

Magnificent Drawing of Big Hall at St. Frank's.—See Inside.

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NELSON LEE

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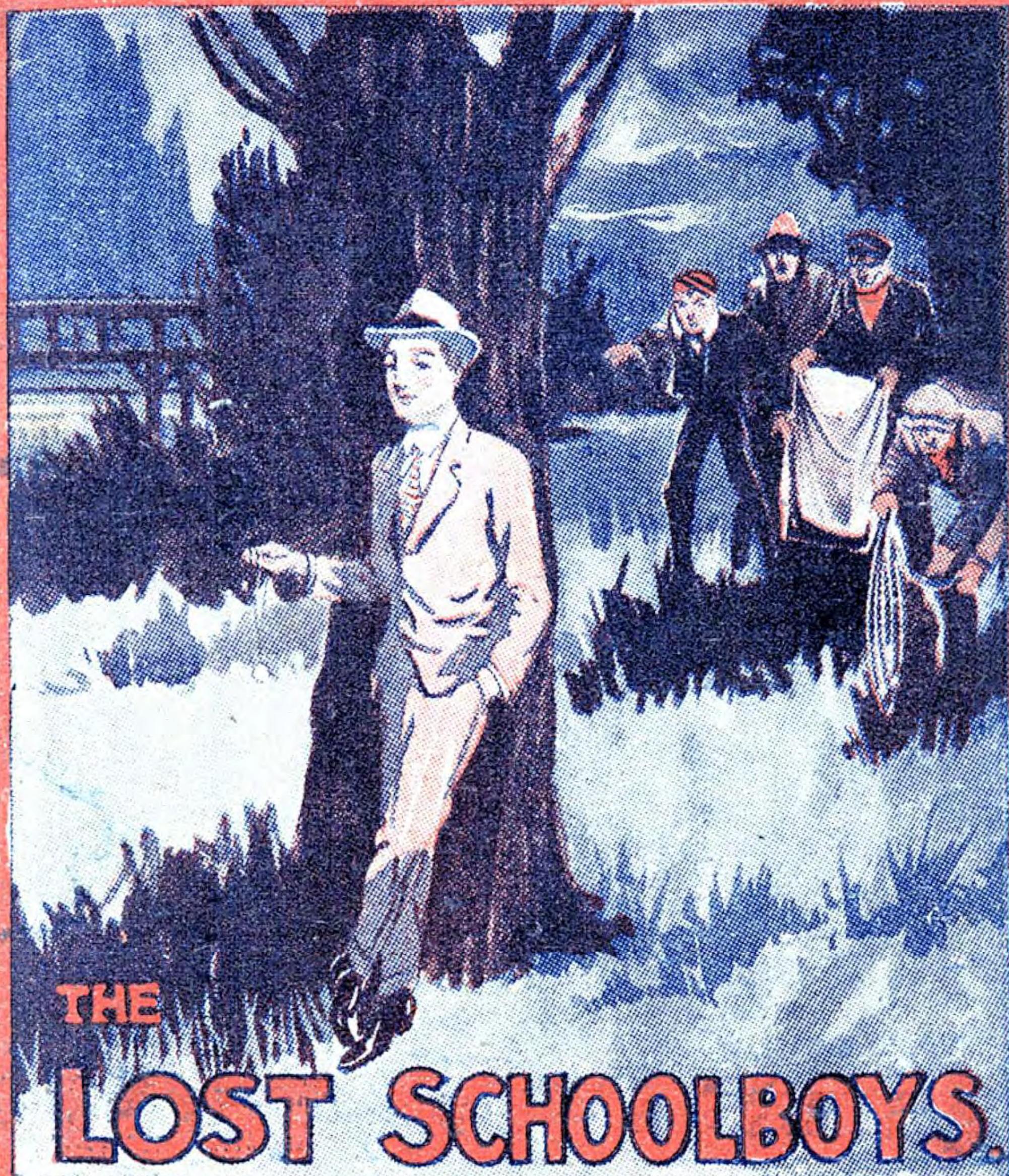
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THE

LOST SCHOOLBOYS.

OR, ARCHIE IN PERIL.

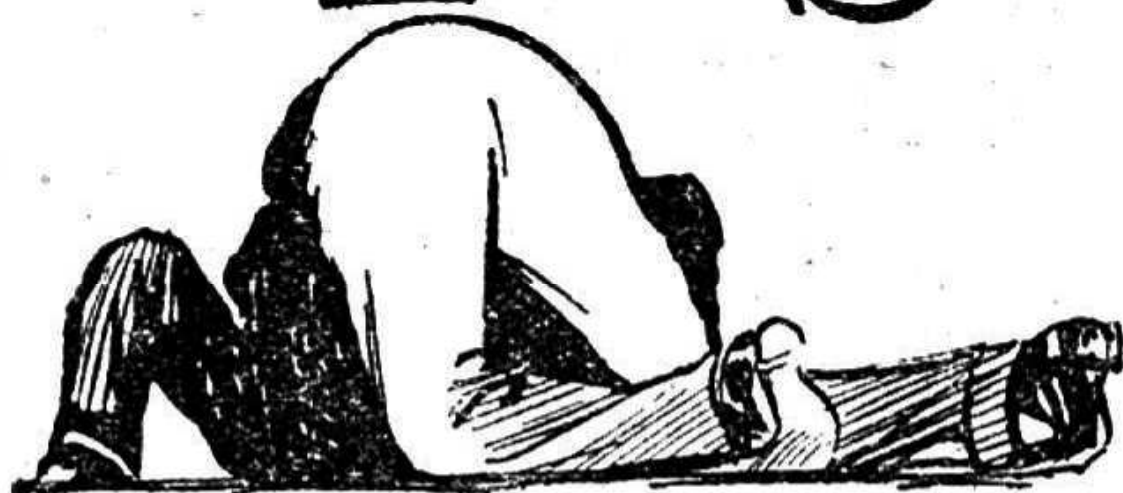
LAUGHABLE NEW FEATURE—A BAD BOY'S DIARY.



Nelson Lee had cast the light from his electric torch down the short tunnel, and before Archie could make his descent, Nelson Lee climbed up the shaft and joined him.

THE LOST SCHOOLBOYS.

Or, ARCHIE IN PERIL.



(THE STORY
RELATED
THROUGH-
OUT BY NIPPER.)

A Splendid Long Complete Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Coming of Archie," "The Trials of Archie," "The Amazing Inheritance," and many other Stirring Tales.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH-PARTY !

REGINALD PITT looked intensely worried. "It's a mystery!" he declared. "I've searched everywhere, and I can't find a sign of the bounders! They've been missing for hours now. It's not like Nipper to stay away deliberately."

"Oh, but there's no need to worry!" said Morrow, of the 'Sixth. "Hang it all, it's quite likely that Nipper and the other three fellows went off to the village somewhere, or——"

"But they didn't," interrupted Pitt.

"How do you know they didn't?" asked the prefect.

"Because we've absolutely proved that they couldn't have done anything of the sort," said Reginald Pitt. "That's the queer part of the whole affair. That's where the mystery comes in."

Corporal Pitt, of the St. Frank's Cadet Corps, was standing just inside the Ancient House lobby, and the look of worry on his face did not find much reflection in the countenance of Morrow. The Sixth-Former, in fact, was inclined to believe that Pitt was making a fuss over nothing.

It was rather late in the evening, and in a very short time the bell would sound, signalling the fact that it was time for the junior school to retire. Sounds of junior laughter and yelling came from the Remove Common-room, for, although the Cadets were in camp, a large number of Remove fellows still remained in the school.

"Look here, Pitt, let's get this thing clear," said Morrow. "You say you've absolutely proved that Nipper and his companions couldn't have gone off to the village?"

"Yes."

"How do you make that out?"

"There were four of them," replied Pitt. "Nipper, Watson, Tregellis-West, and Handforth. Church saw them go off together earlier in the evening."

"Where did they go to?"

"First of all, they went into the camp, and then made their way almost to the top of the island!" exclaimed



Pitt. "They've vanished—absolutely disappeared—and yet they couldn't have gone off the island!"

"Don't be a young ass——"

"Look here," said Pitt tensely. "We had four boats drawn up on the island—four exactly. Dozens of us knew that there were no more than four boats there. Church and McClure started looking for Nipper & Co. at first, and when they couldn't find 'em, they told us. So we scouted about the island, and searched every inch of it.

"Without result?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "The first thing we did, of course, was to look at the boats, because we thought the bounders had gone ashore. But all the boats were there, untouched. Now, what do you make of it?"

Morrow laughed.

"Well, it seems easy," he replied. "Somebody must have come along the river in another boat, and Nipper and his chums got into it. You'll probably find them somewhere in the school. There's no sense in making a mystery out of nothing."

"But I've searched the school!"

"Everywhere?"

"Well, I think so," replied Pitt. "I've a good mind to go straight to Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it."

"You young ass!" said the prefect. "There's no need to bother Mr. Lee until you're certain. You don't think the chaps fell in the river, do you? And you don't suppose they swam ashore? Take my advice and go over the school again—look into all the studies. You'll probably find the young bounders talking football with somebody, or something of that kind!"

And Morrow walked off with a nod, leaving Pitt standing in the middle of the lobby. After a few moments he turned and made his way into the Remove passage. He had already been there, and had looked into every study without result; but now he suddenly gave a little start.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed. "Archie!"

A thought had suddenly come to Pitt. Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne was the new boy in the Remove—the super-knute. He was the most languid "Johnny" St. Frank's had ever seen. He was priceless!

And Pitt abruptly called to mind the fact that Archie had been placed in a Fifth-Form study—No. 13—which was at the extreme end of the Remove passage. And Pitt hadn't looked there.

"Perhaps the silly asses are with Archie all the time!" he muttered. "Morrow may be right, after all. It's quite likely that they got into somebody else's boat and went ashore, and I never thought of looking in Archie's study!"

This, of course, was because the apartment was in the Fifth-Form passage.

But now Pitt hurried forward, arrived at No. 13, and entered.

The study was a revelation. Even the most moneyed fellow in the Sixth had no furniture to compare with the stuff which ornamented this room. A soft pile carpet lay upon the floor,

and Pitt's feet sank into it as he walked forward. It seemed like treading upon velvet.

The lounges and chairs were of the most luxurious description, covered with rich damask, and so comfortable that the very sight of them made a fellow feel sleepy. There were other luxuries in the apartment.

And, lounging before the fire was Archie Glenthorne himself.

He was attired in a lounge suit of brown which fitted to perfection. His feet were encased in perfect shoes, and he displayed quite a quantity of gaily-coloured silk socks. He looked round languidly as Pitt entered, and adjusted his famous monocle.

"What-ho! what-ho!" he observed. "Here we are, what?"

Pitt looked rather disappointed.

"Are you alone, Archie?" he asked needlessly.

Archie gazed round in some surprise.

"I mean to say, somewhat strange, and all that sort of thing!" he exclaimed. "I may be wrong, or you may be wrong; but, my dear old lad, it seems to me that the jolly old apartment is quite empty, except for ourselves."

"Yes, I know that," said Pitt. "I meant, have you been alone all the evening, Archie?"

"As a matter of absolute fact, I have not," replied Archie. "To tell the truth, I have been frightfully busy! Doing the good old best stunt, and so forth! And Phipps has been rallying round like a real sportsman. Wonderful fellow, Phipps! He's got a brain the size of a mountain, don't you know!"

"Never mind Phipps!" interrupted Pitt. "Is your man anything to do with the question? Be sensible, Archie!"

"Dash it all, quite imposs.!" said Archie. "I'm not a chap who makes a pretence of being brainy—absolutely not! The old bean is somewhat empty, and what not; but don't blame little Archie. A chappie can't help things of that sort. He can't avoid being a ehump!"

"You're not half such a chump as you seem to think, Archie!"

"No!" said Archie mildly. "Several feet of gratitude, old thing! That's perfectly priceless of you! Sit down! Make yourself at home! Stagger about and accept the hospitality of——"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Pitt. "You won't let me get to the point! Have you seen Nipper?"

"The cheery lad who leads the brass-band—that is to say, the Cadet contingent, and all that?"

"Yes."

"Absolutely!"

"What do you mean—absolutely?"

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "That's just it, old top! Absolutely! I've seen him. I've viewed the dear chappie!"

"Oh, good!" said Pitt. "How long ago?"

"A frightful time ago, of course!" said Archie. "Hours and hours—oh, more hours than that! Well, rather; much water has flown beneath the bridges since we hobnobbed!

But I'm living in hopes, old fruit! Some day, perhaps, I shall meet the old darling again!"

Pitt fairly danced with impatience. "You fathead!" he roared. "You dummy! You idiot!"

Archie's monocle dropped out of his eye. "I mean to say, what?" he protested. "Somewhat severe, and all that! I might even say, the jolly old insult—slap in the face, so to speak! Rather sharp, don't you think?" "I'm sorry, Archie; but I couldn't help it!" growled Pitt. "I was hoping that you'd seen Nipper within the last hour. It was about tea-time when you last met him, I suppose?"

"Exactly, dear lad!" said Archie. "That is to say, absolutely!"

"Then I needn't bother you any more!" exclaimed Pitt briskly. "You can go to sleep again—you can loll amongst all your finery!"

"Thanks frightfully!" said Archie. "Deucedly generous of you, and all that sort of thing! What, going? Trickling forth? Departing from the old homestead? Stay, dear old tulip!"

"I've wasted enough time already!" said Pitt. "So-long!"

"Toodle-oo, old bean! In other words, pip-pip!"

Archie waved his hand languidly, and Pitt departed. His mission to Study No. 13 had not been successful, and he was just wondering what his next move was to be, when he came upon Church and McClure. They were both looking anxious and rather alarmed.

"Heard anything?" asked Church. "No—they haven't been near the school," said Pitt.

"There's something queer happened—I jolly well know it!" declared McClure. "Look here, Pitt, I want to tell you something—I'm going to let you into a secret. Church and I know pretty well where Nipper and the others have gone to—but we couldn't speak out before the crowd."

Reginald Pitt stared. "What's the mystery?" he asked.

"Come into our study," said Church. They entered Study D, and Pitt looked at the two juniors with new interest. He wondered what this secret could be that he was going to learn. Church and McClure certainly seemed unusually serious.

"Look here, I'm not going to make any long-winded yarn out of it," said McClure. "On Willard's Island there's a treasure. We've got the clue to it, and——"

"Treasure?" repeated Pitt, staring. "What rot! You've been reading some story book or other——"

"It's true—absolutely true!" put in Church. "And those bargemen, Niggs and Croke, are hot on the track of the gold. McClure and I think that Nipper and those other chaps might have met with foul play. That's why we're anxious."

"Rather!" said McClure. "We spotted Niggs and Croke in a boat at the top part of the island. There's something fishy going on, anyhow. I reckon the only thing is to go to Mr. Lee and ask him for help."

Pitt looked at the two juniors curiously. "Have you been dreaming?" he asked. "What's all this rot about a treasure? Foul play, and all the rest of it! Why, those chaps, Niggs and Croke, only wanted to keep us off the island because they had a soft job, acting as watchmen for old Giddy, the estate manager."

"That's what most of the chaps think," said Church. "But it's wrong. Do you remember when St. Frank's was flooded? You know—just after the storm. The Stowe was miles higher than usual——"

"Yes, of course I remember," interrupted Pitt. "Anybody with a grain of sense couldn't help remembering!"

"Well, Handy and McClure and I were out with Niggs and his pals in a boat," said Church. "A part of Willard's Island fell down—a kind of a landslide, you know. And there was an entrance to an old tunnel, and we found a brass-bound box, containing some clues to old Willard's treasure. Niggs and Croke spotted it, and got on the job at once. That's why they're still hanging about."

Pitt whistled. "Daylight!" he said softly. "The truth dawns upon me, my sons! I'm beginning to see things a little more clearly now. So that's the game, is it? These bounders are after Willard's gold? Of course, it's only a myth——"

"Rats! It's really true," said McClure. "Those two bargemen have got another chap with 'em—a fellow who seems to be taking the lead, too. We spotted them in a boat some little time before we left the island. And I'm pretty certain that Nipper and his pals have met with some kind of foul play."

"Of course, it's possible—but I wouldn't be too certain," said Pitt. "Surely four chaps like that could look after themselves! Does Mr. Lee know anything about this?"

"Of course he does." "Why, of course?" "Because Nipper took that secret cipher thing to him at the very outset," replied Church. "Mr. Lee knows the whole blessed game—everything. I think we'd better go to him at once and explain. It's no good wasting time like this. Goodness knows what's happening while we're standing here, jawing."

Pitt nodded. "You're right!" he said briskly. "Come on!"

Pitt was a fellow of action when it came to the point. And he led the way with sharp footsteps towards the housemaster's study. Nelson Lee was in, and he looked up from his desk rather in surprise as the three juniors trooped in. He could tell by their expressions that something out of the ordinary was afoot.

"Can we speak to you, sir," asked Pitt. "Certainly, my boy," replied Lee. "What's the trouble?"

"Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West and Handforth have disappeared, sir." Nelson Lee regarded the junior keenly. "Disappeared?" he repeated. "What do you mean by that, Pitt? Please be a little more explicit."

