering off!"

"Yes, perhaps it would be just as well if you departed," said the Head. "You had better see Mr. Lee, and he will tell you which study you are to occupy, and give you other instructions. I shall write to your father at once, and acquaint him with the facts."

"That," said Archie, "is precisely the idea." Before leaving he gave the Head Col. Glenthorne's address, and then he lounged languidly forth, and emerged into the Triangle. He was at once surrounded by a crowd of juniors. I was one of the first to reach his side.

"Well?" I asked.

"Absolutely!" said Archie.

"Absolutely what, you duffer?"

"Well!" replied Archie. "Absolutely well, my dear sportsman. The dear old gentleman with the white thatch has passed the decree. I am here. That is to say, I'm a permanent fixture."

"Oh, good!" said Pitt. "We can just do with you in the Remove, my son. You'll make life worth living. Whenever we feel down in the dumps, we can drop in on you, and have our spirits revived."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie calmly. "But wait! The jolly old memory jogs me somewhat. There was something about an island, or something. Trouble with the Giddy bird, or something—"

"That's right," I interrupted. "But you haven't told us how you got on with the Head. Have you arranged to come into the Remove?"

"I mean to say, precisely," replied Archie. "Every time, old bean. Quite a fruity interview with the Head, don't you know?"

Everybody was greatly interested and delighted. Archie was very popular already. He was so utterly different from anybody else, that it was impossible to ignore him. He was so genial, so calm and complacent. He promised to be a lasting ornament to the Remove.

But the coming of Archie was to be even more interesting yet!

CHAPTER VI.

IN POSSESSION AGAIN!



DURING Archie Glenthorne's interview with the Head, the Cadets had changed from their Etons into uniform. And now we were all ready for an immediate return to camp. It was still comparatively early, with plenty of daylight left.

Lessons had not been over so very long, and these early March evenings did not give way to darkness until half-past six or seven—according to the cloudiness or clearness of the sky.

It was now quite bright, with the sun shining—the time being only a little after four-thirty. We had a clear two hours before darkness fell—two hours in which to put in some extremely strenuous work.

While we crowded round Archie in the Triangle I was thinking, and wondering if it would be possible for us to return to Willard's Island. Mr. Giddy, the self-important estate manager employed by Col. Glenthorne, was acting fully within his rights in ordering us off the island.

He had placed Captain Joshua Niggs and Ben Croke on the island to act as watchmen

These rascals would report to Mr. Giddy if any attempt were made to turn them off. They were also there to further their own ends.

Mr. Giddy, of course, knew nothing about the treasure. He was utterly ignorant on this subject. But Niggs and Croke had played their cards well, and had arranged things so that they had Willard's island to themselves.

As Tommy Watson and I had already seen—the previous night—the rascally bargemen were fully alive to the possibilities of the case. Although unassisted by the secret cipher and the peculiar jigsaw puzzle, they were nevertheless making an attempt to locate old Willard's treasure.

On the face of it, this was rather a hopeless task. But it would just be the irony of fate if the beggars happened to hit upon the secret treasure by accident.

Nelson Lee had the matter in hand. He was puzzling over the cipher—knowing that this was the chief clue. Once he had got the key, the rest would be comparatively simple.

However, I didn't worry about that just then. The main point was to pitch Niggs and Croke off the island, and to enter into possession once more. But even now I was doubtful if it could be done.

I took Archie by the arm, and faced him squarely.

"Look here, Archie!" I said firmly. "I've got something to say!"

"Well, I mean, what?" said Archie mildly. "The fact is, old lad, I was just thinking about the good old forty winks! Deucedly exerting, don't you know, hobnobbing with Headmasters, and all that sort of rot. The merry tissues require bracing, and so forth!"

"The merry tissues can wait!" I said firmly. "You came here to lend us a hand, didn't you?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then how can you lend us a hand by having forty winks?"

"I mean to say, afterwards!" exclaimed Archie. "That is to observe, a chappie feels somewhat withered, don't you know, after a few yards of exertion. A certain quantity of nap would brace up the circulation, so to speak."

"You'll have plenty of time for napping afterwards!" I insisted. "You've got to go and see Mr. Lee, yet——"

"The brainy lad who opened the door?" asked Archie. "I've already broken bread with the cheery gentleman. A top-holer—absolutely. Led me like a lamb to the Head's den. Shoved me inside, and what not. A regular chappie!"

"Well, you'll have to see him before long, about various matters," I continued. "Your study, for example—sleeping-quarters, and all the rest of it. But there's no hurry. At the moment we'll confine ourselves to Willard's Island."

Archie sighed.

"I mean to say, the idea is for me to rally round, what?" he asked. "Well, it's perfectly lopping, and all the rest of it, but I'm frightfully short on the idea business. It's no good relying on me to do anything that might stagger the old populace!"

"I'm not going to rely on you for anything like that!" I explained. "But I'll put the position in a nutshell. I told you all about it this morning, so you ought to know. Giddy, your pater's estate manager, has turned us off Willard's Island, and planted a couple of watchmen on the spot. These watchmen, I may add, are no friends of ours. We had a few tiffs with them before Giddy took them into service."

"In other words, there's nothing doing in the hug line?"

"Nothing whatever," I replied. "Niggs and Croke are a couple of scoundrels, and they're up to no good!"

"As it were, a really bright pair?" asked Archie. "A couple of frightful chappies who trickle around, dispensing villainy, and so forth? Two of those bounders you read about in the bally newspapers? I know—you needn't explain! The old gear-box is quite clear on the point."

"Well, what's to be done?" I enquired.

Archie looked rather helpless.

"I mean to say, what?" he said, weakly. "That is to remark, how about it? Or, to be more exact, what's the notion of applying to me? I'm not one of those brainy coves—one of those chappies with bulging foreheads, and so forth. When it comes to ideas, I'm finished. I'm concluded!"

"But you came here to help us, didn't you?" roared Handforth, pushing forward. "A jolly fine helper—I don't think! You've got no ideas, and no brains to think of one with!"

Archie pushed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed Handforth in a pained way.

"The fog-horn in full blast!" he remarked. "I mean to say, I've heard something like you at sea! Most earsplitting noise, and all that rot! No offence, of course. But wouldn't it be better to see somebody about it?"

"You—you rotter——"

"Hold on, Handy!" I broke in. "Leave Archie alone! We haven't got much time, and we want to know what to do. Now then, Archibald!"

The new boy looked intensely worried.

"Well, there you are!" he observed. "I'm stumped, old tulip! Fairly on the slab, as it were. Nothing doing whatever in the attic—positively barren. Absolutely!—I ought to send for Phipps."

"Phipps?" I repeated.

"My man, don't you know," explained Archie. "A deucedly brainy lad, and what not. A friend in need, and all that sort of rot. Always handy—always on the spot with heady notions. Quite a laddie!"

"But you haven't got a man to look after you?" asked Pitt, blankly.

"My dear old walnut," protested Archie. "Dash it all, a fellow can't get on without a man to look after him! What should I do without Phipps? The very thought staggers the old brain! I'd be lost—staggering about in the wilderness, as it were. I mean to say, a chappie must have somebody to do things!"

"If you think you'll have somebody to do things at St. Frank's, you've made a bit of a bloomer," I grinned. "But we'll side-track

Phipps for the minute. Now, about the island. Shall I suggest something?"

"Absolutely!" replied Archie, with relief. "A priceless suggestion! Wonderful how you get these flashes, don't you know. Proceed with the suggesting material. I'm frightfully interested."

"Well, look here," I said briskly. "We'll all go in a body to Willard's Island. We'll land, chuck those two bounders off, and then proceed to make our camp. We'll take possession again."

Archie regarded me wonderingly.

"That is to say, so much brain-power all at once!" he remarked. "Sort of makes a chappie feel a bit rocky on his stumps, don't you know! A perfectly fruity idea! Absolutely. You'll be a great man, one day!"

"But there are drawbacks!" I went on. "Niggs and Croke are certain to rush to old Giddy. They'll probably telephone him up from the village, in order to save time. Then Giddy will come rushing along with an army of supporters, and possibly a few members of the police. Prosecutions will follow——"

"This," interrupted Archie, "is where I shine. This is where I dazzle forth, and all that sort of thing. Leave it to me, old top! I'll rally round and do some stout work! The scheme, my dear sportsman, is sound!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Well, I mean to say, when it comes to ticking a chappie off, I rather fancy myself!" said Archie, modestly. "If there's one thing I can do, it's ticking a chappie off! When you hear me you'll gaze in admiration."

"But will that be enough?" asked Watson.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I've been waiting for a chance to tick old Giddy off for many moons, you know. A most unpleasant cove! The kind of chappie a fellow wants to positively cut! Something tells me that old Giddy was really supposed to be a butcher. Just the lad for the job! Beefy, and so forth!"

"Well, we won't waste any more time," I said. "We'll chance it. If we let ourselves into the cart, it can't be helped. But we shall rely on you, Archie, for moral support."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Chunks of it, old lad! Rely on me up to the brass rail! I'll be there every time—and when it comes to ticking a chappie off, put me on the map, and leave me there! I'm the stuff!"

Without any further argument we proceeded in a body to our camp. This, at the moment, was the boathouse. Fatty Little was already there, busily making preparations for tea, assisted by a couple of orderlies. Judging by sundry crumbs adhering to their tunics, they had been sampling the fodder already.

But this, of course, was their privilege. Fatty energetically protested against any move being made at once. Tea, he declared, was far more important than going back to the island.

I pointed out, quite firmly, that tea could go and hang itself. Fatty Little wanted to know how a liquid could perform such a miracle. I didn't answer the conundrum, but lost no time in getting my forces ready.

"Now, sergeant!" I said to Handforth. "We'll do this thing in proper style. You'll

take twenty men, and march them down to the water's edge, and then embark them into two or three boats. You'll take Willard's Island by storm. I'll follow, with Archie."

Handforth saluted.

"Right, sir!" he said curtly. "I'll carry on!"

Handforth carried on. As some of the fellows remarked, he carried on dreadfully. He formed his men up into double file, and after a lot of unnecessary orders, managed to get them into the boats.

Then he gave instructions for the advance to commence. And the St. Frank's cadets swept down upon Willard's Island. The river was quite calm, and the setting sun made the whole picture a most delightful one. It was hardly the kind of scene one would have imagined for the setting of a raid.

There was nothing in it, of course. The only enemies to turn off were Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke—and Sergeant Handforth was practically capable of doing that single-handed. I didn't think it necessary to bother about being there personally.

Besides, I had another task. In brief, I had to hang on to Archie. He was quite capable of wandering off, and leaving us to it. If I left him alone, he would probably vanish, and go to sleep somewhere. So I kept close beside him, and finally got him into a boat and we went downstream to the island. He, of course, was attired in his elegant lounge suit, and he still surveyed the scene through his eyeglass—which now appeared to be a fixture in his face.

"Hardly the occasion for fine raiment, and so forth," observed Archie, as he eyed a pool of water in the bottom of the boat with stern disapproval. "Deucedly awkward, don't you know. I don't mind admitting, old sport, that the old bean is strained to an atrocious extent."

"The old bean?" I repeated.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "What I mean is, the top storey—the thinking department. As a matter of fact, I'm having a perfectly foul time!"

I grinned.

"What's worrying you?" I enquired.

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "Oh, rather! Absolutely!"

"But you haven't explained——"

"Touching on the subject of Phipps!" said Archie. "That's it! That's the very scheme, don't you know! Phipps! A really corking chappie—the kind of fellow who makes you feel that life is worth living. Without Phipps, I'm groping; I'm positively floundering. Fact is, I never dreamed what it would be like without Phipps dodging round in the offing. I'm having quite a ghastly time!"

"We'll talk about Phipps later on," I said. "The island's in sight, my son, and Handforth and his merry men appear to be having a great time. There'll be piles of work for all of us soon."

Archie shuddered.

"I mean to say 'work,'" he repeated.

"I say, dash it all—— Well, look here, that's a bit too steep, old walnut! Somewhat perpendicular, don't you know! Work! What does the word actually mean?"

"You needn't put yourself out: we sha'n't ask you to join in," I said. "Your bit will be required later, when the evening shadows draw longer."

Archie nodded vaguely and relapsed into a thoughtful silence. Probably he was still worrying about Phipps—whoever Phipps happened to be.

We were now practically upon Willard's Island. The other boats were all drawn up, and the Cadets were standing in a big group just in front of the picturesque stone building which had been constructed in the centre of the island.

Captain Joshua Niggs and Mr. Ben Croke had just been turned out of their quarters. The two rascally bargemen had made things fairly comfortable for themselves in the chief apartment of the building, which had been covered over and made all snug by the Cadets.

The two men were somewhat violent.

"Bring the prisoners out and make them stand in front of me!" commanded Handforth curtly. "If they resist, use violence! I'm not going to be messed about by a couple of rotters of this sort!"

Captain Niggs glared round curiously.

"You blamed young varmint!" he shouted. "What's the meanin' o' this 'ere? D'ye think I'm goin' to do as you tell me? Me an' Ben ain't goin' to shift for nobody, an' if you tries any tricks——"

"That's enough!" rapped out Handforth. "See that that prisoner remains silent!"

Niggs was in the firm grasp of five or six Cadets, and, big and burly as he was, he could not do much against such odds. Ben Croke was also held by several juniors, but he remained calm and submissive.

"Better take it easy, my man!" said De Valerie.

"Take it easy, will I?" raved Captain Niggs. "Poor old Ben won't give you no trouble, that's certain! He ain't got the strength of a caterpillar, an' if you 'old 'im too tight, as 'like as not 'e'll die! 'E's near in his grave now, poor old feller!"

"I ain't got one foot in it, like you 'ave!" growled Mr. Croke.

"Didn't I tell you to be quiet?" thundered Handforth.

"Yes, and you can tell me ag'in!" stormed Niggs. "You infernal young cub! It's all very well to come 'ere in this way, but if you turns us off the island, you'll only 'ave yourselves to blame for what 'appens! I'll tell Mr. Giddy——"

"Tell him!" snapped Handforth gruffly.

"An' it won't be long afore 'e comes an' sends you about your durned business!" shouted Captain Niggs. "I warns you, my lads! If you've got any sense, you'll drop this 'ere game an' clear off!"

Sergeant Handforth glared.

"That's enough!" he said. "Now then, men! Take the prisoners and march them down to the boats! Row them across to the other bank and pitch them out! They're chucked off the island; they're whacked!"

Just for a moment it seemed that Captain

Niggs meant to make a fight for it, but the determined attitude of the Cadets made him hesitate, and finally he gave in without any show of resistance.

He and Croke were taken down to the water's edge, and five minutes later they were landed on the opposite bank—not actually pitched out, as Handforth had ordered, but it was quite certain that they were no longer on the island.

Captain Niggs shook his fist fiercely and uttered an oath.

"Just you wait!" he said darkly. "You'll regret this 'ere game, I'll warrant!"

He swung on his heel and walked swiftly down the towing-path. Ben Croke accompanied him, and the two men were soon lost to sight behind the willows.

"Well, that's that!" said Handforth. "And now to business!"

The Cadets were all fairly excited. The spirit of recklessness had become general, and they didn't seem to care what happened now. The boat-house camp was, after all, very unsatisfactory.