Reginald Pitt lost no time in going into

details, and by the time he had finished Nelson Lee was on his feet.

"You did the best thing possible in coming to me, boys," he said. "We'll form a search party at once, and start off. It is quite possible that Nipper and his companions have met with some kind of foul play. I know for a fact that these three men are desperate. They are doing everything possible to lay their hands upon the treasure. It is a pity you did not come sooner."

"Well, we haven't wasted much time, sir," said Pitt. "We can soon buzz off now. Do you intend to bring any more, sir? A few prefects, for example? They might be handy in a scrap——"

"No, Pitt, I think we will keep the party as it stands at present—just the four of us," said Nelson Lee. "We don't want to create a lot of comment, and we shall hardly be noticed. A crowd would cause great excitement."

"Right you are, sir," said Pitt. "Perhaps it's better."

"Rather!" said Church. "Well, let's get off! I'm worrying about old Handy. Goodness knows what's happened to him!"

And, without any further delay, the search-party started off from St. Frank's. But even Nelson Lee did not know of the varying under-currents which were at work. There were to be some extremely dramatic events within the next few hours!

CHAPTER II.

THE CUNNING OF ENOCH SNIPE!



ENOCH SNIPE, of the Remove, cringed in a corner of the Triangle. This was his usual attitude. The Worm of St. Frank's was a most detestable individual in every way. When

he walked he moved with a kind of motion which suggested something snaky, or creepy-crawly. When he stood talking to a fellow, he continually rubbed his hands together after the fashion of a stage miser. And he was most objectionable to gaze upon.

He had hunched shoulders, an ugly face, and red-rimmed eyes. And he was capable of telling the most appalling lies with the most appalling glibness. Teddy Long's fibs could be detected at once—but Snipe was an expert.

And he was cunning to a degree. He thought of himself only—always, without exception. He had never been known to give a crumb away since his arrival at St. Frank's. His meanness was already a by-word, although he was comparatively a new fellow.

And now Snipe was thinking deeply.

He had actually had a great deal to ponder over. He knew the truth—he had discovered the actual facts concerning Willard's Island and the treasure.

For Snipe was hand-in-glove with Captain Niggs and Ben Croke and William Hudson—the three rascals who were plotting to obtain the treasure. Snipe had been commissioned to

entice John Martin away from the Cadets, and he was to deliver the boy into the hands of the enemy.

Snipe had already received a pound from Hudson, and he had the promise of a further two pounds if he fulfilled the contract. But there were difficulties. Things would not be so easy.

"Yes, I must be careful—very careful!" Snipe told himself. "It is most awkward, I'm afraid. Indeed, I shall not interfere with Martin. I have no desire to do so. I want to become friendly with him."

The Worm rubbed his hands together with anticipation.

John Martin was the boy whom Dr. Stafford had brought to the school some weeks earlier. He had been regarded as a charity kid—for, after all, he was living on the Head's generosity.

But John had turned up trumps—he had proved himself to be a gentleman by instinct, if not by upbringing. And he had proved his bravery in a manner which stamped him as a hero.

Things became better for him after that, and he was allowed to join the Cadets. Enoch Snipe, true to his character, had openly sneered at John. He had referred to him as a pauper, and he had shunned John as though the latter suffered from some awful disease.

Not that this troubled John much—for he was not particularly keen upon Enoch Snipe's society. The Worm of St. Frank's, in fact, was a fellow to himself. His character was such that he had no friends.

It was for this reason, perhaps, that Hudson and his associates had hit upon Snipe to assist them. He was about the one St. Frank's fellow they could rely upon to help them. And for money Snipe would do anything. His greed was almost greater than his cunning.

And the Worm was curious, too.

He had asked himself why these men wanted to get hold of Martin. What could their gain be? What possible benefit could they get from a pauper like John Martin? And Snipe discovered the truth.

He had done so in a characteristic fashion. While pretending to hurry off on his errand, he had crept back, and had overheard a brief conversation—but it was quite long enough to tell him the true state of affairs.

And they were startling.

John Martin was actually the son of old Willard—the sole heir to any fortune which might come to light. Martin was not his real name. It had been given to him by a foster parent, who lived in Caistowe. And, upon learning this, all Enoch Snipe's feelings changed. "Old John Willard, the man who had built the queer old 'Folly' on the island, had died over ten years earlier, leaving his quaint edifice uncompleted, and his banking account practically empty.

And old Willard had had the name of a miser—a man who was fabulously rich. And yet hardly enough money was found, after his death, to settle things. What had become of his fortune?

For years there had been talk of a hidden treasure, but this had only been regarded as

idle gossip. And, as time passed, the only thing which kept the memory of Willard alive at all was the island in the middle of the river Stowe. This was one of the local sights for visitors.

But now all was changed. This brass-bound box had been found, with the peculiar cipher message, from old John Willard. And it became a practical certainty that all the talk about a treasure had not been empty chatter.

Snipe, in fact, had learned, by listening behind the hedge, that the treasure had actually been discovered—gold worth hundreds of thousands! And it was all stacked up in an underground cavern far beneath the island.

The island itself was the property of Colonel Glenthorne—Archie's pater. But this treasure, of course, was lawfully the property of old John Willard's next-of-kin.

And this was John Martin—the "charity brat!"

It was strange how Fate worked things out, and Enoch Snipe had no intention of assisting the rascally plans of Hudson. Not that the Worm had any scruples. He simply had schemes of his own.

But the immediate problem to be faced seemed a difficult one.

"A fortune!" muttered Snipe tensely. "What a rotten shame! Why couldn't I get it? I'm just as good as Martin—and it's not fair that that cad should have so much money. But I might be able to work things. In fact, I think I can make a lot of profit. Oh, yes! A lot of profit! But to begin with, I must get that two pounds from Hudson!"

It was an interesting point, this. Enoch Snipe was thinking in thousands. He had wild hopes of obtaining a small fortune for himself. Yet he was determined to get hold of Hudson's two pounds!

Snipe saw no reason why he should throw the money away. He could get it—so why shouldn't he? But, in order to win that reward, he had to deliver John Martin into the hands of the enemy. And this, of course, couldn't be done. It could not be thought of.

"No, I must be friendly with Martin now!" the Worm told himself. "I must help him—and get on his right side. But unless I take him to those men I shall not get the money. But there must be a way out—there is always a way out. I must think!"

Snipe proceeded to think, and as he crouched there in the gloom, his unpleasant face broke into a triumphant smile.

"Yes, of course!" he whispered. "Of course!"

This was quite a habit of his. When alone, he would rub his hands together, and talk to himself—in the faintest of whispers, but he would certainly talk. But he took care never to let any of the other fellows see him.

"This will do splendidly!" he breathed. "And I shall get the money from those men! The only way to work now is to take somebody else instead of Martin. The fools will never know in the darkness—and I shall get my money! What happens afterwards doesn't matter. What do I care? They can't hurt me!"

For some little time, Snipe had been pondering as to who he could entice away instead of John Martin. He thought of many juniors, but realised they would not pay any attention to him. His only hope was—Archie!

Archie was an ass—a chump. He was easy-going, too, and most unsuspecting. Snipe felt convinced that he could get Archie Glenthorne to accompany him. And this scheme had an added spice, because only a short time before Snipe had received the contents of a booby trap which had really been intended for Archie. Snipe would get his own back!

Having made up his mind, he lost no time. Indeed, he had wasted too much already. Hudson and his two associates would be waiting by the old footbridge over the Stowe—they were expecting Snipe to arrive with the decoyed junior. So it was up to the Worm to make haste.

He could easily find John Martin afterwards. He had to find Martin—he couldn't let it rest over until the morning. But the possibilities were so great that Snipe did not worry himself about school regulations.

With his snaky movements, he entered the Ancient House, and went straight to Archie Glenthorne's study. Snipe had his scheme all planned out. He entered Study No. 13 quickly, almost bursting in.

"Glenthorne!" he panted breathlessly. "I say, Glenthorne!"

"What-ho! What-ho! I mean to say, what-ho!" exclaimed Archie, turning round in his chair, and adjusting his monocle. "Dear laddie, you're scaring me, don't you know! Such deucedly frightful energy, and all that! I gather that the old excitement is brewing, what?"

"You must come, Glenthorne—Oh, you must!" gasped Snipe. "It's important. Please—please! Oh, I'm so frightened!"

"Dash it all, you're putting me in quite a fluster, and so forth!" said Archie, placing a hand over his heart. "The old pump is thumping like the dickens, and all that sort of rot! I mean to say, what's the trouble? In other words, what's the worry? What's happened? That is, as it were, where are we?"

Archie looked rather helpless, and he stood regarding Snipe in almost an awed way. Snipe was not a pleasant apparition to suddenly appear, and for him to come in like this was quite enough to make any fellow tremble.

"You must come with me, Glenthorne!" said the Worm, going forward, and grasping Archie's sleeve. "Please come at once!"

"That is to say, I'm all of a dither, don't you know!" protested Archie weakly. "Absolutely. I say, old fruit! Kindly remove the paw! Awfully bothering, and all that! That's it, absolutely! I've hit it on the old head! Right on the napper, so to speak! I'm bothered—most deucedly bothered! Dash it all, I'm feeling hot and cold, and that kind of rot!"

"Don't waste time—you must come——"

"Absolutely! I mean to say——"

"There's not a second to waste——"

"Oh, rather not!" said Archie. "Great gadzooks! No time at all, old pippin! We've

got to go, what? To fly, as it were? That's the stuff! But where do we skate off to? What's the jolly old trouble?"

"Your father has met with an accident!" said Snipe breathlessly. "He was walking along the towing-path from the village, and he made a mistake in the darkness, and fell in. He's—he's lying out there now, in the grass, asking for you!"

Archie turned slightly pale. Snipe had cunningly decided to adopt this ruse—to use this method of decoying his victim. It was so ancient that it had whiskers, and would not have worked on any other fellow but Archie. It was fortunate for Snipe that Phipps was not hovering near. Phipps, Archie's man, would never have been deceived by this yarn.

Even Archie was not such a fool as he looked, and just a little consideration would have told him that the idea was absurd. But he had no time to think. The old bean, as he would have said, simply hadn't an earthly.

"I mean to say, most shockingly sudden, don't you know!" exclaimed Archie blankly. "The good old pater, what? Rolling off the towing-path, and so forth! What a pricelessly ridic. thing to do, old top! Just fancy the pater bathing at this time of night! Frightfully uncomf., and all that!"

"Your father didn't go into the river on purpose——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Even the old lad doesn't do things like that—the old head of the house, don't you know. But what about it? What, as it were, is to be done? Send for the police—sound the bally fire alarm. Do something! In fact, we've got to get dashed busy!"

"Of course we have!" said Snipe. "Come on!"

"But—but—but I mean, of course!" said Archie. "That is, absolutely! I'm most abominably flustered, old lad. Yes, by Jove, I'm like the chappie who—who well, there you are! I forget what the chappie was, or what he did! But, anyway, there was once a chappie who got fearfully flustered, and——"

"We're wasting time!" interrupted Snipe. "And perhaps your father is dying!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Wasting time, what? We've got to get the old move going—to shift, and so forth. Well, come on, laddie. I mean to say, follow me, and everything's topping!"

Archie made no move, but Snipe grabbed his arm, and pulled him towards the door. Once out in the passage they moved fairly quickly. Snipe was particularly anxious to get outside into the darkness before any of the other fellows observed what was going on.

For, of course, if Archie was questioned, he would certainly start talking about this supposed accident to his father—and then the fat would be in the fire.

Fortunately, however, the Triangle was reached without anybody being met. And the Worm felt quite safe now. He took a tighter grasp on Archie's arm, and hauled him along.

"We must be quick!" he panted. "Come on, come on, Glenthorne!"

"I mean to say, ain't we doing something like that?" asked Archie faintly. "It seems to me that we're travelling at a most beastly speed! Undignified, and all that! And I'm hot and ruffled and——"

"You can't help that!" said Snipe. "It's a matter of life and death!"

"How perfectly priceless!" exclaimed Archie. "The dear old pater falling in the wetness, what? I sincerely trust he was all serene. Not under the surface, if you understand, old dear?"

"Of course he went under the surface!" said Snipe. "Right in!"

"Absolutely!" went on Archie. "I'm afraid the old brain box doesn't grasp the idea. The pater is generally a most careful old buffer. But I must admit that now and again—on particularly convivial occasions—the old lad has become merry. Deucedly merry; but just that. Never under the surface, darling!"

"Do you mean drunk?" asked Snipe, as they hurried along.

"Well, I mean to say, frightfully coarse expression!" protested Archie. "Drunk, don't you know! Makes a chappie think of a bally navvy! Under the surface, dear old sport! Quite different—absolutely! No, laddie, most decidedly, no. The pater has never been what you said. Rather not! In fact, most frightfully rather not!"

They continued walking on swiftly, going by way of the playing fields, and then across the meadows towards the Stowe. Willard's Island could be seen away on their left, but they steered clear of this. Snipe had no desire to come face to face with a party of Cadets. Explanations would have been somewhat difficult, under the circumstances.

"Dear old walnut, a large stoppage is required!" observed Archie. "The fact is, the old wind is become exhausted, and all that. The supply, as it were, is petering. Positively petering, don't you know?"

"But we can't stop, Glenthorne—really, we can't!"

"Such a bally shame for a young life to be blotted out!" said Archie. "I can't last, laddie; the fact is, I'm done. That is to say, the spirit is frightfully willing, but the old tissues are liable to strike!"

"Oh, you're all right—and you must come!" said the Worm anxiously.

Archie, of course, was perfectly all right. Somewhat puffed, perhaps, but the exercise was really doing him a lot of good. And at length they came within sight of the old foot-bridge which crossed the river at this point.

The entrance of the bridge on this side was concealed by a clump of willows. Snipe came to a halt here, and Archie breathed a sigh of relief.

"Now, wait here!" said Snipe urgently. "Don't move away from this spot, Glenthorne. I think your father has been taken away—I left him just about here, and there's no sign now. But I'll go and make sure."

"Good enough, my dear chappie—good enough!" said Archie. "Thanks by the yard! I'm filled with the old gratitude, and what not!"

But it seems most frightfully queer, don't you know. I can't grasp——"

"Don't talk so loud!" whispered Snipe. "Don't speak at all. Just stay here, and wait till I come back."

He went off, and left Archie in the shadow of the trees. Things had happened just as Snipe had wanted. If Hudson and the other two men were at the bridge, they would have heard the muffled voices of the two juniors. And Snipe would be able to collect his reward. This was all he was after. He didn't care a jot if the deception was discovered.

The Worm crept towards the bridge in the gloom, and three figures came out to meet him. They were those of William Hudson, Captain Joshua Niggs, and Ben Croke.

"Well?" demanded Hudson quickly. "Got him?"

"Yes, yes, he is here!" whispered Snipe. "I have left him behind the trees. You must be quick, because he might suspect——"

"Good!" said Hudson. "We're ready for him!"

"Best git on the job at once!" said Captain Niggs gruffly.

"Please, you promised me two pounds——"

Hudson pushed Snipe aside.

"Never mind that two quid now!" he snapped. "That'll do later, kid!"

"But—but I must get back——"

"Hold your confounded tongue!"

Snipe received another push, and his eyes glittered evilly. He had a sickening fear that he would not get the money, after all. His trouble had been for nothing. But he could not take the money—he was compelled to wait.

"Got that sack?" demanded Hudson.

"It's here, all ready!" said Niggs. "Don't waste no more time!"

The three men crept through the grass towards the willows. They rounded them noiselessly, and could see the indistinct figure of Archie Glen thorpe standing there in the dense gloom.

It was impossible to see him clearly, and he was just about the same height and build as Martin. It never entered Hudson's head that this might be quite another boy.

Snipe had gone off to fetch John Martin, and there was no earthly reason why he should bring anybody else. The three men were positively convinced that they had got hold of the right victim.

"Now!" shouted Hudson suddenly.

With one accord they sprang forward. Captain Niggs seized Archie's hands, and clapped them to his sides. At the same second, Croke whirled a muffler round, and pulled it tight over Archie's mouth, to prevent any outcry. By this very action, all hope of discovering the mistake was lost.

"I mean to say——" Archie mumbled. "I—I——"

His voice was almost inaudible to the three

men, for it was muffled and thick. And the next moment Archie was thoroughly startled. For a thick sack was thrown over his head, and descended completely over him, right to his knees. It was drawn on, and then a rope was bound round him.

His position was a hopeless one. Poor Archie had never been so staggered in all his life. He couldn't think properly, and he was half suffocated. But, vaguely, he had an idea that something had gone wrong.

"That's fixed him, I reckon!" said Hudson, with much satisfaction. "Well done, my friends! Couldn't have gorn off better."

"A fair treat, the way we did it!" said Captain Niggs.

The men had adopted a plan which they considered to be the most satisfactory. But, as a matter of fact, they had now destroyed all chance of discovering the truth. For Archie couldn't speak, and his features were hidden by the enveloping sack. Even under a strong light the kidnappers would still have believed that they had got hold of the right victim.

Enoch Snipe crept up nervously. He had been expecting every moment to hear a roar of rage from Hudson. But now he could see that the man was pleased. And Snipe saw the form in the sack. And he understood.

Archie had been accepted as John Martin!