But Willard's Island was an ideal camping spot, and the next hour was one crowded with intense activity. Boats were coming and going in a constant stream. They brought down every article of camp equipment, including blankets, eating utensils, cooking pots and pans, lamps, stoves, and everything, in fact, connected with the camp.

It was a record piece of work, and every Cadet laboured with a will. Much to Fatty Little's dismay, tea was not even thought about. He had prepared it, but the whole meal was carried down to the island in more or less of a mangled condition. There would be plenty of time for eating when the camp was settled.

And when the shadows were drawing long, things were fairly ship-shape. The boat-house was looking its old self, deserted and, perhaps, a little untidier than usual; and Willard's Island was now bustling with life. The camp was in full swing.

A cheerful fire was lit in the open space in front of the building, and round this squatted a number of grimy Cadets, mostly in their shirt-sleeves, thoroughly tired, but well content. The thing had been done, but what of the consequences?

CHAPTER VII.

ARCHIE RALLIES ROUND!



REGINALD PITT looked round curiously.

"By the way, what's become of Archie?" he asked.

"Haven't seen him for an hour," replied Grey. "I hope

the ass hasn't sneaked off. Giddy might turn up at any minute——"

"Archie is taking a little nap on a pile of blankets," I said, coming up. "The strenuous nature of the evening has been too much for him. He's sleeping peacefully and contentedly.

but now and again he murmurs the name of 'Phipps' in the course of his slumbers."

"He's a rummy card," said Pitt, "but I must say I like him. Let's hope he rallies round us in this emergency. It's quite probable that Giddy will come——"

"It's dead certain!" I interrupted.

"Why?"

"Because Giddy is here!" I replied.

"Gaze upon it, my sons!"

I was staring across the river to the towing-path. The other Cadets jumped up and looked, too; and there, hurrying along at great speed, could be seen a knot of people.

There were six or seven, and they were headed by Mr. Horace Giddy, the manager of the Glenthorne estate. Willard's Island was a part of the estate, and, therefore, private property.

Mr. Giddy looked very important—and very

squashing of the Cadet Corps. We couldn't take the risk."

Handforth grunted.

"Well, if you put it like that, I suppose you're right," he said. "But, by George, if that fathead of an Archie messes the thing up, I'll punch his nose until he can't tell himself from a lump of pulp!"

"You won't do anything of the sort, Handy," I said. "Archie Glenthorne is a decent sort; he's with us. But he's rather a fathead, and that's not his fault. But I've got an idea that he'll rise to the occasion."

"He'd better rise pretty quickly, then," said Pitt. "The distinguished guests are about to arrive!"

Giddy and his supporters, in fact, were on the opposite bank of the stream, and the estate manager was already waving his hands wildly.



I led the way in, crawling on my hands and knees, and Tommy Watson followed immediately in my rear.—(See page 4.)

angry. He strutted along with a fierce stride, and close behind him were a number of burly men attired after the style of gamekeepers; and, probably in order to create a big impression, there were two police-constables."

"The Giddy bird has arrived in all his glory!" said Pitt. "Well, we were expecting it, so we're ready. The question is, what the dickens can we do? If we defy him, what will Mr. Giddy do to us?"

"That's where Archie comes in," I replied. "If Archie fails us, we're doomed! We can't defy the police. We can't go against law and order!"

"Why not?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "Great pip! It wouldn't take us two minutes to keep that miserable crowd at bay. They'll never be able to land on the island unless we choose to let 'em."

"If Archie fails, we fail as well," I said. "It would be quite possible to keep Giddy and Co. at bay, Handy; nothing easier, in fact. But it would be a fatal policy to adopt. We should only get ourselves into big trouble with the Head, and with the school governors, and that would probably end in the complete

I dispatched Pitt into the building to fetch Archie, and prepared myself for the ordeal.

The evening was so still that a conversation could be carried on over the stream without any difficulty. And I went down to the water's edge, and cheerfully waved my hand.

"Good evening, Mr. Giddy!" I called. "Quite mild for the time of the year!"

Mr. Giddy seemed to be choking.

"You—you infernal young brat!" he bellowed. "How—how dare you defy me in this way? What is the meaning of this—this invasion? You have not only had the utter audacity to lay violent hands upon my two watchmen, but you have actually dared to trespass upon the island again!"

"If you will let me explain, Mr. Giddy——"

"I will let you do nothing of the sort!" raved the fat man. "Explain, indeed! There is no explanation—you have deliberately defied me, and this time I shall not give you one inch of toleration. Unless you remove yourselves from that property immediately, I shall turn you off by force!"

"Come and do it!" bawled Handforth defiantly.

"Yah! Go to the dickens!"

"Rats to you, you old tub!"

"Cadets for ever!"

A perfect howl went up from the juniors, and Mr. Giddy stamped up and down, clenched his fists, and went purple.

"This—this is unbearable!" he thundered. "I shall not be content with allowing you to get off the island. I shall go even further, and prosecute you all for trespassing. Don't imagine that this is merely a threat. You have been warned once, and——"

"Hold on, Mr. Giddy!" I interrupted. "We have got plenty of justification for being here now. And I think it would be far better if you came across to the island, so that we could talk in a more business-like fashion."

"I will not be tricked——"

"I give you my word, sir, that you will not be touched or harmed in any way!" I broke in. "I am the commander of this Cadet Corps, and you need have no fear. But a little talk would be useful, I believe."

Mr. Giddy hesitated for a moment, and then turned to his companions. Finally, he looked back across the river, and nodded.

"You give me your word of honour you will not touch me?" he asked fiercely.

"Yes."

"Very well—I will come," said the estate manager. "Send a boat across at once."

Handforth took charge of the boat, but I sent three other boats with him, well filled with Cadets, in case Mr. Giddy was contemplating any treachery. It would rather complicate matters if a number of fellows were collared.

In the meantime, Pitt was locating Archie Glenthorne.

That languid youth was found, after a short search, sprawling full length on a comfortable pile of blankets. He was sleeping with an expression of peaceful contentment upon his face, and his eyeglass was dangling on its cord.

Pitt shook him gently.

"Wake up, Archie!" he said. "You're needed!"

"Hallo! Hallo! I mean to say, what?" murmured Archie, opening his eyes and sitting up. "Oh, there you are, old sportsman! Deucedly thoughtful of you to wake me up, don't you know. Thanks muchly. Chunks of gratitude, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't, require any gratitude," said Pitt. "Mr. Giddy has arrived, and you're needed—at once!"

Archie looked somewhat startled.

"Absolutely!" he said. "Well, rather! Just say the word, old lad, and I'm there! This is my scene, I believe? In other words, this is where I push on, and do the ticking off stunt, what? A sound scheme!"

"Good!" said Pitt. "Buck up!"

"Well, dash it all, give a chappie a chance!" protested Archie. "There's no hurry, and so forth. Must have time to compose the old nerves, don't you know! A fearful ordeal awaits me, and a chappie needs to gather up all his forces, and what not. But I'm your man—absolutely. Trust me, and I'll do the merry old trick. Well, rather! I'm the laddie who invented this sort of stuff!"

He managed to get to his feet at last, and then he languidly followed Pitt out of the building, and emerged into the dusk. Mr. Giddy was just arriving on the island—he was, in fact, in the act of stepping ashore.

He faced me and glared in a baleful manner.

"Now, young man, what have you got to say?" he demanded harshly. "What explanation have you to offer? I cannot waste any time with nonsense, and I demand to know why you have dared to bring your infernal Cadets on the island. You have taken this action in face of my direct orders to the contrary."

"Exactly," I said. "That's just the position, Mr. Giddy. But I think I am justified——"

"Justified!" stormed Mr. Giddy.

"Yes. I received permission over your head——"

"Don't tell such confounded lies to me!" snapped Mr. Giddy fiercely. "I am in sole command of the Glenthorne estate. The colonel is away, and——"

"Well, here we are, what?" said Archie genially, arriving upon the scene. "Here we absolutely are! That is to say, there is no question about our arrival! The landscape appears to have enlarged somewhat—vast quantities of elephants knocking about, as it were. Why, hallo, hallo! I mean to say, it's the Giddy lad! Absolutely!"

Mr. Giddy started back, thoroughly astounded.

"Master Archibald!" he exclaimed thickly.

"What—what are you doing here?"

"Well, don't you know. I'm hobnobbing with the dear old lads, and all that sort of rot!" replied Archie. "Quite a cheery crowd. You must let me introduce you, old scout. Large supplies of good nature on hand——"

"Don't you know that these young rascals are trespassing on your father's property?" demanded Mr. Giddy angrily. "I'm amazed, Master Archibald: that you should be here! It is positively outrageous!"

I could easily see that Mr. Giddy was thoroughly taken aback. He had not been expecting any such discovery as this. And now that he found himself face to face with Archie, he didn't exactly know what to say. By the expression on his face, however, I gathered that he was quite annoyed.

Archie turned to us, and adjusted his monocle.

"This, my dear old tulips, is where I shine!" he exclaimed. "In other words, this is where I commence the ticking-off process. I mean to say, something's got to be done, what? Something drastic, don't you know?"

"Take my advice, Master Archibald, and leave this island as soon as you can!" exclaimed Mr. Giddy, controlling himself with difficulty. "I am greatly surprised to find you here, mixing with these—these young hooligans——"

"Well, as it were, that's somewhat thick, don't you imagine?" asked Archie mildly. "Rather terse, and what not! A deucedly strong term, Mr. Giddy. The most priceless idea that I can think of is that you should trickle away into the offing and quietly vanish!"

"Look here, Master Archibald, I'm not standing any nonsense!" raved Mr. Giddy. "I'm not going to be dictated to by you."

"Say on, old scout—say on!" observed Archie. "Your remarks may be somewhat fruity, but quite to the point. Absolutely! I mean to say, I'm here—positively standing on the good old terra-firma. These priceless lads are my pals. Rattling decent chappies, and so forth."

"They are a set of young blackguards——"

"Enough!" interrupted Archie, holding up his hand. "In other words, enough! I might even say, absolutely enough! You may be a somewhat beefy cove, but there are limits to the manner in which you can throw the old weight about. Listen carefully, my dear lad. Words of wisdom are about to flow!"

"I—I refuse——"

"The tap of knowledge is about to be unloosed!" went on Archie, unperturbed. "The cheery old oracle is getting busy. Absolutely! Fade away, my dear chappie! Remove your fairy carcass to other climes! I don't mind telling you, don't you know, that you positively give me the pip! I'm feeling frightfully annoyed. I mean to say, I'm quite furious. Observe the flashing eye!"

Archie projected his head forward, and glared. The cadets stood round, grinning with huge delight. The new fellow was coming up to the scratch well, and he was handling the situation in a masterly way.

"I have had enough of this nonsense!" snarled Mr. Giddy harshly. "You do not understand the situation, Master Archibald. These boys are trespassing on your father's property! Do you realise that?"

"What-ho!" said Archie brightly. "What-ho again! This is where I allow my face to slide slightly. In other words, take note of the jolly old smile! Trespassing, what? Allow me to draw the veil from the situash! These chappies are my guests, don't you know. They are on the island at my request, and all that sort of thing. Turning them off means turning me off—and that, old scout, is out of the ques. positively ridie. and prepos.!"

Mr. Giddy nearly gobbled with rage.

"You—you——"

"Now, now!" said Archie, reprovingly. "Calm the good old temper!"

"This is unbearable!" stormed the manager. "I am doing my utmost in your father's interests, and all you can do is to interfere. Let me tell you, Master Archibald, that I shall write to the colonel fully on this subject——"

"I mean to say, spare the dear old pater!" interrupted Archie. "Dash it all, what has he done to deserve such packets of misery? Between ourselves, old top, I don't mind admitting that you're a frightful old buster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This—this is getting beyond all bounds!" panted Mr. Giddy, as the cadets roared. "I will not be insulted by you, Master Archibald! I advise you to get away from this island while you are safe!"

Archie waved his hand.

"This article annoys me!" he exclaimed.

This excrescence positively ruins the landscape, don't you know!"

"You young dolt!" shouted Mr. Giddy. "You brainless young idiot! I'll soon show you!"

The manager brought himself up with a jerk. In his fury he had allowed the words to come out somewhat rashly. For, after all, it was decidedly the limit for the man to refer to his employer's son in such a way—and to his face.

Archie pulled himself up straight, jammed his monocle more firmly into his eye, and gazed round.

"Well, I mean to say, what?" he protested. Somewhat near the edge, as you might say. This man has wounded me!"

"You're not going to stand that sort of thing, are you?" roared Handforth.

"Hold your tongue, confound you!" snarled Mr. Giddy.

"Well, dash it all, things have got beyond the chatty stage, as you might say!" exclaimed Archie. "The good old smile has vanished. When a cove insults me, the blood of the Glenthornes rises up, don't you know. Fairly bubbles, in fact. This human haystack has insulted me. He has withered my pride, somewhat. Things have got to be done!"

Archie moved a step forward, and tapped Mr. Giddy on the chest.

"This," he said, "is where you crumple, my lad! There has been sufficient—in fact, there has been enough! Do not imagine that I shall allow you to proceed. Absolutely! That is to say, absolutely not! The fact is, your face confuses a chappie—makes him lose the jolly old trend, and so forth. What I mean is, the pater will square this when he returns to the ancestral mansh!"

Mr. Giddy looked rather startled.

"I—I lost my temper!" he muttered. "You don't seem to understand, Master Archibald, that these young ruffians have deliberately flouted my orders. They have no right upon this island."

"Tut—tut!" said Archie, waving his hand. "In fact, tut—tut severely! I might even say, with the addition of knobs! Leave me, Giddy! It may be deucedly hard, but fade away! I don't even see that it can really happen, but gather yourself together, and make a large attempt. Your presence annoys me. It puts me off my bally stroke, and all that sort of rot. These dear chappies are my guests, and your interference is most frightfully not required."

"But—but——"

"What have I done to have this worry?" asked Archie, appealingly. "Why should I suffer such pangs? The jolly old pater would be delighted in about fifteen positions if he knew that I was gallivanting with the lads. There is nothing more to be said. The oracle has spoken, and that's that! That, in fact, is positively that! When it comes to a matter of this kind, I'm firm. As immovable as pyramids, and so forth. My mind, like the blonde young lady's face, is shockingly made up! Quit, my dear old nuisance—dematerialise!"

Mr. Giddy had had just about as much as

he could stand. For a moment or two he clenched his fists, opened his mouth once or twice to speak, but failed. Then, with a choking cry, he turned to me.

"Take me across to the other side!" he snapped, harshly. "I wash my hands of you! The fact that Master Glenthorne is here makes a great difference. But I can give you my word that when Colonel Glenthorne returns home, I shall put all the facts before him. And then—look out for yourselves!"

Mr. Giddy probably relieved himself to a certain extent by speaking in this way. But he was a beaten man—and he knew it.

The one and only Archie had done the trick!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIDDLE OF THE CIPHER.



"EXCELLENT! Excellent!"

Nelson Lee murmured the words in a tone of great satisfaction. He was seated at his desk in his study, and before him he

had a writing-block upon which were a number of peculiar signs—and, underneath, some writing.

The Ancient House was quiet—unusually quiet. It was not late—being, in fact, comparatively early in the evening. The unaccustomed quietness was due to the fact that practically all the members of the Remove were on Willard's Island.