It didn't matter to the Worm what happened now. As far as he was concerned, everything was all right. And he went forward eagerly.

"I did well, didn't I?" he asked. "I—I think you ought to pay me the money you promised——"

"Certainly, kid—certainly!" said Hudson, diving into his pocket. "That's fair and square. You've earned the cash real properly!"

Hudson felt very generous. Things were going well. And the prospect of becoming the owner of unlimited gold made him somewhat reckless. What were a few pounds to him now? He laughed as he drew out some notes.

"There you are, young 'un," he said genially. "There's more than two quid there—three, at least! You're welcome. You've done your bit, and you deserve the lot. But don't forget—no talking!"

"I—I won't say a word!" panted Snipe, seizing the money greedily.

"You'd better not!" said Hudson. "Don't forget that we can get you into rare trouble if we like to speak. So keep your tongue still. Get back to the school, and forget all about this business. Understand?"

"Yes, thank you," said Snipe. "I—I'll go."

He slid off into the darkness, feverishly fingering the notes. There were four—three pound notes and a ten-shilling note. Enoch Snipe fairly gloated. Four pounds ten he had made! He fondled the money as though it were a fortune.

But the hapless Archie was apparently in for something quite unpleasant.

CHAPTER III.

THE TREASURE CHAMBER.



SIR MONTIE TREGEL-
LIS-WEST sighed.

"Dear old boys, I'm afraid we're in a hole in more senses than one—I am, really!" he exclaimed. "The position is an appallin' one.

We're imprisoned down here, an' there's no way of gettin' out."

"No need to keep harping on that!" growled Tommy Watson. "It's simply awful! What's got to be done?"

"I don't quite know," I said grimly. "We're in a nasty fix!"

Edward Oswald Handforth snorted.

"Well, you're the leader of this expedition," he said. "It's up to you to think of something. I wash my hands of it! Let's see what kind of a leader you are, Nipper. A blessed lot of good—I don't think!"

"Don't keep grumbling, Handy!" I said. "Grumbling only makes matters worse. I'll admit that I'm responsible, and I'll do anything I can to make things all right. But here we are, with a tremendous fortune all round us, and we're helpless. It's just the irony of Fate."

Handforth paced up and down.

"By George!" he said, fiercely. "By George! If I could meet those rotters—Niggs and Croke! I'd smash their faces to pulp! I'd knock their teeth down their giddy throats! I'd bash their noses flat! Just wait till I get a chance—just wait till I meet the rotters!"

And Handforth, in an excess of zeal, struck out vigorously. It was only by a piece of extra rapid dodging that I escaped being felled on the spot.

"Steady on, you ass!" I exclaimed. "No need to swipe out at me!"

"I've got to hit something!" roared Handforth. "I've never been so jolly furious in all my life! It's—it's ghastly!"

And Edward Oswald continued to stamp up and down. He couldn't move very far, for we were all standing in a fairly small cavern, which lay a great number of feet below the surface of Willard's Island. The cavern had an uneven floor, rough, steeply-sloping sides, and a low roof.

There was only one exit. This was a short tunnel which led to a narrow shaft. This latter was not particularly deep, and a rickety iron ladder led up the side of it. Twelve feet from the bottom of the shaft the ladder ended, and a heavy stone slab barred further progress.

Our present plight had come about in quite a curious way.

There's no need for me to go into full details, because I've described it all once. The four of us had decided to have a shot at looking for the treasure, and so we had gone to the upper end of the island, and had descended into the tunnel. Here, as I have more than once set down, a steep stone stairway led straight down into a bare chamber.

But, more by accident than anything else, we had hit upon the secret. Nelson Lee had

been working hard on a jig-saw puzzle arrangement which provided the real clue. And it was rather rich that we should discover the secret by pure chance while the gov'nor was solving the problem.

Anyhow, we found an entrance in the stone stairs themselves. But even now the true treasure-chamber was not reached, for the space beneath the stairs was simply a bare kind of place with only a single pile of golden coins in it. This pile, of course, represented a good lot of money—between eight and ten thousand pounds, I judged.

It was contained in a deep recess in the wall, and at first we believed that we had discovered the treasure. But after that we found the loose slab in the floor. And then we descended the shaft into the cavern of gold—for that is what it actually was. The place was simply full of gold.

But, just when our hopes were highest, disaster came.

For Hudson and Niggs and Croke decided on an exploration trip at the same time. Handforth, like the careless ass he is, had left the secret door open—an act of pure forgetfulness.

And then the trouble started.

Hudson & Co. marched in, found the slab open, and descended the shaft. But they didn't find us. We concealed ourselves, not wishing to chance a fight with three powerful, desperate men.

I considered it far better to remain in hiding. We did this, and the enemy ascended the shaft again—but they replaced the stone slab, imprisoning us in the cavern! This, of course, was quite unintentional. Hudson believed that he had hit upon the secret entrance by chance, and he had not the slightest suspicion that the hoard of gold was known to anybody else. Neither did he know that he had unwittingly imprisoned the four of us in the cavern.

So, as I have said, the situation was rather peculiar, and full of dramatic possibilities. For nearly a couple of hours now we had been left absolutely alone, and we were not exceedingly cheerful.

The only light we had was provided by my electric torch. And I dare not use this continuously for fear of the battery giving out. So I just flashed it on now and again, with intervals of intense darkness in between.

"There's no need to be worried," I said, after a bit. "It's a dead certainty that those men will come back before long. And, by waiting, we shall probably be able to take advantage of the enemy. Besides, I'm expecting the gov'nor almost any minute. He's bound to come here——"

"How can he come when he doesn't know anything about it?" growled Handforth.

"Mr. Lee knows more than you think, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"Rather!" I agreed. "Besides, we shall be missed, and the chaps are bound to talk about it. The gov'nor will jump to the conclusion that we're down here, and he'll soon be hot on the track. Just you wait!"

"That's all we can do—wait!" said Handforth. "Well, I'm not a chap to grumble. I believe in taking everything with a smiling

face. That's me! So I suggest that we get busy on something, instead of messing about like this. I've never known such a rotten lot of fatheads in all my life, standing here doing nothing! This is absolutely the limit! Sticking here——"

"I thought you weren't going to grumble?" asked Watson.

"Am I grumbling?" roared Handforth. "Can't I make a few remarks now?"

"There's no need to deafen us," I said. "This cavern echoes everything tremendously, Handy. But I must admit you're right. That's a good idea of yours."

"What idea?"

"About doing something. There's just a faint chance that there's some other exit to this cavern. We've looked once, I know, but

A disappointment awaited us, however, for beyond the moving boulder was only a long, narrow cave, which extended back for perhaps a dozen feet.

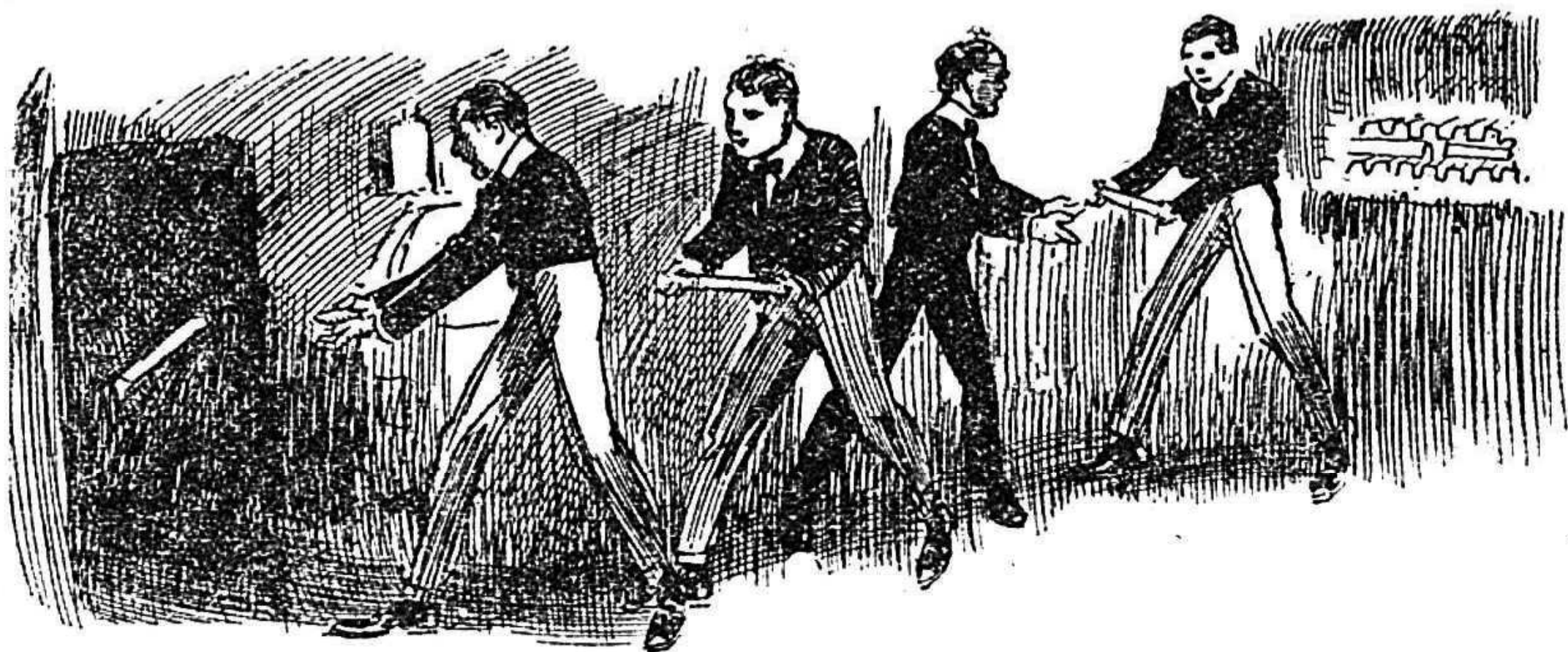
"Why, it's only like a cupboard!" said Handforth, in disgust. "There's no way out of this! A blessed swindle, I call it! All this trouble for nothing!"

"By Jove!" I exclaimed tensely. "I've just thought of something!"

"Anything good?" asked Watson.

"I'll leave that for you to judge," I said.

"Look here, we might as well occupy our time. We'll string ourselves out in a line, and pass those gold ingots from hand to hand. We can work rapidly like that. We'll shove 'em all in this cave. A pretty stiff task, but we're capable of it."



We spread ourselves out, and passed the ingots along from hand to hand. The precious yellow bars clanged dully as we threw them into the cave.

perhaps we've missed something. Anyhow, I'm going round the walls with this light again. Never say die—that's the best motto!"

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie. "That's the spirit, dear fellows!"

And so, just to pass the time, we commenced a search for any possible door. Secret exits and tunnels and caverns were so common under Willard's Island that we had almost grown to look upon them as a certainty.

And, by one of those strokes of luck, we hit upon something in the first two minutes—although we had spent half an hour previously without result. Just behind a great furnace, I noticed something that looked like a crack in the rock wall. And a closer examination proved that it was not natural—it had been artificially formed. It was, in fact, a part of a doorway!

We were now thoroughly excited, and we worked hard. And in a short time we had the satisfaction of finding that the thing wasn't really a secret door, but a big chunk of rock which was capable of being pushed bodily back. It was so balanced that it would do this upon the exercise of heavy pressure.

"And what's the good of it?" asked Handforth, abruptly.

"Dear fellow, can't you understand?" asked Montie. "Begad! It's a ripping idea—it is, really! A frightfully good suggestion. When Niggs an' those other fellows come down again they'll be staggered to find that the gold is gone! It will have vanished without any apparent cause!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "That's right! As a matter of fact, I had an idea something like that, and I was just going to mention it——"

"Naturally!" I grinned. "Good old Handy! Always just a shade late with the ideas! You see, we can shift the gold, and then dive into the cave at the first sound, and pull the boulder closed. We shall be as safe as houses, and those rotters will be completely dished!"

"Let's get at it!" said Tommy Watson, eagerly.

And, without any further talk, we got at it. I propped my electric torch in a position so that we could see, and chanced whether the battery gave out. The cavern was interesting

in many ways. In addition to the gold, it contained two peculiar-looking furnaces, and a strange machine which we could not understand.

The gold itself was piled upon stone shelves, and was in the form of ingots about an inch square, and perhaps a foot in length. They were weighty, too, as can be imagined.

There was a mystery about this gold which we could not fathom. But it seemed to us that old Willard, the eccentric miser, had hoarded up gold coins for years, and had melted them down in this cavern.

We spread ourselves out, as I had suggested, and passed the ingots along from hand to hand, throwing them in a disordered heap in the cave. The precious yellow bars clanged dully as we threw them in, one after the other.

For the first five or ten minutes we worked on hard, but then our arms ached, and we were rapidly becoming tired. We had a short rest, and continued, but our speed was now more steady. And, at intervals we would pause and listen carefully for the first sign of any sound.

But it seemed that we had been left down in the cavern for good. No indication came to us that our prison was to be penetrated. And we worked on doggedly now, determined to complete our task.

There were two sets of these huge stone shelves piled up with the gold ingots. They didn't seem very much to look at, but as the time passed we began to realise that the job was a stiff one.

However, by determined persistence we succeeded in our design. Thoroughly fagged out, and aching in every limb, we had the satisfaction of stowing the gold away before the enemy returned.

And then, breathing hard and perspiring, we sat down in utter darkness and took a rest.

"Phew! It was jolly stiff work while it lasted," I exclaimed, mopping my forehead. "My arms feel almost torn out of their sockets."

"You'd never believe those gold bars were so heavy," said Watson. "And now that we've got the whole job done, it doesn't seem much use. It strikes me that we've been bottled up down here, and we're going to be left to die of starvation and thirst."

"Don't be an ass!" I said impatiently. "Niggs and those other rotters only went up to prepare things. It seems to us that hours and hours have passed, but in reality it's not very late—only just about ten."

"Ten!" said Handforth. "I thought we'd been here all night!"

"That's how it seems when anything like this happens," I replied. "Looking at the thing reasonably, it's pretty obvious that the men wouldn't attempt to take the gold away until the camp was quiet. They wouldn't risk being interrupted at such a job. It's quite likely they'll wait until after midnight."

"That gives us two hours," said Handforth. "Look here, couldn't we do something? Couldn't we open that trapdoor? It's a jolly heavy slab of stone, I know, but we ought to be able to shift it."

"My dear chap, we've tried it," I interrupted. "It's no good at all. There's nothing

in this whole cavern that we could use as a lever—and you can't get any purchase on that rickety ladder. Besides, I believe it's been jammed, or something like that."

We decided, therefore, to wait. It would not be a long one, however, for while we were discussing these questions far underground, other events were taking place on the surface.

And when Hudson and his companions did venture into the bowels of the earth, they were booked for a somewhat startling surprise.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEUCE OF A TIME, AND SO FORTH.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE was bewildered.

In addition, he was flustered and hot, and getting well on the road to being suffocated. Never in the whole course of his easy-going life had he experienced anything so utterly appalling.

He would never have been able to explain just what took place.

He only knew that he was in pitchy darkness, that it was difficult to breathe, and that the whole of his person except the lower part of his legs were stickily and uncomfortably perspiring.

The sack which was enveloping him was the cause of this. Anybody who has been bound up with a muffler, and then smothered in a sack, will be able to appreciate what Archie went through.

He was carried about, dumped down without ceremony, bumped here and bumped there, until he hardly knew whether he was upright or upside down.

Now and again he could hear the muffled sound of men's voices. He didn't know who they were, and he hadn't got the faintest idea why he was being treated in this way. His brain, in fact, was hardly capable of entering into such matters. He was confused and bothered.

He had a vague kind of idea he was being taken somewhere. At least he received the impression that he was constantly on the move. As a matter of fact, Hudson and Niggs and Croke were losing no time in carrying out their plans. They believed, of course, that their prisoner was John Martin. So far they were sublimely ignorant of the somewhat startling truth. There was a shock in store for them—quite a number of shocks, in fact.

At the present moment they were stealing silently up the dark River Stowe, Niggs rowing, and the others sitting in the stern. The prisoner was lying in the bows, thankful for a little rest.

"Now we've got to go careful," said Mr. Hudson, softly. "This is the biggest thing we've ever come across, and we can't afford to make any blunders. It's early yet, and we shall have to keep our eyes open."

Captain Niggs cast a fierce glare upon the island, which was just in sight.

"It's a durned nuisance them boys bein' on

that island!" he muttered gruffly. "The young brats can't mind their own business—that's the trouble. Like as not we'll be interrupted, even as it is."

"We shall be all right if we go easy," said Hudson. "I've got the whole thing planned—exactly what we've got to do. This boy has got to be taken right out of the district. He's got to disappear. Understand?"

"You don't mean to do no 'arm to 'im?" asked Mr. Croke.

"The boy won't be hurt," replied Hudson. "I'm not such a fool as to try any game of that kind. As long as he disappears, that's all that's needed. But I want to be on the safe-side."

"Ow do you mean, mate?" asked Niggs.

"Well, this boy's Willard's son, and it's pretty certain there's somebody who can prove it," replied Hudson. "But if the boy can't be found, there'll be no proof at all. I don't believe in taking chances over a job of this kind."