Of course, a certain number of fellows remained—fellows who were not cadets, such as Fullwood & Co., and Merrell and Enoch Snipe, and Teddy Long and Timothy Tucker. These juniors, and a few others, occupied their studies, as of old. And at night they slept in temporary quarters.

For the Remove and Fifth dormitories were under repair. In the daytime the workmen were busy on the job. But, although the task was proceeding with all swiftness, two or three weeks would elapse before things became normal.

Nelson Lee was rather glad of the quietness, for he had had a very intricate problem on hand. But at last it was solved. He had got to the bottom of the secret which had been puzzling him for some time.

On his desk lay the sheet of foolscap which had been found in old John Willard's brass-bound box. This foolscap sheet contained a message in cipher. It was of a character which Nelson Lee had never before encountered. He was an expert in this kind of thing, but, even so, it had given him quite a twisting.

But, by trying process after process, and method after method, he had eliminated them all until he had arrived upon the right solution. As a matter of fact, I don't exactly know how the gov'nor really did the trick. He explained it to me afterwards, but it was so intricate that I failed to follow him.

Not that that matters.

The main thing was that he had solved the

cipher. And now, he had written down the true message, and he regarded it with great satisfaction. And it put an end to every scrap of doubt. The words which Nelson Lee had written—which he had deciphered from the foolscap—made the whole thing a certainty.

Until now, old Willard's secret hoard had been something of a myth. It was only a mere supposition that the old eccentric had left a fortune hidden away somewhere on Willard's Island, or in the neighbourhood.

But now the facts were clear.

Nelson Lee picked up the writing-pad, and a thoughtful expression came into his eyes. This whole thing, he knew, was going to be big. Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke were not chasing a wild goose.

The words on the pad ran as follows:

"He who has solved this riddle is indeed clever. The reward will be an ample one for he who pieces the fretsaw puzzle together, thus having in his hands a complete and accurate guidance to the precise whereabouts of my hidden gold. There is much of this—vast and unthinkable quantities of pure gold! The fortune is one which will make any man as rich as the monarch of a fairy kingdom. It is easy to find—quite easy. Piece the puzzle together, and the pathway to the gold will become clear. Proceed!"

"JOHN WILLARD."

Nelson Lee smiled with rather grim amusement as he glanced over the words once again. There was also a look of satisfaction in his eyes. He had set himself out to accomplish this task, and he had succeeded. The great detective had every reason to feel satisfied.

He could not help being somewhat amused. Old Willard had made the task of finding his hidden gold a decidedly difficult one. Even now that the cipher was solved, the treasure was just as far off. For, before the gold could be found, it was necessary to piece together the intricate jigsaw puzzle. This was made of thin wood, and every scrap of it was so constructed that it had its proper place. Old Willard had made the puzzle himself, with the aid of a fretsaw. This, alone, must have occupied him weeks and weeks, for the thing was perfection itself—a work of pure art.

"Well, so far, we know that this gold exists," said Nelson Lee. "I was almost certain of it from the very start, but now there can be no doubt—unless, of course, the old man was playing a great practical joke. But that, I think, is hardly feasible. The gold already exists."

Nelson Lee turned his attention to the jigsaw puzzle. He had not spent very much time on it so far, feeling convinced that the cipher was the most important. As it now turned out, he had simply been wasting his time on the cipher. It was the puzzle which formed the whole key to the treasure.

And Nelson Lee knew very well that this task would be even more formidable than the other. A cunningly constructed jigsaw puzzle is one of the most difficult things to solve, and old Willard had manufactured his so cleverly

and the markings upon the upper face were so indistinct and vague, that they formed practically no guidance.

It was not like piecing together one of those simple picture-puzzles, where a face, or an arm, or sections of a room serve as a direct clue. Here there was nothing, although, when all the pieces were correctly fitted together, the puzzle, as a whole, would be understandable.

Nelson Lee was about to seriously set himself to the task when a tap sounded upon the door. It was a somewhat timid tap, and Lee looked up.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened, and Archie Glenthorne appeared. He lounged in elegantly, jamming his monocle into his eye as he did so. He gazed round, smiled amiably upon Nelson Lee, and nodded.

"I mean to say, I just dropped in," he remarked calmly. "I flowed down the passage, old top, and trickled in. Well, how are we? How goes it, and so forth? What about the jolly old chat?"

And Archie lowered himself into a lounge-chair. For a moment Nelson Lee felt like smiling, then he looked severe.

"Glenthorne!" he exclaimed sharply.

"What-ho!" said Archie languidly. "Got it first time, dear old scout. Right on the nail, as you might say. Absolutely. I'm the chap-pie who answers to the name you have just warbled."

"I am well aware of that," said Nelson Lee. "Stand up."

"Eh? What? I mean to say——"

"Stand up, Glenthorne," commanded Nelson Lee.

Archie sat forward in sheer surprise.

"Well, dash it all!" he exclaimed. "Fearfully tugging, don't you know. A strenuous day, my dear old sportsman. As a matter of fact, the most strenuous day the old brain can remember. A regular ripper of a day, in fact."

"I have already told you once to stand up, Glenthorne, and I shall not tell you again!" snapped Nelson Lee. "You do not seem to realise that you are in the presence of your House-master. It is your place to stand when I am speaking to you."

Archie jumped up with surprising alacrity.

"Oh, really! Yards of apologies!" he exclaimed. "That is to say, pray accept the old beg-pardon. Forgive me, dear sir, and may blessings fall upon you. The fact is, I'm ig. on these subjects—atrociously ig., and so forth. I just popped in to see how things stand, don't you know. Well, what about it? Shall we commune together? Shall we hob-nob?"

"We shall not!" exclaimed Nelson Lee firmly.

"No, perhaps not," said Archie. "I wouldn't argue, old top, not for a moment. Not for less than that. I'm absolutely in your hands; it is your jolly old duty to get busy."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Dr. Stafford informed me that you were a most peculiar boy, Glenthorne, and I can

see that he was not exaggerating," he exclaimed. "You may sit down now, if you wish to."

"Oh, thanks in abundance," said Archie with relief, as he sank back into the chair. "Deucedly topping of you, don't you know. I understand that I had to look you up, and all that sort of rot."

"Yes, there are one or two things that I must tell you, Glenthorne," said Nelson Lee. "I think you have qualified for the Remove?"

"Absolutely!"

"And you wish to remain in the Ancient House?"

"Absolutely twice."

"Well, my boy, I hope you will be comfortable here, and get on well with your school fellows."

"Now to get down to the cheery old facts," said Archie, nodding.

"At the moment the Remove dormitory is undergoing repairs, owing to damage sustained during a recent storm," said Nelson Lee. "At first I thought it would be somewhat difficult to accommodate you, my boy. But Mrs. Poulter has found a room for you in the East Wing."

"Dear old soul," said Archie. "I must make a point of handing her the glad thanks."

"I do not think you will grumble at your quarters, Glenthorne," proceeded Nelson Lee. "The room is, in fact, a great deal better than Remove boys usually get. Later on, of course, you will take your place in the dormitory. With regard to a study, we are fairly well filled at present, and I have, therefore, decided that you shall occupy No. 13."

"This study actually belongs to the Fifth Form," said Nelson Lee. "But the Fifth Form is not particularly full just now, so it is more convenient for you to occupy the apartment. You will find No. 13 just at the bend of the Remove passage, the Fifth Form passage is really a continuation of it. So, actually you will be in the Remove quarters, or, at least, so near that it makes no difference. I should advise you to get one of the other boys to show you round, Glenthorne. I think that will be all just for the moment. You may go."

Archie rose and bowed.

"In other words, the jolly old boot," he observed.

And Archie Glenthorne opened the door, and ambled out of the study. As soon as he had gone, Nelson Lee lay back in his chair and laughed heartily. This new arrival at St. Frank's was most decidedly the limit in new boys.

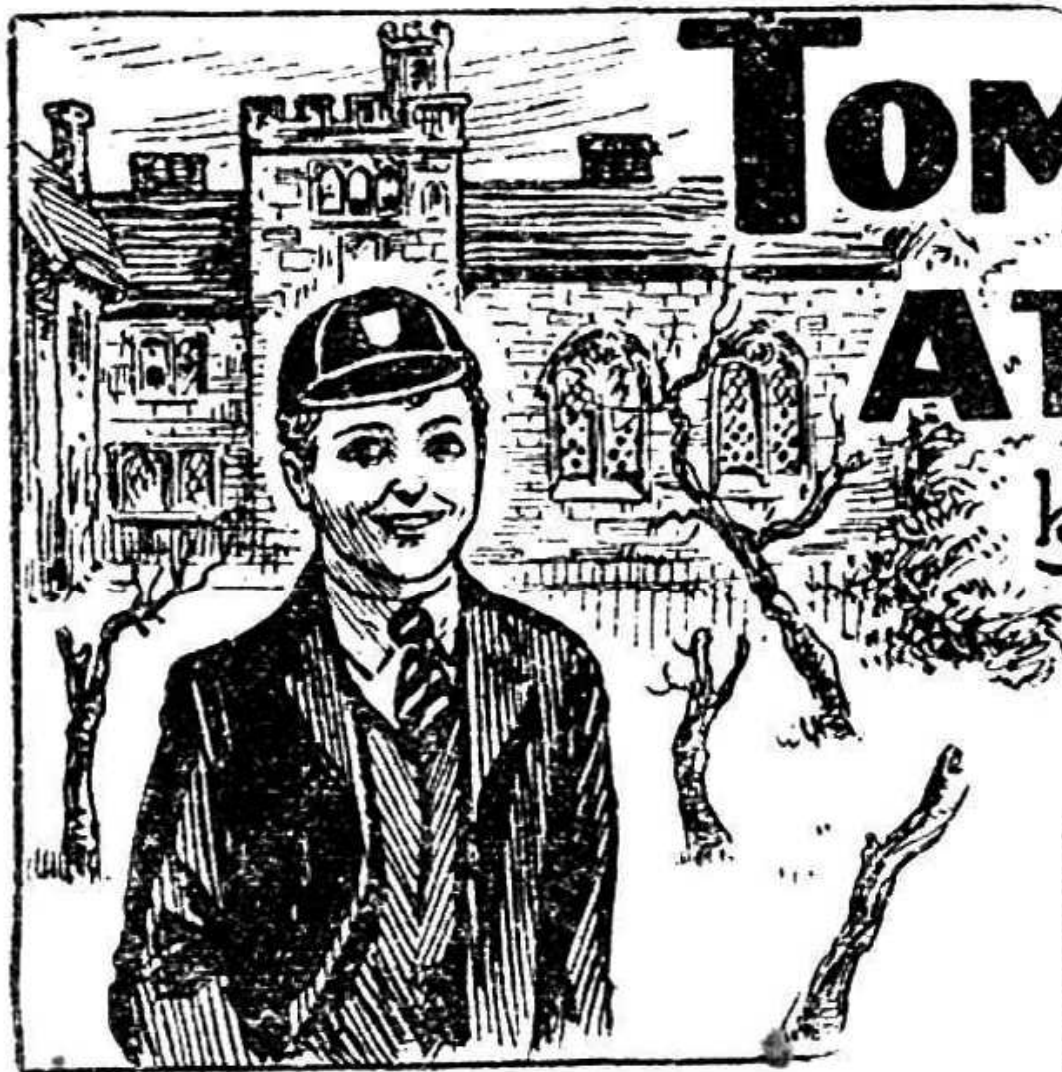
Archie had come to stay, and he was destined to become one of the most prominent members of the Remove.

And his popularity was not in question for a moment, it was an absolutely certainty.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY WILL
BE ENTITLED:—

The Trials of Archie



TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

by **HARCOURT BURRAGE**

(The World's Most Famous
School Story).

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Tom Tartar arrives at Mr. Wrasper's school where discipline is maintained by moral force only. Tom makes several friends and a few enemies. He is initiated into the "Eagles," a party opposed to the "Cuckoos," or the rotters of the school. Foster Moore, the school usher, and a man held in great awe by the boys, has been scheming to marry Miss Smatterly, the younger sister of the principal of a neighbouring girls' school, for her money. Tom upsets the scheme and has to face the terrible vengeance of the usher.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

**Tom is caught by Miss Smatterly —
Wooden Jerry's scheme against Tom.**

QUICK as a cat pounces on a mouse, she sprang towards that tell-tale gamp, and, dragging it aside, saw Tom, who had probably never felt so absolutely idiotic in his life.

"Goo-goo-good gracious me!" exclaimed Miss Smatterly. "It is Thomas Tartar!"

Tom rose to his feet, looking sheepish, but feeling like an ass.

"How—how do you do, Miss Smatterly?" he stammered feebly.

The mistress of Cecilia Seminary made no reply. Truth to tell, she also was looking a trifle uncomfortable, as if torn by conflicting emotions.

The fact was, she had a feeling of deep gratitude towards Tom, knowing as she now did that he had saved her sister from a degrading marriage; yet, at the same time, she could not altogether overlook

this secret meeting of his with one of her young lady pupils.

After a severe internal struggle, gratitude got the better of Miss Smatterly's shocked indignation.

"Mr. Tartar," she said, more in sorrow than in anger, "you must surely know that you have been doing wrong! I sincerely trust that this will never occur again!"

Tom had by now somewhat recovered his wits. He bowed politely to Miss Smatterly, and remarked, with an ingratiating smile:

"It was quite an accident my meeting Miss Fenn here."

"There was no appointment between you?"

"Certainly not!" declared Tom emphatically.

"Then may I ask why you concealed yourself under that umbrella?"

"Well, I—I—really, Miss Smatterly, I'm hanged if I know! It was an idiotic thing to do."

"Humph!" Miss Smatterly compressed her lips firmly to keep herself from laughing. "I think perhaps you had better go away now, Mr. Tartar."

Tom thought so, too, and, with a bow to schoolmistress and pupil, departed.

As soon as he was out of sight, the storm fell upon poor Lottie. But, fortunately, Miss Smatterly's wrathful outbursts, though severe while they lasted, never lasted long. So that, after all, Lottie Fenn was little the worse for the verbal castigation meted out to her that day.

* * * * *

"Diggles, old pal, we will never part."

"Jerry, old mate, we will cling to each other as the hivy do to the hoak."

The undue fervour of this sentiment was in a great measure owing to the potatoes Diggles had been indulging in at Mr. Wrasper's expense.

Wooden Jerry had got a key to fit his master's beer-cellar, and he was giving Diggles a treat in the tool-house

The "Wrasper special," as the beer was spoken of in the school, had been drawn in an ordinary watering-pot, and with the rose removed the two cronies had been able to drink it out of the spout with tolerable freedom.

They had not failed to take the advantage offered of the rapid means of transit from the cans to their throats.

But it was not to drink alone that they had come together; Wooden Jerry had made an appointment with Diggles to talk over "business."

"Come quietly, on Sunday evening, when everybody is at church," he had said, "Even Jane goes out, and we shall be able to do as we please."

On that evening, then, about a week after the events recorded in our last chapter, the precious pair got together to talk "business."

What sort of business was it?

Wooden Jerry seemed to be in no hurry to come to it, and Diggles waited and waited, while the watering-pot passed to and fro.

Then, at last, he could wait no longer.

"Well," he asked, "what's the game, old pal?"