But what does it matter, anyway?" demanded Niggs. "We're going to take this gold away secret, in the night, an' stow it miles away from 'ere, down the river. There ain't no question of the boy coming into it."

Hudson looked grim.

"Things don't always happen as a man plans," he replied. "Likely as not there'll be a slip. In that case I'll be ready to prove that the gold is mine—by law! With that boy out of the way I'm the next of kin, and if any questions come up I'll make out that I was doing it secret, because I didn't want any fuss. You don't need to worry—I've got it all planned."

"We've got this kid, anyways," muttered Mr. Croke. "A nice 'andful, too! Wot the thunder are we goin' to do with 'im? 'E'll be a blamed trouble on our 'ands—that's wet 'e'll be!"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Hudson. "We're going to take the kid down into that cavern. It'll make a good prison for him, and he won't have a dog's chance of getting away. We'll get that gold up, and we'll do it during the night. We'll pack it all the way down the river where we've planned. We can see about the boy afterwards. Shifting the gold's the first thing—after we've got the young 'un stowed away."

Niggs and Croke agreed to this plan. Mr. William Hudson, evidently, was not going to take any chances. But if he could have had the faintest idea of what was actually in store, he would not have looked quite so self-satisfied.

The upper end of the island was reached, and the boat grounded silently. All was quiet and still here, and the night had now become pitchy dark, and a stiff wind had sprung up. This was greatly to the liking of the conspirators, for their movements were cloaked.

And then the difficult task of getting "Martin" into the cavern commenced. At first Mr. Hudson thought about carrying the boy bodily up the steep ground, and into the tunnel. But this promised to be too strenuous. So Hudson placed his mouth close against the sack opposite the prisoner's head.

"Now, my lad, you've got to walk," he said distinctly. "Understand? You won't come to any harm if you do what I say. We'll guide you—and you'll soon be set free."

Archie heard the words clearly enough, but he was not in a position to make any reply. The ropes had been loosened from about his legs, and he was only too glad to obey—to walk as he was commanded. It was a change, and he badly wanted to be free of the muffler and the sack.

So in this fashion the tunnel was entered. And the three rascals took their victim down the steps, and so into the first chamber. Here in the floor lay the shaft which led down into the treasure cavern.

"We're all right now," said Mr. Hudson. "I think we might as well let the kid have a breather. It doesn't matter if he yells his head off down here—nobody can hear him."

"We might as well be human," said Captain Niggs kindly. "Don't want to 'arm the young cuss, do we?"

"We've got time to take a rest ourselves," said Mr. Hudson. "It's only about ten, and we've got an hour or two to waste. We can't make a proper move until midnight. Everything's going well."

Mr. Croke turned his eyes upon the deep recess—which, at first glance round, was hardly noticeable. In it lay the big pile of sovereigns and half-sovereigns. These formed just a tiny portion of the main treasure.

"Might as well shove these quids in our pockets," said Mr. Croke. "Seems a blamed pity to leave 'em lyin' there. Bust my buttons! I ain't never seed so many quids in all my life! I can't rightly believe they're real!"

"Oh, they're real enough," said Hudson calmly. "And that gold's real down in the cavern, too. I'm worried a bit, regarding how we can get rid of it. But we can leave that till afterwards. The main thing is to take it away."

Captain Niggs, in the meantime, had been unfastening the rope which bound the sack to Archie. Hudson had lit a candle, and had stuck it to the wall. The flickering light illuminated the chamber oddly, and the figures of the men cast long, dancing shadows on the dull walls.

"There you are, kid—that's better, hey?" said Niggs.

He pulled the sack off, and jerked the big muffler free. Archie Glenthorne staggered a trifle, and held on to the wall for support. He blinked round, dazzled by the candle-light, and breathed hard.

"I mean to say, what?" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Dashed beastly, and all that! The old air seems deucedly topping after the suffocating business. Absolutely! Jolly decent of you to yank the lid off, laddies!"

Mr. Hudson uttered a gulp, started forward, and then gave vent to an oath.

"Well, really," protested Archie. "I say! Language, and what not! Rotten form, don't you know! Soiling a chappie's ears, and so forth."

Hudson gulped again. His face was livid with fury. At the first sound of Archie's voice

he knew the truth—and one glance confirmed the matter. Hudson glared at Archie with the ferocity of a wild animal.

"We've been tricked!" he thundered. "This ain't the boy at all!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie mildly. "Megaphones outclassed, and all that sort of rot. The voice, old fruit, is somewhat powerful, don't you know. You seem to have swallowed a bally trumpet."

"What the thunder does this mean?" raved Hudson. "How did you get here?"

"Well, I mean to say, dashed awkward question to answer," said Archie. "The fact is, old bean, I thought you knew all about it."

"It's that durned whelp who tricked us!" snapped Niggs. "That kid with the red eyes! Tricked us proper, too! He must have known all the time this kid wasn't Martin!"

Hudson cursed again.

"Wait till I get hold of him!" he snarled. "Snipe—that's the kid's name! Wait until I lay my hands on him! By glory, I'll smash him up! I'll make him realise that he can't play games with me!"

"Matters seem to be frightfully rotten for the Snipe laddie!" said Archie. "A most deuced bounder—absolutely! Snipe, as you might say, led the little lamb astray. I'm fearfully annoyed with him. Well, rather!"

"How did it happen?" demanded Hudson, calming down. "How did Snipe get you away from the school?"

"Well, there you are," said Archie. "I mean to say, absolutely! Snipe, don't you know, waltzed in. He staggered into the old apartment, and got busy with the yarn. Yards of it. About the pater taking a jolly old bath in the river. You see, as it were, I was required. I had to fly to the rescue, and all that——"

"Don't talk so much," snapped Hudson. "We can't get any sense out of you. Not that it's any good now. That young humbug fooled us, and took the money. Well, young man, you're in a bit of a hole. We shall have to keep you here now."

"What for?" put in Niggs. "What's the good of keeping this kid——"

"What's the good of letting him go?" retorted Hudson. "D'you think we want him to blab the whole game away? We've got to keep him now—until this job's done, anyway."

"Yes, I s'pose we 'ave," agreed Niggs slowly. "A blamed nuisance, that's wot it is! I reckon we'd best shove 'im down in the cavern straight away."

"It's the only thing to be done," agreed Hudson. "We can see about Martin afterwards—or else give it up altogether."

Archie looked round with mild interest.

"Pardon the old interruption, but what's the idea?" he asked. "I mean to say, what's

the scheme? Reminds a chappie of dungeons deep, and what not! Frightfully queer business, this. Where do we stagger to now?"

"We're going to put you where you can't do any harm, my lad," said Mr. Hudson. "You were brought here by accident, and now you've got to stay here."

"Dashed rotten, what?" said Archie. "No comfort, and all that. Not even a bally chair to rest the old bones. And it must be getting frightfully late. Absolutely! Time to tuck in for the old dreamless, and all that kind of stuff."

"You won't get any dreamless to-night," said Hudson grimly. "Look here, Niggs, keep your eye on the kid while I go down into the cavern. I'll try and find a place where we can stow the young brat away."

"Somewhat terse, so to speak," murmured Archie. "Brat, don't you know! Decidedly near the knuckle, and all that! Makes a chappie feel hot and cold. The old temper, in fact, is beginning to bubble."

Archie was pushed aside, and Ben Croke stood near him—although this precaution was unnecessary. There was not much fear of Archie trying to bolt. There was only one exit, and he could never have squeezed through it in time to avoid recapture. And even then he would not have known which way to go.

Captain Niggs and Hudson levered up the stone slab after a considerable display of energy. Then Hudson switched on his electric torch, and descended the iron ladder. A gloating feeling of triumph came over him as he entered the cavern. Gold! It lay in front of him in profusion—hundredweights of it! The treasure was worth the better part of a million sterling.

Hudson had come down into the cavern for the purpose of finding a place for Archie. But, instinctively, he first went to the shelves where the gold ingots were stowed. And, suddenly, Hudson came to an abrupt halt. His eyes nearly bulged from his head, and he caught his breath in with a hoarse, choking sound.

"What the—— why, great thunder!" he gasped. "What—what——"

He paused, the words failing to form. He dashed a hand over his eyes, and then looked again. It was impossible—it was out of the question! But the stone shelves were empty! Absolutely empty!

There was a silence in the cavern like that of a tomb as Hudson stood there motionless. Behind that big boulder I crouched with my chums. We could hear nothing, but we knew that somebody had come down into the cavern—for we had not scuttled into the little cave until the last minute. But the great mass of stone cut off practically all sounds.

To Hudson, the thing was utterly staggering. It was uncanny. Only a short time before he had seen the gold with his own eyes. There was not the slightest indication that the cavern had been entered by other human beings. And yet the gold had disappeared as though it were a light mist.

Hudson wheeled round, and stared at the stone shelves on the other side of the cavern. These, too, had been packed with gold ingots

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But now they were bare. Every atom of the precious metal, in fact, had been spirited away.

Hudson suddenly found his voice, and his limbs recovered their utility. He rushed up and down like a madman, bellowing, cursing, and nearly choking with rage and disappointment.

"Niggs! Niggs!" he thundered. "It's gone—the gold's gone! You fools! We're tricked—we've been beaten! Niggs! Come down here, you idiot!"

Hudson didn't wait. Like a maniac he rushed into the short tunnel, and scrambled up the iron ladder as though demons were after him. When he emerged into the upper chamber his face was as pale as chalk, his eyes were burning, and his breath came and went in great gulps.

"I mean to say, what!" exclaimed Archie, startled. "The fact is, old fruit, you're somewhat out of condition, and all that!"

"It's gone!" gasped Hudson hoarsely. "Do you hear—it's gone!"

Captain Niggs seized Hudson's shoulder.

"Wot do you mean?" he demanded, his voice shaking. "Wot's gorn? Durn my hide! If you're tryin' to double-cross me——"

"You fool—you imbecile!" snarled Hudson. "The gold's vanished——"

"Dashed awkward, and all that," put in Archie mildly. "I mean to say, rather a habit that gold has, what? Always doing the vanishing act, and so forth! Fearfully elusive material."

"Hold your tongue, curse you!" snapped Hudson. "I—— What's that? Didn't you hear—— Thunder! Somebody's coming!"

They all stood stock still, and held their breath. And, faint and far away, sounded voices and the scraping of feet upon stonework. There were others coming down the secret tunnel—and it certainly seemed that the developments of the immediate future would be interesting.

CHAPTER V.

NELSON LEE AT WORK.



"HERE we are!" Reginald Pitt breathed the words as he jumped out of a boat at the upper end of Willard's Island. He was followed out by Church and

Nelson Lee. The night was dark and windy.

There had been some little delay, for Nelson Lee had visited the Cadet camp—without the others—in order to ascertain if everything was all right. He had found, of course, that the missing juniors had not returned.

The Cadets were decidedly worried. Their Commander had gone, and the sergeant was missing, too. And, with Corporal Pitt out searching, this only left one N.C.O. in charge. Corporal Christine was commanding the corps for the time being, and he had his hands pretty full.

Pitt, of course, forgot that he was a cadet now. All formalities had been dropped, all military routine was put aside. He was keenly

anxious to get into this old tunnel and make a search.

Nelson Lee himself was quite calm.

Although he said little, he knew most of the facts. He was well aware that Hudson was after Willard's gold, and that the two bargemen, Niggs and Croke, were helping him.

But it certainly came as a bit of surprise to the famous detective to find that events had developed so rapidly. He had been spending a good deal of time on the quaint old jig-saw puzzle. This was a peculiar problem which old Willard had left behind, in order to make the finding of the treasure as difficult as possible. It seemed that Lee had been working for nothing.

For, in the meantime, the treasure cavern had been hit upon by accident. Well, it was all the better. The climax had arrived.

The little search-party went up the steep ground till the tunnel entrance was reached. This was naturally concealed by masses of fallen earth and rock, and the presence of an opening would not have been suspected by any casual observer.

"How do we go, sir?" asked Pitt. "I suppose you'll lead the way, and we'll follow? You've got a torch, haven't you, sir?"

"Yes, Pitt," said Nelson Lee. "I'll lead the way, and you boys can follow if you like. But I should advise you to wait out here in the open."

"Oh, we'd rather come, sir!" said Church eagerly.

"Rather, sir."

"Very well, come," said Nelson Lee briskly.

He switched on his electric torch, and plunged into the low, narrow tunnel. And, with Pitt bringing up the rear, the party progressed until the steep stone stairs were reached.

They went down, and at the bottom the opening was found. It would not have been found if Hudson had had his way. The man had tried to close the cunningly contrived door.

But from the inside he had found it impossible to do so. And so in desperation he had decided upon another plan, perhaps a better plan. He knew that he was in a tight hole, and he wanted to get out of it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, flashing his light upon the opening in the steps. "This looks interesting, boys. I think we can take it for granted that Nipper and his companions passed through here. We will do the same."

"Does it lead to the treasure, sir?" asked Church eagerly.

"I don't know, my boy, and I'm not concerned with the treasure, anyhow," said Nelson Lee. "I want to find out what has become of Nipper and the other boys. And we must be on the look-out for any sign of the enemy. I'm not particularly afraid of them; they're a poor lot."

In point of fact, Nelson Lee regarded Hudson and his companions with contempt. They were not professional criminals, but amateurs of the most ordinary kind. In a scrap, Lee was confident of victory.

He squeezed his way through the secret opening, and the three juniors followed closely

almost tumbling over one another in their eagerness to get inside. And then came the surprise.

"Hands up—every one of you!"

The voice was harsh and strained. It came from the rear. Nelson Lee and the juniors had just got through. And then the bright beam from an electric-torch played upon them, and Nelson Lee swung round.

His own light revealed the figure of Hudson, with Niggs and Croke just in his rear. And, more surprising still, Archie Glenthorne was hovering in the background, looking mildly interested.

"Very dramatic," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Come—come—Mr. Hudson, this sort of thing is rather absurd, isn't it? Put that weapon away."

"I'm not going to be bluffed into anything!" snarled Hudson. "Up with your hands, I tell you! If you don't, I'll fire!"

For a moment, Nelson Lee hesitated. He was quite certain that this man was bluffing on his own account. Hudson was not the kind of individual to go about with loaded fire-arms.

Lee could see that the man was fairly shivering—not with fright, but with the intensity of the situation. Even if he did fire, his aim would be at random, although probably fatal for all that. The range was short.

"There's no need for this nonsense," said Nelson Lee. "It seems, Mr. Hudson, that we have met at a somewhat awkward time, and, since I do not believe in tamely surrendering, I must adopt other methods."

And, with a lightning spring, Nelson Lee leapt forward. He was convinced that if he sent Hudson crashing down, the other men would give in. Hudson backed away, alarmed and scared.

Crack!

A revolver-shot rang out with a report like that of a cannon. In that stone chamber the sound boomed and echoed. And Reginald Pitt gave a sharp, agonised cry, and staggered against the wall.

"Oh! Oh!" he muttered pantingly.

Nelson Lee, with a horrible fear clutching at his breast, swung round. He forgot everything in that terrible moment. Hudson, no doubt, had fired unintentionally. In the excitement his nervous finger had pulled the trigger. But it was evidently dangerous to show resistance.

"Pitt!" exclaimed Lee quickly. "Are you hurt, my boy?"

"It—it's nothing, sir!" gasped Pitt. "A close shave, though."

For that one terrible second Lee had believed that Pitt was badly hit, but now he could see that the junior was pulling up his sleeve. His tunic was torn just near the elbow.

And when he exposed his arm a trickle of blood was flowing down.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Church. "You're wounded!"

"It's broken your arm!" shouted McClure. "Oh, this is terrible!"

"Hands up, all the lot of you!" snarled Hudson thickly. "You can see I'm in earnest. I'll fire again if you don't obey."

Pitt rubbed his arm sharply.

"It's nothing, after all," he said. "The skin's only grazed, sir, it'll be well in a day or two. But it was a near squeak. And it gave me a fearful jar at the moment."

Lee breathed a sigh of relief. The injury was indeed, only a slight graze, and a mere trifle; but it might easily have been a fatal wound. The left elbow is not very far from the heart; it was by pure chance that Pitt had escaped so lightly.

And Nelson Lee decided at once that no more risks could be taken. He greatly regretted that he had not come down alone. He didn't care about himself, he would have taken a chance; but it was impossible to endanger the lives of the juniors.

He turned to Hudson rather grimly.

"I think you have the upper hand—for the moment," he said quietly. "But be careful what you do with that weapon. If you harm any of these boys you will be made to answer to the utmost limit!"

"I know what I'm doing!" snapped Hudson. "That kid can think himself lucky he wasn't hurt more. I'm not in a mood to waste time. Put your hands up, and keep 'em up."

"Do as this man says, boys!" exclaimed Lee.

The juniors were plucky enough, and quite game for a scrap under any ordinary circumstances. But the revolver-shot had startled them, and Pitt's narrow escape took most of the fight out of them. They were only too willing to put their hands above their heads.

They didn't want any more shots.

"Now, you'll do just what I tell you," said Hudson grimly. "See that hole in the floor? Get down there—one after the other. There's a shaft leading downwards with an iron ladder. You first, Mr. Interferer."

Nelson Lee walked towards the shaft and climbed through. The position was decidedly galling, but the detective was by no means alarmed. He knew that he was quite capable of beating these rascals when it came to strategy. But you can't very well use strategy with a man who is pointing a loaded revolver at you.

"Now the next one!" said Hudson curtly.

Pitt passed down the shaft. He was immediately followed by Church and McClure. They didn't know where they were going, and the whole adventure was a most startling one. They simply plunged down into inky darkness—into the mysterious depths of the earth.

As they vanished, Hudson breathed a husky sigh.

"By thunder!" he muttered. "I'm glad that's done! I never thought we'd manage it, Niggs. The interfering rats! They can't do anything down there, and it'll be easy enough for us to slip off now."

Niggs uttered an oath.

"Slip off?" he repeated. "Wot's the good o' that? A blamed fine swab you are! Talkin' about leavin' an' we ain't got a hounce of gold between the three of us. You sent them lubbers down where the stuff is——"

"The gold's gone, I tell you," interrupted Hudson. "The whole thing's a mystery. It's—it's startling! But the best thing we can do is to take these sovereigns, fill our pockets, and

clear. We'll have two or three hundred each, anyway—and that makes it worth our trouble."

"Strike me timbers!" shouted Ben Croke suddenly. "Where's that kid?"

"Which kid?" asked Hudson. "Why, you don't mean——"

They gazed about the stone chamber in the candlelight, and Hudson flashed the light from his torch round.

Archie Glenthorne had gone!

In the excitement of the recent tussle, the men had forgotten all about Archie. They had overlooked him. He certainly had not gone down the shaft with the others, and he was no longer in the chamber.

"The young skunk!" snarled Hudson harshly. "He's slipped off—while you weren't looking. This is what comes of trusting to you."

"The kid was 'ere not two minutes ago," said Niggs. "'E can't 'ave got far. Ben's eyesight ain't wot it used to be. The pore old cuss is givin' out fast. I was a durned fool to leave——"

"Don't waste time by talking," interrupted Hudson. "We've got to get that boy back, and shove him down with the others. Then we shall have time to get clear away without being followed."

Swiftly they heaved the stone slab into position. Hudson knew that it would be fatal to let Archie get away. He would tell the whole story to the first person he met, and then, of course, there would be a hue and cry. Indeed, it might even be impossible for the three men to leave the island. Hudson remembered that the Cadets were near by, and Archie would certainly go to them.

If, on the other hand, he was recaptured and placed down in the cavern with the other prisoners, escape for Hudson and Co. would be easy.

The three men hurried out of the chamber with all speed, and rushed, panting and cursing, up the stone steps to the upper tunnel. They were hot on Archie's track—at least, they thought they were.

But if they hadn't been in quite such a hurry they would have saved themselves a lot of trouble. Their footsteps were still sounding when there came a movement from the deep recess—where the golden coins were stowed.

Archie Glenthorne looked out, and shoved his monocle into his eye.

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHIE RALLIES ROUND.



"**R**ATHER jolly decent what?" said Archie pleasantly.

He smiled with great amiability as he observed that he was quite alone. He could still hear the sounds of

the men as they rushed madly up the stairs in chase of him. Archie was somewhat tickled.

"Deucedly brainy, and all that," he remarked, addressing the candle. "I mean to

say, I didn't know the old bean was capable of it. But there you are—absolutely! I might even say absolutely twice. We've done the old trick. Routed the beastly enemy, and so forth."

Archie let himself down gingerly. He had climbed up into the recess as soon as he noticed that he was not observed—that he had been momentarily overlooked. And, crouching at the very back of the place, he had not been visible.

Even an ordinary search of the place would have revealed his presence in that recess. But Hudson and Co., in their excitement, had taken it for granted that Archie had escaped out of the chamber by means of the exit.

"This, as it were, is where I do the good old cackle," went on Archie. "Absolutely! Villains foiled, and all that sort of rot! I mean to say, the old brain was buzzing frightfully, and then—zing! The idea arrived. Positively and absolutely turned up smiling!"

He looked down at his creased and dusty clothes.

"Of course, these brainy ideas have their drawbacks," he said. "Most deucedly filthy, and all that. Dashed rotten, to be exact. Absolutely! Old Phipps will be suffering convulsions when he sees the wreckage."

Archie wandered up and down once or twice, and then he brought this aimless proceeding to an end. He came to a halt, and stared at the stone slab in the floor. He adjusted his monocle, and looked harder. Then he frowned.

"Something, as it were, has got to be done," he said firmly. "I don't know what it is, but there's no question about it. Absolutely not. Something, dear laddie, is on the agenda, as you might say. But I'm dashed if I can remember what the trouble is. The old memory needs jogging."

He touched his forehead, and frowned again.

"Why, by Jove, and so forth!" he exclaimed. "Of course! Absolutely! What-ho! The works are buzzing again. I've got it—absolutely nailed the old thing! The dear chappies, including the sportsman who rules with the old rod, have done the vanishing act down the drain business. Absolutely! It's up to me to fly to the rescue, and all that kind of stuff. I'm the merchant who's got to make several large pages of local history. What-ho!"

Archie gazed at the stone slab, and bent down.

"Somewhat hefty," he observed. "Dashed weighty, as it were. One gang of navvies required, and what not. But there you are! The dear laddies aren't on hand. It's up to me to deputise, and all that. Now, this is where we start. This, in fact, is where we positively commence. Absolutely! Business of removing lid is on the point of being put into operation."

For a moment or two Archie continued to gaze at the stone "lid." But, finding that gazing did no actual good, he set about something more useful. First of all, he tried to grasp the stone with his bare fingers, but he soon gave this up as a hopeless task.

"Frightfully rough on the fingers!" he murmured. "I mean to say, awfully jolly rotten on the old digits. This won't do. Abso-

tutely not! Levers and rods, and so forth, required in chunks. But where are they, old dear? Archie, cast the optics round, and do the searching stunt."

He was feeling quite proud of himself. This was about the first time he had ever attempted to do anything useful. And he was quite delighted to discover that he was not absolutely helpless.

His face lighted up as he saw a cold-chisel lying a little distance off in the dust. This useful tool had evidently been left by Mr. Hudson, who had had a little trouble with the stone slab himself. Archie picked it up, turned it over two or three times, and then nodded.

"I mean to say, the identical," he remarked. "I don't know what the bally thing is. Haven't the faintest. Deucedly beastly ig., and so forth, but there you are. A fellow can't do everything. But to begin. In other words, to start the digging biz."

He bent down, inserted the edge of the chisel in the crevice against the stone slab, and pushed all his weight on it. The chisel slipped, and Archie's knuckles thudded violently upon the stone floor.

"Wow! I mean to say, yards of pain!" he exclaimed, holding his hand tightly, and screwing up his face. "Great gadzooks! Two miles of the old tissue missing. Gallons of blood, and so forth. Absolutely! That is to say, one ghastly disaster to the good old puncher."

Archie surveyed his hand with grave concern. There was a graze on the knuckles about an inch long, and a tiny trickle of blood was oozing forth.

"But it's no dashed good looking at the thing!" said Archie. "Makes a chappie feel all queer, and that! The mind requires to be otherwise occupied. What-ho! Shall we make another try? Absolutely!"

He picked up the chisel again, but this time he went to work more cautiously. Instead of pushing with all his strength upon it, he exerted quite a gentle pressure. And, inch by inch, the heavy stone slab came up. It was really a great piece of luck, for a much more business-like chap than Archie might have tried three or four times without success.

"Cheers, and all that!" breathed Archie tensely. "Observe the lid moving. Well, rather! How perfectly priceless! Good! That is to say, topping!"

He raised the slab by means of the chisel to such an extent that he was able to insert his foot in the opening. Then, rather thoughtlessly, he relaxed the pressure on the chisel. The stone slab weighed about a hundredweight.

"Yow-wow-oooooch!" howled Archie wildly.

He really thought that his foot was smashed, and it was certainly bruised. Sheer necessity compelled him to act with decision and swiftness. Nothing else on earth would have caused him to move so rapidly, or to display such energy. Indeed, but for this mishap, it is doubtful if Archie would ever have got the slab open.

But with every ounce of his strength, he

bent down and grabbed at the stone. Then, with a heave, he sent it crashing back. It went over with fearful force, and it was a great wonder that it didn't splinter to fragments.

"Great goodness!" gasped Archie. "All sorts of exclamations! Unprintable words and what not! This is frightful—absolutely! Two shocking injuries already! But we must proceed—there must be no turning back. No white feather, and all that rot!"

Archie bent down over the shaft, and gazed into the intense blackness.

"I mean to say, what-ho!" he shouted. "Down in the black hole, don't you know! Are you there, dear chappies? Anything doing? Kindly give the old yell if you're all serene!"

"Archie!" came Church's voice excitedly.

"Great Scott! So it is!" shouted Pitt.

Archie smiled.

"Absolutely!" he called. "The fact is, old tulips, I'm coming down! I'm doing the merry descending stuff! Be good enough to gather at the bottom, in case I have half a dozen side-slips!"

Nelson Lee had cast the light from his electric torch down the short tunnel. And before Archie could make his descent, Nelson Lee climbed up the shaft, and joined him.

"Bravo, Glenthorne!" he exclaimed. "How did you manage it?"

"Oh, well, exactly!" replied Archie. "That is to say, old sport, I just did the thing! Quite simp., as it were! Did the good old squat upon the pieces of eight, and waited!"

"But where are those three men?"

"The merchants who shoved you down in the old coal-cellar?" asked Archie. "Oh, rather! They've gone, don't you know. Absolutely! In point of fact, they're looking for me. Somewhat fruity, what!"

"I think I understand," said Nelson Lee. "So these men imagined that you had escaped—whilst all the time you were crouching in that recess in the opposite wall?"

"You've hit it, old top—you've positively struck the thing!" replied Archie. "Allow me to remark, sir, that you're a deucedly brainy cove! It would take me about four hours to work out a thing like that—absolutely!"

"And the three men have rushed off in search of you?" said Nelson Lee. "Well, they will soon return, I should think. In the meantime, it gives us an opportunity to make a few preparations."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "I mean to say, preparations? Plans and schemes, and so forth? The laddie you require is Phipps. Absolutely! Every time, in fact. Phipps, don't you know, has got a brain about as large as St. Paul's Cathedral. Only, as it were, it's compressed. Positively corned! Phipps is a most useful buffer. Thinks of things while a chappie is scratching his bally ear! Ideas simply come——"

"Never mind about Phipps!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "As a matter of fact, I doubt if the excellent Phipps would be of much use in a situation of this kind. The best thing we can

(Continued on page 25.)

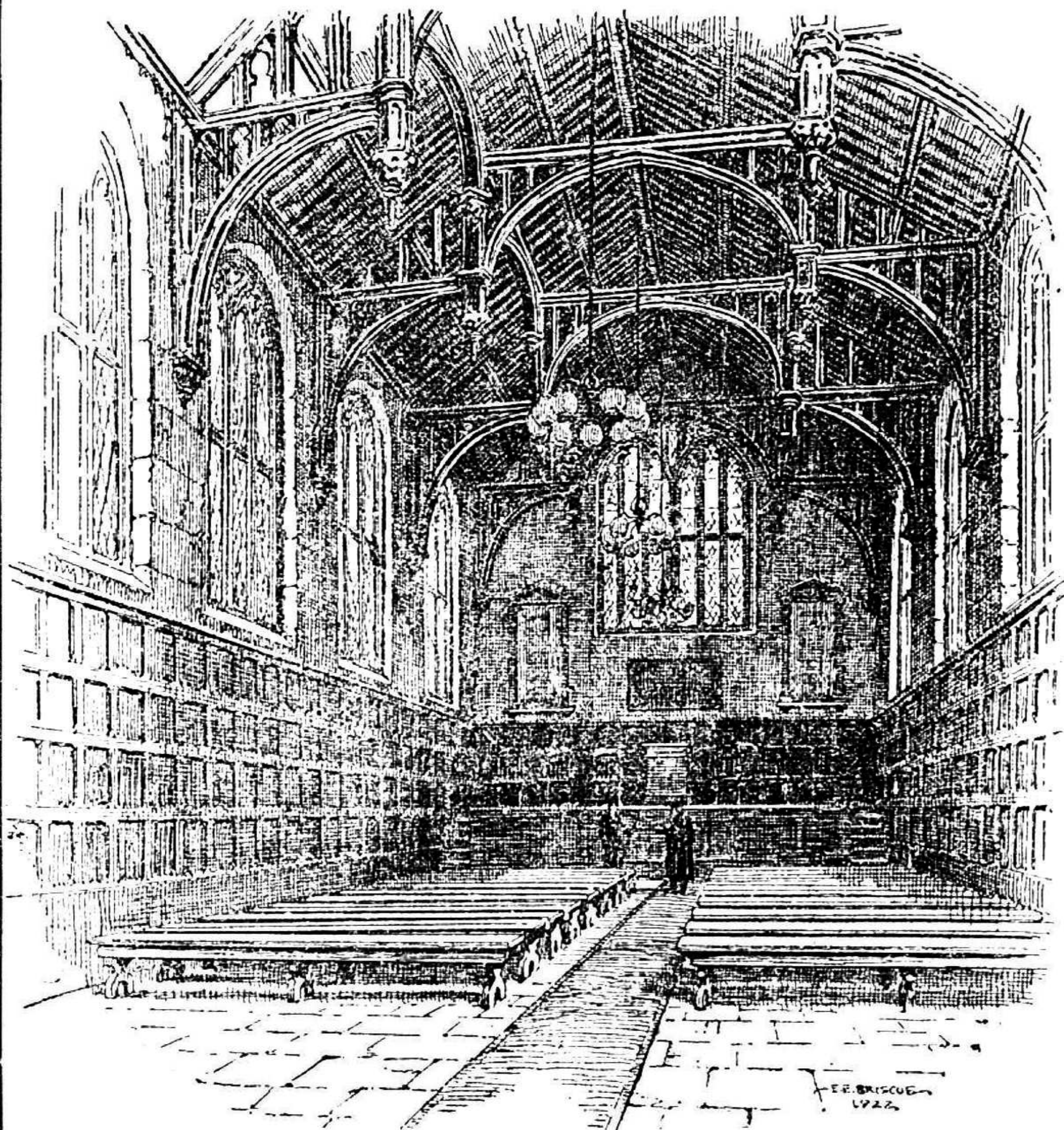
SPECIAL NEW FEATURE—A BAD BOY'S DIARY!

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 18.

THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S
Edited by Nipper.

March 25.
1922.



THE BIG HALL, ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE.

(Specially drawn for the Magazine.)



THE PHOTOGRAPHS

I'VE been 2 sick too write in my diry for most a week. It was gettin' drownded made me ill, an' gettin out o' bed when I was hot. Docktor Moore he's been up to see me twist a day. He's been so good to me I'm sorry I fritened him that night.

I herd Bess tell Lily this morning she was glad I was sick, 'cause there was some piece in the house now; she hoped I'd stay in bed a month. I wonder wot girls don't like their little brothers for? I'm sure I'm real good to Bess. I go to the post-offis fur her twist a day when I am well. I never lost moren three letters fur her. Golly! ain't I glad she don't know 'bout them!

This afternoon I felt so much better I wanted to get up, so when I heard Betty comin' with my supper, I slipped out o' bed an' hid behind the door.

I had mamma's shawl around me, an' I jumpted out as she come in, an' barked as like I was a big black dog, an' that careless creature just dropped the tray on the floor. Such a mess! The china bowl was broke, the beef-tea spilt on the carpet, an' the hull family rushed upstairs to hear her scream as if the house was on fire.

I didn't know Betty was such a goose. They all blamed me—they always do. I believe when I get well I'll run

away, an' be a buf'lo bill, or jine a ship. There never was a boy got such tretement—so unjust.

To-day I was let sit up, tucked up in a quilt in a arm-chare. I soon got tired o' that, so I ast Betty to get me a glass o' ice-water to squench my thirst, an' when she was gone I cut an' run, an' went into Susan's room to look at all them fotografs of nice young men she's got there in a drawer.

The girls were all down in the parlor, 'cos Miss Watson had come to call. Betty she came a huntin' me, but I hid in the wardrobe behind a ole hoop-skirt. I come out when she went away, an' had a real good time.

Some o' them fotografs was written on the back, like this: "Conseated fop!" "Oh, ain't he sweet?" "He ast me, but I wouldn't have him." "A perfeck darling!" "What a mouth!" "Portrait of a donkey!"

I kep about two dozen o' them I knew, to have some fun when I got well. I shut the drawer so Sue wouldn't notice they was took.

I felt as if I could not bare to go back to that nasty room, I was so tired of it, an' I thought I'd pass my time a playing I was a young lady. So I put on Sue's old bustle, and a pettycoat with a long tale to it, and Sue's blue silk dress, only it wouldn't be big enuff about the waste. I found a lot o' little curls in the buro, wich I stuck on all around my forehead with a bottle of gum, and then I seen some red stuff on a sawcer, wich I rubbed onto my cheeks.

When I was all fixed up I slid down the bannisters plump againste Miss Watson, wot was sayin' good-by to my sisters. Such a hollerin' as they made!