"Oh, nothin' in partikler," replied Wooden Jerry.

"But it must be something."

"Yes, it's something."

Another silence.

"Perhaps I was wrong to call it 'business,'" said Wooden Jerry, "because it isn't that; it's only something I heard in a casual sort o' way."

"Well, out with it," said Diggles, with sudden ferocity; "I'm ready for anything. Do you want the house robbed?"

"Goodness me—no," replied Wooden Jerry; "there's nothing to rob—all the plate is electro, and poor stuff at that, and Wrasper don't keep two pounds in the house."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"It's something I heard Mister Moore say."

"Go on."

"You know he hates young Tartar?"

"So do I hate him, and so do you. We've reason to."

"Yes; well Mister Moore says to me the other day, 'Jerry,' he says, 'if ever you brings me the news of Tartar being hurt, I'll give you ten pounds.'"

Jerry took up the can, drank, with his eyes on Diggles, and put it down again.

Diggles scratched his head, and stared out of the open door of the tool-house.

"Hurt in what way?" he asked.

"Anyway," replied Jerry, "I don't want to say too much, but look here, Diggles, if ever you bring the joyful news to me, I'll give you five pounds."

"You mean seven?" said Diggles calmly.

"No, I don't. I said five."

"And I sav seven."

"Come, Diggles, you play fair with me. I'm putting you on to a good thing——"

"Don't talk to me, Jerry. I'm to have seven quid if ever I does it." Diggles looked round cautiously as he spoke. "Yes, or no."

"Yes," said Wooden Jerry, after a struggle.

"Young Tartar is a sinful boy," said Diggles, with a hypocritical whine, "and I looks on it as being chosen to punish him. He wants a lesson, he do, to turn him from his wicked ways."

"He do," agreed Wooden Jerry solemnly. "Have another drink."

Between them they shared what was left in the can. Then Wooden Jerry rose.

"I must be goin' now," he said. "I've got to lay out supper for them young rips. Wish I could give 'em somethin' as 'ud choke 'em dead!"

With which amiable sentiment he parted from Diggles, who skulked away through the garden, across the playground, and so to the wood, where he was still living.

No sooner had the precious pair gone, than a pile of sacks in one corner of the tool-house was violently agitated, and from beneath it there slowly emerged the head and shoulders of Rosy Ralph.

His eyes glanced quickly around, and seeing that the coast was clear, he stood upright, and crept to the door. Then he sped down the kitchen-garden, climbed an apple-tree that grew close to the wall, and by its aid dropped into the cricket-field.

Stealing along under the wall, he presently got on to the high road, and then plunged into a copse on the other side.

There he threw himself down, and, holding his head tightly between his hands, tried to think.

Thinking was always a troublesome process to this unfortunate youngster, and the conference between Diggles and Wooden Jerry, which would have been clear enough to persons of ordinary intelligence, had put Rosy Ralph into a mental maze.

He had stolen up to the school that evening in the hope of seeing Tom Tartar, and, while waiting about, he had seen Wooden Jerry come out by the kitchen door. Then he had seen Diggles approach, and had slipped into the tool-house. When the two men entered, he had hastily concealed himself under the pile of sacks, and, lying there, he had distinctly overheard the greater part of what had been said.

"What did they mean?" Ralph asked himself over and over again. "Ten pound if Tom Tartar is hurt. . . . Mister Moore. . . . Why should Tom Tartar be hurt, and who is goin' to hurt him?"

That was the puzzle the boy was now endeavouring to solve, and to his poor, weak mind it was a puzzle indeed.

He lay in the copse holding his head

until darkness fell. But he did not heed the darkness, and not until the sky was spangled with stars, did he suddenly spring up, and look wildly about him. His poor, clouded brain had at last solved the puzzle!

"I know! I know!" he panted hoarsely. "The man who hurts Tom Tartar will get ten pound! Mr. Moore will pay him ten pound!"

In an indirect manner Foster Moore had tempted Wooden Jerry to commit the crime, and Wooden Jerry, with his low cunning, had tempted Diggles.

Would Diggles tempt some other man? And if so, who would that other man be?

Rosy Ralph put his arm against a tree, rested his face upon it, and began to cry.

"It be main bad—awful!" he sobbed. "Feyther be with Diggles in the hut, and he may go to feyther. Feyther'll do more than hurt Tom. He'll kill 'im!"

"But he sha'n't do it—he sha'n't!" said the boy, wheeling round and looking angrily into the dark wood. "I love my feyther, but he must stop there. Sir Claude be nowt to me, but Tom's much. I'll stand by Tom, I will."

Brushing away his tears with his hand, he strode on through the trees, walking in the dark with the swiftness and sureness of some wild animal returning to its lair, and presently came to the hut.

The door and shutters broken down by Foster Moore in his frenzy had been repaired, and both now were closed, but through a crack here and there a light within was made visible.

At one of these cracks the boy fixed first his eye, and then his ear.

He could see very little, but he could hear his father and Diggles talking.

As he feared, the subject was Tom, and the cruel task of injuring a noble, brave boy was being passed on to the poacher.

Need it be said, that Posh Powner exulted in his task.

To do such a thing and be paid for it was especially congenial to his ruffian nature, and Ralph heard him say:

"I'll make him helpless to trouble Mister Tutor Moore any more. He'll give us a chance before long, because he's one of them lads who won't see danger. Get him quietly into that 'ere wood, and I'll do the rest. I can already hear the clink of Mister Tutor's money; but that's small music to young Tartar's groans."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Rosy Ralph's warning.

IT was three days after Rosy Ralph's great mental struggle in the wood. It seems an odd expression, "mental struggle," to use in connection with the poor, semi-demented lad, but it was really one, and a strong and terrible one.

Matters had been rather dull in the school, because there had been additional restrictions, or more "moral persuasion," for "solitary" had not had a single victim in its grasp.

It was rather the dull, leaden stillness that precedes the storm.

Everybody seemed to be conscious that something was pending, yet nobody seemed to know what it was.

Foster Moore went about gloomy and silent, Mr. Wrasper looked like a man who had some impending fate to dread.

Mrs. Wrasper was often in tears, and Pubsey was silent and sulky as a wasp that had lost his sting would naturally be.

The boys all lacked spirit, and Tom himself was sad at heart.

Rosy Ralph was hanging about the school all the afternoon, to the great wrath of Wooden Jerry, who was weeding the garden.

Jerry ordered him off a dozen times, and the boy always obeyed him, going as far as the road and returning almost immediately.

"I never saw a boy with so much cheek as you," Wooden Jerry said at last. "Do you want me to keep on hollerin' at you? I ain't paid for hollerin', and it's no use my looking for extras."

"I'm only looking for Measter Tom Tartar," said Rosy Ralph.

"If you've got any message for him, give it to me."

"I can't do that," said Rosy Ralph, "although if you were not such a fool you might guess a part of it."

"A fool!"

Wooden Jerry called a fool by a boy known to be a born one!

That underpaid servitor of the house of Wrasper fairly gasped.

"I'll break your bones if you give me any of your cheek," he said.

"Are you sure you would not ask Diggles to do it for you?" returned Ralph.

This reply had a petrifying effect on Wooden Jerry. He fairly staggered back, and was pulled up by the barrow, half-full of weeds.

Into the midst of the rubbish he steadily settled down.

"Don't you come talking to I," said Ralph, "for you bean't nobody, and don't count."

More Ralph might have said, but he was interrupted by the voices of the boys who were trooping out of the school into the playground.

Ralph ran off after them, and saw Tom and Sam Smith amongst the foremost. He signalled to them, and they followed him into the football-field, into which he rapidly retreated.

"Come here," he said to Tom. "I've summat to tell 'ee. I'm not afraid of Master Smith. I'll trust him."