That careless creature just dropped the tray on the floor

"My best blue silk, you little imp!" said Sue.

Miss Watson turned me to the light, an' sez she, as sweet as pie:

"Where did you get them pretty red cheeks, Geordie?"

Susan she made a sign, but I didn't know it.

"I found some red stuff in Sue's drawer," sez I, and she smiled kind o' hateful, and said:

"Oh!"

My sister says she is an awful gossip, wich will tell all over town that they paint, wich they don't, 'cause that sawcer was just to make roses on cardbord, wich is all right.

I stepped on to the front o' Sue's dress goin' up stares agen, an' tore the front bredth acrost.

She was so mad she boxed my ears.

"Aha, missy!" sez I to myself, "you don't guess about them fotografs wot I took out o' your drawer!"

Some folks think little boys' ears are made on purpose to be boxed—my sisters do. If they knew wot dark an' desperate thoughts come into little boys' minds, they'd be more careful—it riles 'em up like pokin' sticks into a mud puddle.

I laid low—but beware to-morrow!

They let me come down to brekfast this mornin'.

I've got those pictures all in my pockets, you bet your life.

"Wot makes your pockets stick out so?" ast Lily, when I was a waiting a chance to slip out unbeknone.

"Oh, things," sez I, an' she laughed.

"I thought mebbe you'd got your books and cloathes packed up in 'em," sez she, "to run away an' be a Injun warryor."

I didn't let on anything, but ansered her:

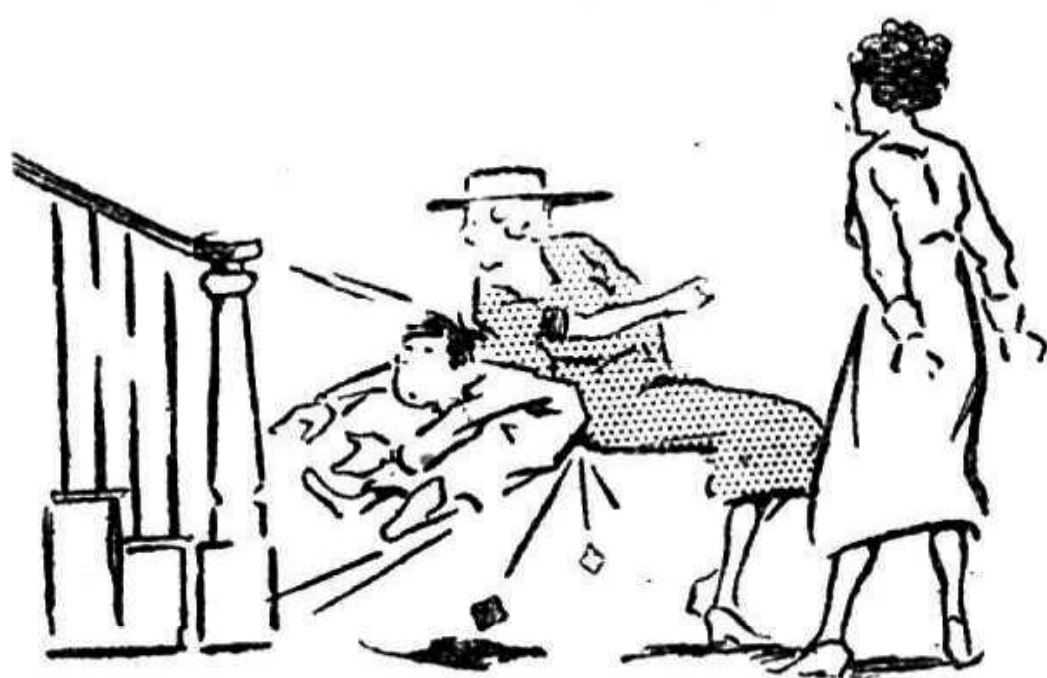
"I guess I'll go out in the backyard an' play a spell."

Well, I got off down town, an' had a lot of fun. I called on all the aboriginals of them fotografs.

"Hallo, Georgie! Well agen?" said the first feller I stopped to see.

Oh, my! when I get big enuff I'll hope my mustaches won't be waxed like his'n! He's in a store, an' I got him to give me a nice cravat, an' he ast me "Was my sisters well?" so I fished out his fotograf, and gave it to him.

It was the one that had "Conseated Fop" writ on the back. The girls had drawed his musttaches out twict as long with a pencil, an' made him smile all



I slid down the bannisters plump into Miss Watson.

acrost his face. He got as red as fire, an' then he skowled at me.

"Who did that, you little rascal?"

"I guess the spirits did it," I said, as 'onest as a owl, an' I went away quick cause he looked as mad as thunder.

The nex plaice I come to was a grocery store, where anuther young man lived. He had red hair an' freckles, but he seemed to think hissself a beauty. I said:

"Hallo, Peters!"

He said:

"The same yourself, Master George. Do you like raisins? Help yourself."

Boys wot has three pretty sisters allers does get treted well, I notiss. I took a big hanful of raisins an' a few peanuts, an' sot on the counter eating 'em, till all at oncest, as if I jest thought of it, I took out his fotograf, an' squinted at it, an' sez:

"I do declare, it looks like you!"

"Let me see it," sez he.

I wouldn't for a long time, then I gave it to him. The girls had made freckles all over it. This was the one they wrote on its back, "He asked me, but I wouldn't have him." They'd painted his hair as red as a rooster's comb. He got quite pale when he seen it clost.

"It's a burning shame," sez I, "for them young ladies to make fun o' their bows."

"Clear out," sez Peters.

I grabbed a nuther bunch o' raisins an' quietly disappeared. I tell you he was rathy!

I give them cards all back fore dinner-time. They were teazin' ma to let 'em give a party nex week wen I got home to dinner. I don't believe one of them young gentlemen will come to it.

A laughable sequel to this will appear next week under the title of "The Party."



SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS.

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

The Cat's Family.

Very naïve or witty was the following:—

During an object lesson on the "cat," the teacher, by way of finding out which of the boys remembered most of his pre-

vious lesson on the subject, asked—

"Well, lads, and what family do you say the cat belongs to?"

And one boy, who had evidently been absent at the former lesson, cried out—

"To the family as owns it, sir!"

Original Definitions.

The master of a school in the East End of London got two remarkable definitions or "meanings" from one of his lads. The school is situate in the very poorest part of a poor district, and most of the children come from neglected or poverty-stricken homes.

The teacher had given the fourth class a number of words and expressions to take down on the left hand side of their slates; and they were to write, as far as they were able, the *meanings* of these words on the opposite, or right hand side.

Amongst the list occurred the words or expressions:

Candid.

Drawn and quartered.

Many of the lads rendered the word "candid" fairly correctly, as *frank*, *truthful*, etc.; but very few gave the proper meaning of the expression "drawn and quartered."

However, one of the lads, with pale face, but with a brave and determined look about him, had boldly tackled both, and rendered them as follows:

Candid: Shuggery, like candid peal.

Drawn and quartered: Drawn from the tap and pered into a quart pot.

The master, very properly, so far from punishing the lad for his ignorance, commended him for his brave attempt at answering the questions, and performing, as well as he could, the task allotted him.

Tennyson's Works.

The pupils at evening schools are often lads who, from some cause or other, have not attended regularly or continuously at the day school, and whose education has proportionately suffered.

One evening a lad of this type presented himself for admission to an evening school in a certain North country manufacturing town. After registering his name, address, etc., the schoolmaster informed him that the pupils were studying, during the forthcoming winter quarter, some easy selections from Tennyson's works.

"Yes, sir," mumbled the lad, vaguely and sheepishly, on getting the information.

"I suppose," said the master, "you don't know much of Tennyson's works, eh?"

"Noo, sir," answered the lad, "I can't say as I do; though I knoo moose o' the factories i' the town, too. Be they steel-smeltin' works, sir, or be they i' the file line?"

The master only prevented himself from laughing by coughing violently; and he straightway led the lad to a seat without asking him any more questions.

What His Father Would Have Done.

The teacher of a school in a remote country village received a very naïve and amusing answer from one of his lads during a reading lesson. The statement was made in the book that "A gentleman who attended the sale gave no less than two hundred pounds for the picture of 'The Bull, or King of the Meadows.'"

"Now," said the master to the lad who had read the extract; "now, Phil Butler, how would your father like to give that sum of money for a picture, eh?"

"Why, sir," responded the lad, the son of a farmer, "father wouldn't ha' given a hundred pence!"

"Ha, ha! You think not?" said the schoolmaster.

"No, sir, I'm sure on it. Why, he'd be glad to sell a real bull and cow—wi' the calf throwed in—for half the money!"

IMPRESSIONS

AND

All That Sort of RotBy **ARCHIE GLENTHORNE****A Bally Bore, and so Forth !**

I MEAN to say, the whole thing's positively awful, don't you know. A frightful bore, and what not. Makes a chappie pretty well exhausted. Takes all the vim and what-do-you-call-it out of a cove.

But there you are. Nipper, the priceless sportsman who steers the Remove, has asked me to get frightfully busy on this job, and all that kind of thing. Wants my impressions for the good old Mag., or something. The whole scheme's perfectly putrid, of course, but what's a chappie to do ?

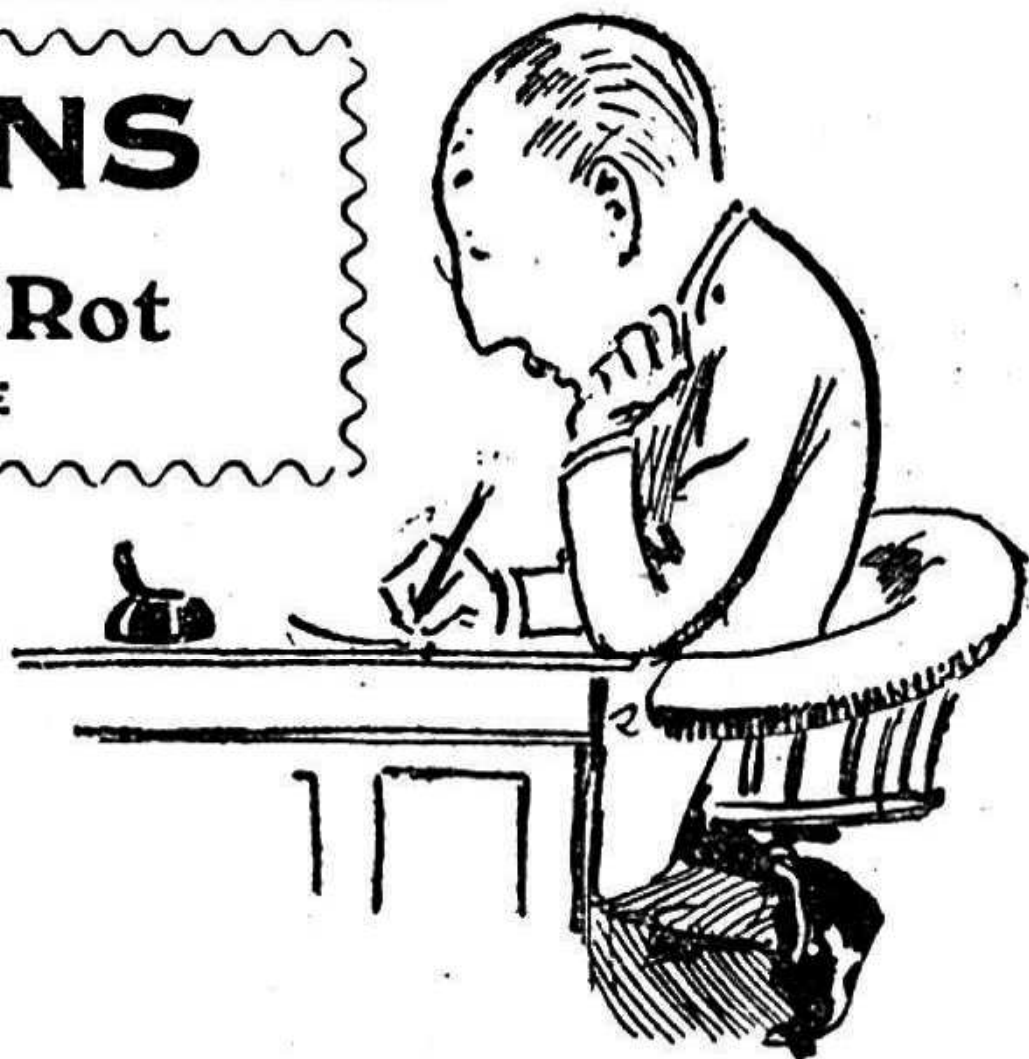
I must say that Nipper is a brainy lad of the first quality. Absolutely. I might even say he's gilt-edged and twenty-two carat, and so forth. One of the real ones, if you know what I mean. The kind of chappie who just sits down and does things. Deucedly clever, and that kind of rot. Absolutely.

Well, to get on with it. To proceed with the biz., as it were. In other words, to bring out the jolly old flow of eloquence. What ho ! When it comes to eloquence, I'm there. Absolutely, as it were, on the spot. I'm the chappie who shoved the bally word in the dictionary.

Well, rather ! And now, how about it ? How about the good old stuff ? St. Frank's, and all that piffle. Of course, so to speak, I may make a perfectly deuced

mess of the whole bag of tricks. In other words, I shall probably fizzle. I shall absolutely trickle away, like the old kitchen tap after the main's been cut off.

It makes it ghastly for a chappie to describe a place before he properly knows it. Absolutely. That's the frightfully beastly trouble. I've been at St. Frank's for a week. or some-



thing, but you can't expect a cove to know the whole bally place in a few bally days.

Still, something's got to be done. There it is. Something's got to be jolly well pushed on the old parchment.

St. Frank's is a school, don't you know. Oh, absolutely ! I mean to say, it's a place where chappies send their sons and heirs and so forth, to have the good old chunks of knowledge rammed home. The kind of place where a frightfully decent set of lads congregate.

Speaking about the lads, as it were, I must say that they're perfectly priceless. Positively it, don't you know. Jolly sporty, and all that kind of rot. Personally, I've shaken down in next to no time. I've become planted, as you might say, in rich soil.

And St. Frank's is just the kind of spot where a fellow can restore the old tissues, and shove yards of learning up into the attic. Of course, a chappie needs a pretty decent attic to start with. The dear old pater has frequently blown off to the effect that my attic is deucedly empty. Somewhat good, what ? Plenty of room for storage, and so forth.

Well, there you are. There, in fact, you absolutely are. Every time, don't you know. St. Frank's reminds me of a jolly old spot you hear about in songs. You know the idea. Roses round the door, and ivy clinging to the walls, and all that kind of stuff.

The Jolly Old Goods !

At St. Frank's there are two houses. Absolutely. I mean to say, there are two chunks of architecture where the chappies congregate. Then, of course, there's another chunk belonging to the old lad



who rules with the iron rod, and so forth. The Head, don't you know—the decent old sportsman who tops the bill.

Of course, the Head's a ripper. Absolutely a ripper, in fact. One of those coves who skate round doing the lording business. All the chappies have to do the kow-towing stunt, and scrape and bow like the deuce. A frightful bore, and all that, but there you are, it's got to be done. One of the jolly old customs of the natives, in a way of speaking.

But St. Frank's is the goods. I don't mind saying that it's absolutely the right kind of material to give 'em. In other words, it's the last word, and all that sort of thing. Personally, I'm having a topping time. I'm having a priceless beano, and Archie is enjoying himself muchly. Absolutely.

Well, that's it, I fancy. That's about the finish, what? Dash it all, a bloke can't keep up this kind of rot for long. Takes away all his energy, and makes him feel like the old girl's dish-cloth after it's been washed out. Quite surprising how this stuff saps away a fellow's vitality.

I suppose it's the old bean that suffers the most. The works, don't you know. The machinery in the tower becomes somewhat clogged. In point of fact, I'm feeling used. Absolutely.

The dear old lad will probably chuck all this piffle into the merry old blaze—that is to say, the place where the kettle does the boiling act. And now that I've finished, I'm dashed if I know what the bally rot's about.

I've got a kind of idea that this is sup-



All the chappies have to do the kow-towing stunt, and scrape and bow like the deuce.

posed to be an impression. That is to say, an outline of what I think of things. I'd be awfully bucked if I could grab the words I want to use. But the bally things won't come when I want them. And I'm absolutely certain that all this stuff is rank rubbish.

As a matter of absolute fact, I'm pipped. To be more precise, I've got it fairly and squarely. That is, the pip, don't you know. I'm feeling as used up as this rotten fountain pen. Frightful bore the way these pens give out just when a chappie wants to do the old writing stunt.

But there it is. If the dashed pen won't write, what's a chappie to do? He can't keep the job on. Absolutely. That is to say, absolutely not! There's nothing doing—positively nix!

And so, dear old lads, I'll do just the same as the old flow—and dry up. Pretty smart that, what? Several claps on the back, and all that sort of thing!

THE EDITOR'S DEN

My Dear Chums,—Not much space has been accorded me this week to indulge in my customary spout. It was a merciful thing that Archie's pen dried up before he could spill any more ink, or I should not be able to tell you about some of the meaty attractions for next week.

The cover drawing will represent an excellent view of St. Frank's from the playing fields, and you can look forward to another thriller by E. O. H., entitled: "The Man With the Green Nose!" The description of "The Party" in the Bad Boy's Diary, I can promise you, will bring the tears of laughter to your eyes. Taken all round, next week's Mag. will be a stunner.—Ever Yours, NIPPER (The Editor):



THE PROBLEMS OF TRACKETT GRIM

The Amazing and Staggering Adventures of the World's greatest Criminal Detective and his Boy Assistant, Splinter.

By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

CUNNING CARL, THE COINER KING.

Scotland Yard Baffled!

TRACKETT GRIM glanced at the card, and nodded.

"Yes, Splinter," he said; "show the gentleman in at once."

The great private detective lay back in his easy chair, and waited for the distinguished visitor to be shown in. Sir Coppem Sharp was the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard.

He appeared almost at once. Sir Coppem was a stiff, straight man with grey hair, and eyes that glued themselves to everything they came in contact with. He was dressed in the usual uniform of a C.I.D. man.

"Forgive my calling, Mr. Grim," said Sir Coppem, as he shook hands. "But Scotland



The man was dressed in rags and had the face of a villain. "Got change for a tanner?" he asked.

Yard is baffled. The whole organisation is in confusion. I want your help."

"I shall be glad to be of service," said Trackett Grim simply. "I gather that you require me to investigate the matter of the counterfeit coins?"

Sir Coppem Sharp staggered.

"But—but how do you know?" he gasped. "This is astounding!"

"Pooh! A mere trifle!" said Trackett Grim. "At this very moment, my dear sir, you are fingering a sixpence which is obviously a dud. An easy deduction. These things are child's play to a man like me!"

The Rotten Sixpences!

"Now I can understand your amazing fame, Mr. Grim!" said Sir Coppem. "Do what you can for us. Track down the arch-miscreant, Cunning Carl. He is the head of the Coiners' Gang, and has baffled all capture."

"I understand that the matter is serious?" asked Trackett Grim.

"Serious!" shouted Sir Coppem. "You fathead! It's vital! The whole country is being flooded with rotten sixpences! The Mint has informed us that there is danger of a national crisis. Do what you can, Mr. Grim, and if you get Cunning Carl by the heels, your reward will be terrific!"

"Have no fear!" said Trackett Grim calmly. "Cunning Carl will not escape me! I'll collar the rotter before I go to bed!"

After the Coiner King!

Ten minutes later Trackett Grim started out. He was wearing a complete disguise, and looked like a plumber or a gasfitter. He had decided not to take Splinter with him, as this mission was of extraordinary importance. Trackett Grim's one difficulty was that he had no clue to work upon, and no means of getting on the track.

But to such a marvellously clever detective, this was as nothing. And Trackett

Grim's masterly powers came into operation at once.

He had hardly got a hundred yard's down Baker's Inn Road before a man stopped in front of him, and leered into his face. The man was dressed in rags, and had the face of a villain. But only Trackett Grim could have told this. He knew every type of face by heart.

"Got change for a tanner, guv'nor?" asked the man.

"Certainly!" said Trackett Grim on the instant.

All his suspicions were aroused, and they were soon confirmed. He gave the man six coppers, and watched keenly as the fellow took out a great canvas bag, and dived his hand into it. The detective caught a glimpse of hundreds of brand new sixpences.

It only took Trackett Grim a mere second to discover the truth.

As soon as the stranger had passed on, Trackett Grim took the sixpence and gazed at it. The coin was dull, but brand new. It was badly made, with rough edges, and was about two sizes too large. Trackett Grim bent it between his fingers with scarcely an effort.

"Lead!" he muttered. "Ah, Cunning Carl, I will get you now!"

He put the dud sixpence into his pocket. Only a man like Trackett Grim could have detected the fact that it was counterfeit. But nothing escaped this marvellous man.

The Coiners' Den!

All day long Trackett Grim followed the stranger.

The man was loaded up with coppers—his ill-gotten booty. And by the time he got to his destination he was nearly exhausted. It was dark now, and the river was hidden in the gloom, but Trackett Grim was not baffled. He easily saw that the man went towards a houseboat which

was lying in a backwater. All the windows were dark, and the place seemed deserted. The man disappeared.

Face to Face!

This was the Coiners' Den! The place was like a furnace. Molten lead lay everywhere. Furnaces were roaring, and several men were working at the great moulds, stripped to the waist.

"Hands up!" roared Trackett Grim. "You are my prisoners!"

"Curse you!" snarled Cunning Carl fiercely.

The man was a big brute, and he glared at Trackett Grim with all the ferocity of a beast. He had a great black moustache and coarse hair, and he whirled up a ladle full of molten lead.

With a snarl, he hurled this at Trackett Grim. The detective easily dodged, and the molten lead struck the floor and burst into flame. The houseboat was on fire!

Surrounded by Fearful Odds!

And then came the most thrilling moment. Cunning Carl made a dash for liberty, and reached the roof. But Trackett Grim was close behind. And there, on the roof, they struggled, slipping, sliding, and fighting like a couple of dogs. One, indeed, was a dog—a dirty dog!

But Trackett Grim was ready.

At the crucial moment he leapt upwards, soaring high. Cunning Carl fell back, to die a terrible death in the icy water, which was boiling hot from the effects of the fire.

And Trackett Grim, alighting on the bridge, was deftly caught by Splinter, his faithful young assistant.

Cunning Carl was burnt to death, but the rest of his gang fell into the hands of the police. And there were no more dud sixpences flooding the country. Once again Trackett Grim had achieved a marvellous triumph.



Cunning Carl fell back to die a terrible death in the icy water, which was boiling hot from the effects of the fire.

(Continued from page 16.)

do, Glenthorne, is to get back into this lower cavern."

"Oh, absolutely, if you say so!" agreed Archie. "But it appears rather extraord., what? I've just performed the old rescue, and you suggest diving down again——"

"Under the circumstances, Glenthorne, I think it will be better," said Nelson Lee. "You must remember that we came here to search for Nipper and three other boys, and so far we have seen no sign of them. By the way, I haven't ascertained how it is that you are down in this peculiar place."

"The idea, so to speak, is perfectly prepos.," said Archie. "These chappies sprang at me, you know. Positively took me off the old guard. They hurled a sack over my bean and there you are! Slow suffocation, and what not! I'll just explain the cires., old lad."

"I think we can wait for your explanation until afterwards," said Nelson Lee. "There's no time to be lost just now, Glenthorne. The enemy may return at any moment, and I am determined to lay those rascals by the heels."

"A sound scheme!" said Archie, nodding.

"So we will go down the shaft at once."

Nelson Lee pointed, and Archie commenced the descent. Lee pulled the slab over with some little difficulty, but when he set it in position he jammed the chisel in such a way that it would be comparatively easy, from underneath, to dislodge the slab just whenever he pleased.

The detective was anxious to have a further look round the cavern—he had been examining it with much interest when Archie had called. It would be possible, of course, to make a dash for freedom at once.

But Hudson & Co. would almost certainly be met in the narrow tunnel—and a fight in such confined quarters would be decidedly unwelcome. And Hudson was armed, and in his desperation he might do serious damage.

It was far better, in every way, to remain down in the lower cavern. Hudson would think that his prisoners were helpless. And it was quite possible, on the other hand, that the three men had fled for good. In that case, there was no hurry whatever.

Archie found himself surrounded as soon as he walked into the cavern. Pitt and Church and McClure regarded him wonderingly.

"Well, this is about the limit!" said Church. "How the dickens did you get here, Archie? We saw you, of course, but we didn't have time to ask any questions then. How did it happen?"

"Never mind that!" said Pitt. "Archie's a good 'un—he hoodwinked those rotters, and opened up our prison. It ought to be easy enough for us to escape now. But I'm anxious about Nipper and those other fellows."

"Frightfully beastly!" said Archie. "The dear chappies seem to have done the old vanishing act. What's to be done? What, in other words, is the precise programme? How do we stand?"

"I'm blessed if I know!" said McClure

"Everything seems to be upside down. We're in the rummiest place a chap could think of, we've had a scrap with three desperate rotters, and it seems that we're only just starting the trouble. Goodness knows what's going to happen next!"

Archie beamed round.

"Well, we're all happy and bright, what?" he asked. "Everything's going quite top-pingly, as you might say. I've got an idea I shall wake up soon, and I shall find Phipps waiting beside the old cot with the welcome brew! The jolly old cup of tea, don't you know! This can't be really happening, dear lads! It's too frightfully prepos., and all that."

"It seems more like a nightmare!" said Pitt. "Plenty of excitement and mystery, but we don't seem to get anywhere. The main thing is to find Nipper and those other chaps. They seem to have evaporated into thin air!"

The juniors watched Nelson Lee for a few moments. The detective was looking round searchingly, as though quite oblivious to the fact that the boys were present. He was giving his whole attention to the problem which had presented itself.

And he could detect, quite plainly, by glancing at the door, that this cavern had been very recently occupied. And not merely by men, but by boys, too. To an expert like Lee, the signs were as plain as an open letter.

"Do you think Nipper and Handforth and the two other chaps have been down here, sir?" asked Pitt, as Lee paused in front of one of the walls. "There doesn't seem to be any sign——"

"On the contrary, Pitt, there are a great number of signs," put in Lee. "Furthermore I am quite certain that Nipper and his chums have been here. And I have a strong suspicion that they did not leave."

"You mean they came down, but didn't go up again?"

Reginald Pitt looked round the gloomy cavern.

"They must be pretty good at hiding, then, sir," he remarked.

"Yes, undoubtedly," said Lee with a smile. "There must be some other exit to this cavern, Pitt. That is the only possible solution to the matter. If you don't mind holding this light my boy, I will be able to get on better. Thank you—that's splendid!"

Pitt was only too ready to help, and he held the electric torch while Nelson Lee went round the rough rock walls inch by inch. But before the detective had gone far, he came to a halt.

The wall, just at this part, was rougher, and a big boulder seemed to stand out from all the others. It weighed several tons, and was obviously altogether too substantial to be shifted.

"There's nothing here, sir," said Pitt.

"I'm not sure, my boy. This spot looks far more promising than the others, at all events," said Nelson Lee. "Ah! This seems to be rather significant! Perhaps we shall be able to manage—— Dear me! Look at this, Pitt! What do you make of it?"

There, on the uneven floor, a footprint could be plainly seen. It seemed to lead right into the rock-wall, for it was only an inch from it.

"Don't you understand?" asked Nelson Lee keenly. "This footprint was made by somebody walking in his full stride, which seems to imply that the walker went straight into the wall. There's an opening here, boys—I'm certain of it!"

"My hat!"

"But how can we find it, sir?"

"I mean to say, somewhat exciting, and all that!" remarked Archie. "The old miser's cavern, and that kind of rot! Ghosts, and so forth! Makes a chappy feel deucedly creepy."

They didn't take much notice of Archie, but let him run on. And Nelson Lee exerted all his pressure upon the massive boulder of rock. He had expected it to shift slightly, but was hardly prepared for the decided movement which followed. The rock fairly rolled back, as though on a hinge.

And, while this was going on, I was anxious and curious. With my chums, I crouched in that little cave, with the great stone boulder shutting us off completely from the main cavern. And, as I have already said, the rock was so thick and heavy that we could not hear any sounds through it—except for an occasional murmur, which was quite unintelligible.

We had been squatting there in the dark for what seemed to be hours and hours. Our nerves were on the stretch, and we badly

wanted to know what was taking place. To open the cave, however, would be fatal. If Hudson and Niggs and Croke were on the alert, we should thus play right into their hands.

But the matter was taken up by somebody else.

While we were still waiting, the rock boulder began to move. We saw it distinctly, for I had my torch going. I sprang up, rigid and alert.

"Look out!" I hissed. "We've got to fight for it, now!"

"Oh, good!" said Handforth. "I've been waiting for this! I'm going to smash those rotters to smithereens! I'm going to wipe 'em up—"

"Begad, the exit is open now!" said Sir Montie, quickly.

"Yes, and we're ready!" I shouted. "Come on, my sons! St. Frank's for ever! We'll show these rotters—. Why, what—? Guv'nor!" I gasped blankly.

For, through the opening in the rock-wall, I found myself face to face with Nelson Lee. This was a surprise which I had not been hoping for. I rushed at the guv'nor, and grabbed him.

"How did you manage it, sir?" I panted.

There was confusion in a moment. Church and McClure rushed in, and seized Handforth, and proceeded to do a cake-walk on the spot.

"Hurrah!" roared Church. "Good old Handy! We thought you were lost!"

(Continued on next page.)

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"Jolly glad to see you again!" grinned McClure.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I'm glad to see you chaps. No need to make all this fuss, though! We've been having the dickens of a time!"

"Rather!" said Church. "You must have been fighting, I suppose?"

Handforth frowned.

"There ought to have been some fighting," he growled. "But that ass of a Nipper wouldn't budge! If I had been in command, there'd have been a very different story to tell!"

"Oh, Nipper's a good chap," said Church. "After all, Handy, his judgment's better than yours——"

Biff!

"Yaroooooh!" howled Church, wildly.

"That's just to start with!" roared Handforth. "Better judgment than mine! Why, you rotter, if you say that again, I'll biff you sideways! You needn't think I'm standing any rot!"

Church groaned.

"You rotter!" he muttered. "I've been worrying about you like the dickens, and fearing that all sorts of things had happened. And all you can do is to slosh me in the nose as soon as we find you!"

"Don't be a dotty lunatic!" said Handforth, witheringly. "I'm just about fed up with all this jaw about Nipper's judgment! I could have captured those scoundrels, and found the treasure, and everything else by this time. As a matter of fact, I have found the treasure."

Handforth had been fairly gasping for a chance to punch something, and the sight of Church and McClure was a sheer joy to him. He had punched them so often that he had almost come to regard them as a couple of gymnasium requisites.

"What's the trouble, boys?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Oh, nothing, sir," said Handforth. "Church was a bit funny, that's all. Jolly glad to see you, sir!"

"I am far more glad to see you, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "Why didn't you indicate your presence sooner, boys?"

"Why, we couldn't hear a thing through that rock," I said. "We simply had to wait—and when the rock started moving we thought that we were in for a brush with the enemy. Well, I'm blessed! Archie's here! Archie, of all people! Surprises will never cease!"

We had passed out into the main cavern, and were now all in a group, with Nelson Lee's electric torch casting a powerful light over the whole scene. We were all looking pleased.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "I'm here, as it were. Well, rather! Positively on the old spot! I mean to say, we've been doing the old worrying stuff over you laddies!"

"Well, everything's worked out all right," I said. "There's no time to ask questions now, or to get any explanations. Look here, guv'nor, I suppose you know that those three rotters are up to some trickery?"

"Yes, I am well aware of that, Nipper," said Nelson Lee.

"Why, that beast Hudson fired his revolver off and nearly killed Pitt!" said Church. "He's got a graze on the arm—but the bullet might easily have gone through his heart."

I looked serious.

"Phew!" I whistled. "I didn't think they were as desperate as all that! But, still, they're after a tremendous fortune. It's not altogether surprising that they should be desperate. They're on a big game!"

"Fortune?" repeated Pitt. "Where?"

"In this cave," I replied. "You see, all the gold was in here at first, but Handforth and Montie and Tommy and I shifted it, so that the enemy would be diddled."

"Can't be much of a fortune, if you shifted it like that!" said Church.

"Come and look here," I exclaimed.

Nelson Lee flashed his light into the cave, and then uttered an exclamation. The beam of light revealed the piled-up stack of solid gold ingots. There seemed to be a great many more now, for they were lying haphazard in a great heap.

"Good gracious!" said the guv'nor. "This is amazing!"

"There must be hundreds of thousands of pounds here, sir," I said eagerly. "Well over half-a-million, anyway. I reckon that old Willard must have hoarded it up in the form of gold coins, and then melted it down."

Nelson Lee flashed his light over the furnaces, and the strange-looking machine, and the big bottles of chemicals.

Willard did not need such furnaces as these to melt down such a metal as gold," he said. "Neither did he require chemicals. This cavern is exceedingly interesting, Nipper. The whole affair is more mysterious than you imagine. I am even doubtful if these ingots are made of real gold."

"Why, they're solid—pure, twenty-two carat!" I said. "I'll fetch you one, sir!"

I did so, and Lee examined it closely.

"Upon my word, Nipper, I believe you're right!" he said at length. "This is certainly pure gold. The story of Willard's treasure, then, is absolutely true in every detail. This is splendid. I am not at all surprised that Hudson should have shown such ferocity. Gold makes any man excited."

And then a lot of explanations followed. I had to tell Nelson Lee how it was that we had come down into the cavern, and, how the arrival of Niggs & Co. had prevented our escape. In fact, I told everything.

Then Archie made an attempt to describe his own adventures. But these were somewhat vague. We gathered, however, that he had been kidnapped in mistake for somebody else. Archie made no mention whatever of Enoch Snipe. The genial ass was not the kind of fellow to get another chap into trouble.

And while we were, down in the cavern, clearing all these points up, the final events in this little drama were being prepared for elsewhere. And Enoch Snipe and John Martin were closely concerned.



Hudson glared at Archie with the ferocity of a wild animal.

"We've been tricked!" he thundered.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie mildly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORM TURNS.