They came up to him, and Tom, seeing that the boy was flushed and excited, bade him compose himself.

"I be deposed enough," said Ralph. "Wait a minute."

Then he told his story of what he had overheard in the wood-shed, and between Diggles and his father.

Tom listened in a dumfounded sort of way, and Sam fairly shivered on Tom's account.

But what both marvelled at most was that Rosy Ralph should betray his father.

"Have you been beaten?" asked Tom, thinking revenge might be the prompting power.

"I've been whacked summat awful lately," the boy said, "but it's not that. See here"—he bared his arm, showing the record of cruel stripes; "and here"—pulling up his ragged trousers, so that they could see the flesh lying up in ridges, created by blows. "But it's not that. Feyther beat I many a time, but I'd not tell on him. No, I wouldn't now if he wasn't safe."

"Safe," echoed Tom.

"Yes, he's gone. I told 'un that if he hurt a hair o' your head that I'd gi' 'un up for it, and he knows I'd keep my word. He beat and beat me, and would ha' killed me if Diggles hadn't been by, but I wouldn't turn from it. He knew I'd do it, and so he's gone."

"Sam," said Tom, "what do you think of that story?"

"Oh, it's true enough," replied Sam; "he isn't lying."

"I don't mean that. But what would you advise me to do?"

"Give them all up to the police."

"Not me," said Tom, laughing. "I think I can square accounts with all, and don't forget that it would be a difficult matter to prove. No, we must let things go, and settle with our enemies in our own way. Ralph, here's half-a-crown for you."

"No," said the boy, shrinking back; "I've gone agin feyther, and I can't take money for that."

As he spoke he sped away across the field, sprang through a gap in the hedge, and was seen no more that day.

CHAPTER XXX.

Diggles in the Stocks.

"I SHALL not trust anybody," said Tom; "but I'll have revenge on all in my own way."

"It isn't everybody that would take it as coolly as you do," returned Sam, "and there's one thing you must remember: Posh Powner may not have gone away, after all!"

"I must take my chance," said Tom; "but, meanwhile, I'll settle with the lowest conspirator, Diggles. I'm off to the wood."

"And I'll go with you."

"Ask McLara to come, too," said Tom. "I may want some help."

"What are you going to do?"

"I can't tell. It's best not to lay any plan, but trust to the inspiration of the moment when we've got Diggles."

Sam hurried off, promising to join Tom in the road, and counselling him to get away unseen.

"It's just as well," said Sam, "although Pubsey and Co. are a little cramped just now by Wrasper's commands, which, as I told you before, I overheard. 'Don't come to me,' he said, 'but go to Foster Moore. He's master here now.' Ha, ha! I wonder what led him to say that?"

"We shall know soon," Tom said, as he sauntered off towards the road.

He had no plans as he said, but trusted, as he often did, to his ready wit when an opportunity offered to punish a foe. It had rarely failed him, and he saw no reason to doubt it now.

Cautious Johnny and Sam were not long in appearing, the former not as yet exactly knowing what was wanted of him.

Sam, up to then, had no time to explain, nor did he feel that he ought to say much, for it was for Tom to decide how far the story should be told to others.

"What's up now?" asked Cautious Johnny.

"Going to square a new account with Diggles," replied Tom, carelessly.

"What's he been doing?"

"Conspiring to waylay and main one of us."

"Oh, hang it, you are joking!"

"No, I'm not."

"Are you sure?" inquired Cautious Johnny. "Who is it?"

"Suppose it were you," asked Tom, "what would you do?"

"I might feel tempted to waylay and main him," replied Johnny.

"But you would resist the temptation?"

"I might."

"Of course he would, no maiming for us," said Tom.

Diggles still lived in the wood, mainly because we had no other place to live, and his hut was their destination.

They found the nest, but the bird was not there. Diggles had gone away, leaving his door open.

After a look round his place, they decided to run down to the village to see if he was there.

Their hopes were destined to be gratified, for Diggles was in the village, and he was also in a half-intoxicated condition.

They found him at the lower end of the village, where two signs of ancient law were still in view, viz., the pound and the stocks.

The pound was still used for stray animals, but the stocks had long been languishing for the want of an occupant. Everything was, however, in order.

Tom's eyes fell upon the stocks, and saw a means of having a sweet revenge on Diggles.

Half-a-dozen words enlightened his companions, and with a rush they bore down upon Diggles, who, as if to oblige them, had taken up his stand against that very thing, and was haranguing two grinning rustics homeward bound from work in the fields.

"I suppose you know who I am," he said. "Some of you call me Diggles, and say I'm low born. Nothing of the sort. I'm heir to a title and half a county. I'm—I'm Diggles—Lord Diggles—Markis o' Diggles—ay!—Duke Diggles, and it ain't more than even betting that I ain't a prince. Here, what are you doing?"

"Going to put you on your throne," replied Tom, as he seized him round the waist behind. "Catch hold of his legs, Johnny. Now, Sam, throw back the catch, that's it. In you go."

And before the astounded Diggles knew what their intentions were they had secured his legs and one hand in the stocks.

"I'll leave him the other to scratch his head with," said Tom generously.

Diggles had no hat on his head, but several straws were sticking out of his hair, probably part of his property in the part of sham madman he had been playing.

"There you are," said Tom. "and now, you scoundrel, shall I tell you what it is for?"

Diggles stared at him wild-eyed, only half comprehending him.

"I ain't done nothing to you," he muttered.

"No," said Tom, in an undertone; "you set another man to do it, you miserable coward."

The two rustics were quite as much astounded as Diggles at these proceedings, and did nothing but stare until the boys had walked some way up the street, and turned to see how their victim was getting on.

Then they burst into a roar of laughter. "The loikes o' that I never seed," said one.

"They be smart lads," roared the other. "Old Diggles in t' stocks. That be mighty fine."

Others of the inhabitants now drew near the scene, and Diggles proceeded to address them.

He demanded to be released on pain of his royal displeasure. He bade them beware how they offended a man of his rank and standing.

Suddenly somebody cried out:

"What were it they used to do to chaps in t' stocks?"

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

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(Continued from page 40.)

"Why, rotten-egg 'em, to be sure!" replied another.

Then there was a rush for suitable ammunition, for all gloried in the opportunity given them. They would now avenge the Miss Hatty affair, in which Diggles had played so prominent a part.

Unconscious of the preparations that were being made for his confusion, he continued his haughty address to those who lingered around him. He called them scoundrels, serfs, yea—dogs.

Then in a moment he stopped.

The storm was upon him.

It is well that we draw a veil over the scene.

Some people may think the roaring rustics went a little too far, but his sin was great, and he deserved something.

In vain he implored for mercy.

Sobered, he felt the full force, and the full odour of the missiles aimed at him.

It may be truly said that there was not a nest-egg left in the village.

The boys and women all joined in, the latter being true in aim and spiteful in delivery.

At last there was a cry that the policeman was approaching, and the bombardment ceased.

Everybody suddenly became very busy doing nothing, and all the men's hands instinctively went into their pockets.

The officer strode up, and first looked at Diggles, then at the populace. After that he backed a little.

"This is a case of trespass," he said. "Them stocks is the property of the parish, and nobody's got a right to intrude on them. Somebody let him out, and I'll run him in."

Assistants to open the stocks were not lacking, but when Diggles got upon his feet, and looked miserably about, with the idea of running away, he was abandoned.

The police-officer was not inclined to go near him, much less to touch him.

"Go home and wash yourself," he said sternly. "To-morrow I'll apply to the magistrate for a summons!"

Diggles, casting malevolent glances around him, crept through the crowd, which opened wide to let him pass, and wended his way back to his home in the wood.

There he had a night of leisure to brood over what had happened, and to concoct a scheme of revenge.

(To be continued.)

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