DOWN in that cavern it really seemed to us that the time was somewhere in the small hours of the morning. But, actually, it was hardly yet eleven o'clock. The events had been happening so quickly that we lost all count of the hours.

Enoch Snipe, having succeeded in planting Archie Glenthorne upon Hudson & Co., proceeded with the other part of his plan. The Worm of the Remove was as cunning as a fox, and he had already decided upon his course of action.

At that time, of course, it was not very much after nine, and Snipe knew that time was limited. It would soon be bed-time for the Remove. Indeed, he realised that he would have some difficulty in getting in in time.

So he abandoned the project.

That is to say, he abandoned the idea of going to bed with the rest of the Remove fellows. He preferred to carry out his scheme, and the first part of it consisted of finding John Martin.

The latter was on Willard's Island. Martin was a Cadet, and he was naturally with all the other juniors in camp. Snipe accordingly turned his footsteps in the direction of the island.

He was not to get ahead with his scheme without trouble.

More than anything else, he wanted to see Martin in private. It would never do to talk to him with half a dozen other juniors looking on and listening. The problem was, how to get Martin alone.

Snipe was assisted somewhat by the fact that the camp was in a state of disorder. With so many of the Cadets away, all the ordinary routine was abandoned, and the juniors on the island did not think of turning in at the usual time.

There were seven Cadets absent, including myself, and quite a number of the others were passing to and fro between the island and the school. And there was an air of subdued excitement throughout the whole camp.

Snipe, when he arrived on the bank of the river, was delighted to find that a boat was tucked away in the reeds. Nobody seemed to be watching, and the Worm seized his opportunity without hesitating.

He pushed the boat off, jumped in, and then clumsily rowed across to the island. Snipe was no athlete. He was pretty well hopeless at all kinds of sport, and he knew as much about rowing as he knew about honesty.

Consequently, he caused quite a little commotion with the oars, and there was not much chance of him getting across to the camp in secret, although he was making for a part of the island which was apparently deserted.

The evening was windy and very dark, but in spite of this, Snipe was spotted by several cadets just before he reached the half-way mark. The fellows who saw him were Jack Grey, Goodwin, Somerton, and De Valerie.

They had been watching the river-bank in the hope of seeing some sign of the missing juniors' return, and they became aware of the fact that a small boat was floundering across in a most unusual way.

"I wonder who the dickens it can be?" said De Valerie. "Not one of our chaps, anyway. We wouldn't own a fellow who made a mess of it like that. How about giving him a hail?"

"No, wait until he lands," said Grey softly. "I don't suppose he's spotted us against these trees, and he may think he's alone. We'll catch him by surprise. It might be a tramp, or somebody like that—you never know—prowling about to see what he can pick up."

"By Jingo, that's possible!" agreed De Valerie. "We'll wait."

"Ay, lad, it's the best," agreed Dick Goodwin. "If it's a tramp, we'll send him about his business. By gum, we don't want those fellows about the camp!"

And so the Cadets waited until the boat grounded. They were only a little distance off, and they saw the figure of Enoch Snipe step out, and then hesitate for a little while on the bank.

Snipe was thinking. And as he stood there, adopting his usual cringing attitude, he rubbed his hands together. Even in the gloom this characteristic little action could dimly be seen.

"Why, it's the Worm!" whispered Somerton. "It's Snipe!"

"What the dickens is that cad doing here?"

demanding Grey. "It's bed-time, and he ought to be tucked in by now. Come on, we'll investigate."

They hurried forward, and surrounded Snipe before he could dodge. He cringed more than ever before them.

"Please, I—I'm not doing any harm!" he whined. "Don't—don't do anything nasty with me! I—I only came——"

"Don't snivel," said Grey contemptuously. "What did you come for? And you needn't dodge away like that, we're not going to eat you."

"I—I want to have a talk with Martin, if—if you don't mind," said Snipe boldly, realising that secrecy was no longer possible. "Can—you tell me where he is, please?"

"Martin is somewhere near the camp-fire," replied Grey. "So you've come across to see him between nine and ten at night? Well, it's not my business, and I'm not going to ask you any questions; but I don't think Martin will be particularly overjoyed to see you."

"Oh, thank you!" said Snipe eagerly.

He hurried off as quickly as possible; for he feared that the others would not hesitate to ply him with questions. And he was just approaching the camp-fire when he noticed the tall, well set-up figure of John Martin coming out of the main camp, which was situated in the curious old building in the centre of the island. Snipe ran up.

"Can—can I speak to you, please?" he asked, halting in front of John. "I—I don't object to talking to you, Martin."

"But I object talking to you," said John shortly.

"Oh, I mean, because you're a—a charity fellow. I—I mean——" Snipe paused, and backed away slightly. "It's all right, Martin. I want to be friends with you. It doesn't matter about social equality, does it? I don't mind calling myself your friend at all."

John looked at the Worm curiously. When Martin had first come to the school, brought by the Head, he had met with a certain amount of opposition. All the snobs in the Ancient House had openly sneered at him, and Enoch Snipe had been the bitterest and most insulting of all. It was rather surprising that he should change his tone in this unexpected manner.

John was a sturdy youngster, and just recently he had been getting on well. The Remove had accepted him as one of themselves, and the "poor boy" was finding that the majority of the fellows were true blue.

"What's the idea of this?" he asked bluntly. "Want to borrow something? Because if you do, there's nothing doing. I'm not a chap with piles of money."

"I—I know that," interrupted Snipe. "Of course, you're poor, aren't you—terribly poor? You're the poorest boy in the whole school. That's the truth, isn't it?"

"What are you getting at?" asked John grimly. "It's not my way to do anything underhand, Snipe, so I warn you straight off, that unless you're a bit different in your tone, I'll knock you down!"

Snipe cringed away.

"I've got something to tell you," he whispered mysteriously. "Something that will make you shout with joy. But—but I cannot tell you here. We must be alone, Martin. Please come somewhere quiet."

"No," said John. "You can clear off. I don't like you."

"But—oh, but you must come!" insisted Snipe urgently. "It's very, very important. You don't know how important, Martin. It concerns you and your whole future. Please don't think I'm trying to do anything nasty."

"Considering that you hardly ever do anything else, I've got some excuse if I do think it," said Martin. "All right, let's hear this frightfully important news. We'll go over among these trees, no danger of being disturbed here."

They left the clear space where they were standing, and penetrated into the thick trees which grew near by.

"Now, out with it," said Martin. "I'll give you two minutes."

"I think you're very mean," said Snipe, in an injured tone. "I'm doing everything I can for your good, Martin. You're very poor, aren't you? I—I mean, you're only at St. Frank's because of Dr. Stafford's kindness?"

"Stop that talk!" snapped John curtly. "I'll stand none of it!"

"But—but it's the truth," insisted Snipe. "And I can make you rich, Martin! In fact, you are rich—as rich as a millionaire! There's a tremendous treasure which belongs absolutely to you."

"What piffle is this?" asked John curiously.

"It—it's not piffle," went on Snipe. "And there's something else. Your name isn't Martin—it's Willard. There! What do you think of that? You're the only son of old John Willard, who used to own this island."

"You funny idiot!" said John, grinning. "I'm blessed if I know what's the matter with you, Snipe, coming here and talking all this ridiculous rubbish. You must have gone out of your mind."

"That's what you think, but I haven't!" exclaimed Snipe tensely. "I can prove all this—I can, I tell you. Your name is Willard, and you're rich. There's a treasure right down in an old tunnel. It's all gold—real gold! And it's worth nearly a million pounds!"

"When did you dream this?" asked John amusedly.

"I didn't dream it, I didn't!" replied Snipe, rubbing his hands together, and speaking in a voice which quivered with excitement. "Don't you understand, Martin? What about Nipper? What about the others? They're all away—looking for this treasure. And it's been found, too. Why, those two men, Niggs and Croke, have been trying to get hold of the gold. It's all plain, you must see it! And all this money is yours, because you're Mr. Willard's son!"

For the first time John looked serious. Snipe was so absolutely tense—so utterly in earnest. And, after all, there was something in what he said. John knew that Niggs and Croke had been prowling about, and he had often wondered why they were so persistent.

Furthermore, there was a mystery about his own parentage. For years he had suspected that his name was not really Martin. Was it possible, by some inconceivable chance, that Snipe was telling the truth? John Martin's heart gave a little jump, but he forced himself to remain calm.

"Oh, it's ridiculous!" he growled. "Don't be an idiot, Snipe!"

"Ah, but you're beginning to realise that I'm right, aren't you?" asked Snipe eagerly. "I can prove it, too! I can show you all this gold. How much will you give me if I do? How much money will you let me have for telling you this?"

John Martin grinned.

"Oh, now we're getting at it," he said. "So that's the wheeze? You want a share, eh?"

"Well, it's fair enough, isn't it?" whined the Worm. "I've told you all about it, and you ought to recognise it. You'll give me a share, eh? You will, won't you?"

"If there's any treasure, I'll give you a share all right," said Martin agreeably. "But the whole thing's impossible, so we might as well change the conversation."

"How much will you give me?" asked Snipe eagerly.

"Oh, about half-a-crown," laughed John. "That'll be a good proportion; I should think."

"Half-a-crown!" said Snipe shrilly. "But it's worth millions—or—or, at least, nearly a million! But I know you don't believe me—that's the trouble. I'll prove that I'm right. If you'll come with me, I'll show you this gold."

"Oh, have you got it hidden away somewhere?" asked John.

"No, it's all packed away down in an underground cavern," said Snipe. "You'll come, won't you? You must come, Martin! And when you see all the gold, perhaps you'll agree to give me a fair share."

At first John Martin would hear nothing of it. He refused to budge. But Snipe was so persistent that in the end John consented to walk to the upper end of the island—just to make sure that a tunnel really existed.

Snipe knew that once John saw the tunnel he would go into it. And they walked through the trees quickly, leaving the camp far behind. Willard's Island was not very wide, but of considerable length, narrowing down at each end.

And they had hardly reached the place where the tunnel entrance existed, when a misfortune overtook them. Snipe was very vague in his own knowledge. By eavesdropping, he knew that the treasure existed, and that it was contained down in a cavern. He also knew the

(Continued on next page.)

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approximate whereabouts of the tunnel. He knew he would have to leave much to chance.

The two juniors were getting round some rough pieces of rock when, without warning, three dim figures loomed up, and fell upon them. Snipe, of course, collapsed on the spot. There was no fight in him. Mr. Ben Croke had no difficulty in holding him down, and in keeping him quiet.

But Hudson and Captain Niggs had rather more trouble with John Martin. The youngster fought desperately. But he could not hope to overpower the two rough, strong men. He was soon brought down and silenced.

Hudson peered gloatingly into his face. "It's the kid—Martin himself!" he exclaimed. "Thunder! This is a bit of luck! And the other one's that infernal rat who tricked us. We'll take the pair down into that cavern."

"Wot, with all them others?" asked Niggs.

"Why not?" said Hudson. "Might as well do the thing properly now. And two more won't make any difference. If it wasn't for that young dude fellow I wouldn't worry. But he seems to have gone."

"It's my belief the young swab's down in that stone place all the time," said Niggs. "The boat's still 'ere, and he couldn't 'ave swum ashore. The best thing we can do is to go back straight off."

And Hudson & Co. forcing their two prisoners between them, walked towards the tunnel entrance.

Incidentally, they walked towards trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.



CAPTAIN NIGGS had his knuckles firmly rammed into the back of John's neck, and with his fingers he clutched the boy's coat-collar. The slightest attempt on John's part to wriggle

free resulted in the knuckles ramming harder into his neck.

And in this way he was forced down the narrow tunnel until the steep stone-steps were reached. Enoch Snipe, of course, was a very simple prisoner to deal with. He gave no trouble.

In vain he whined and panted for mercy.

"It's not fair," he moaned, as Mr. Croke led him along. "After all I've done to help you—"

"Shet that, ye young swab!" growled Mr. Croke. "Bust my hide, you're nothin' but a whelp! You git four or five quid to do a job, an' plays a dirty blinkin' trick! We'll show yer!"

"It—it was a mistake," faltered Snipe.

"Well, there won't be no mistake this 'ere time," said Mr. Croke. "You've done it for yerself, my lad—fair done it!"

Snipe continued to groan and whimper, but it made no difference. He was altogether too scared to make any attempt to get away. And he was filled with bitter disappointment, and malevolent rage against his captors.

But the Worm was beaten. His whole scheme had fallen to pieces, and he could do nothing. He was forced along the tunnel. Then the little procession made its way down the dark steps.

All was silent and quiet. Hudson was quite confident in his belief that Nelson Lee and all the others were trapped down in the old cavern. And he had an idea that Archie was still lurking about somewhere.

Hudson decided to make a search for Archie as soon as these two new captives were put safely away.

In that strange secret chamber under the stairs everything was just the same as before. But there was no sign of Archie. The stone slab remained in its old position.

"Now, we'll soon have these young brats down!" exclaimed Hudson. "Then we can have a bit of breathing space. By thunder! We've been running about the whole confounded evening! And everything's gone wrong—right from the start! Hang those boys!"

Hudson succeeded in forcing up the stone. Then, laying it aside, he looked round.

"Now then, young gents," he said mockingly. "Down you go—one at a time. And you'd better not try any tricks."

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Martin steadily.

"Never you mind—obey my orders."

"Before I go down into that hole, I want to know where it leads to!" said John. "I'm not going to step into a death-trap just because you order me to! What is there down in that hole?"

"They're—they're trying to kill us!" screamed Snipe wildly.

"You blamed young fools!" snapped Niggs. "We won't hurt you!"

"There's nothing down there to hurt a fly," exclaimed Hudson. "We've already got about half a dozen prisoners there, so you needn't be afraid. Now then, are you going willingly, or shall we chuck you down? Better be quick in deciding, my beauties!"

He flashed his light down the shaft, and John Martin could see the iron ladder. And he heard voices coming up from the depths—voices that he recognised. He was satisfied that everything was safe. So he walked forward, and commenced the descent.

Snipe had to be forced into it. The boy was fairly scared out of his wits, and was so terrified that he hardly knew what he was doing.

But, at last, he scrambled down the iron ladder. Mr. Hudson stood over the shaft, and uttered an oath.

"Scared young whelps!" he exclaimed. "Got no more pluck than a mouse! That youngster with the red eyes fair makes me sick. Well, they're safe down there, and now we'll have a look for that other kid."

"Not just now, Mr. Hudson," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Be very quick and put your hands above your head. Quickly, I say!"

Hudson swung round, gasping.

And there just inside the entrance, stood Nelson Lee. The famous detective had Hudson well covered by a small, but service-

able revolver. And next to him stood another figure with a revolver; It was me. I was there all right. Handforth and one or two others hovered in the background.

"What's this?" snarled Hudson hoarsely. "Why, you——"

"Don't move!" snapped Lee. "I shall not hesitate to fire if you get your own gun out!"

Hudson's hands rose over his head. There was something in Nelson Lee's tone which absolutely commanded obedience. Hudson's face was livid with rage, and his eyes glittered with helpless hatred.

"How—how did you get out of that cavern?" he demanded. "You durned skunk! Interfering all the time——"

"I fancy I have been justified in interfering, Mr. Hudson!" said Nelson Lee. "Nipper, go forward and relieve that man of his weapon. We don't want any more random shooting in a confined space of this kind."

I walked forward with alacrity. It gave me enormous pleasure to see the enemy so completely flabbergasted. They had not been expecting anything of this nature—and the shock, therefore, had been all the greater.

Nelson Lee had been quite convinced that Hudson and his men would return. And the gov'nor had made preparations. These were quite simple, and had only taken a few minutes.

Three or four of us had forced up the stone slab, and then we had gone out into the passage, and along for a few yards until we reached a square stone chamber. This place had been discovered long since, but we had never regarded it as of much importance.

We had been right in this, as events turned out. But the stone apartment came in very handy now. For we were able to conceal ourselves there until the enemy had entered the secret cavity.

And then of course Nelson Lee had simply walked up and taken them in the rear. But he had delayed any action until Martin and Snipe were safely out of the way. Lee didn't want any casualties.

Hudson fairly glowered at me as I approached him.

"Don't lay your hands on me!" he muttered tensely.

"Better take it quietly, old son," I said. "It's no good getting into a rage like that. It won't do you any good. I think I'll have your gun, if you don't mind. It's of no use to you——"

Crash!

Hudson, utterly reckless with fury, suddenly landed out with all his strength. I was quite unprepared for the attack. If I had been six inches nearer, that tremendous drive would have knocked me clean out. As it was, most of the force was spent before Hudson's fist reached me.

But the blow was quite heavy enough for my liking. I staggered back with a roar of rage and pain. And the next moment the chamber was one mass of wriggling, struggling figures.

Niggs and Croke took the cue from their leader, and commenced fighting with all their strength. Lee did not fire. As Hudson had

guessed, the detective had only been bluffing. But the bluff had succeeded, nevertheless.

For Hudson & Co. were now fighting a losing battle. They had utterly no chance of winning. Nelson Lee was in fine form, and pitching his revolver into his pocket he sailed in with gusto.

He took on Hudson, and the next second the pair were fighting madly. Hudson was beside himself with rage. He kicked, scratched, and even attempted to bite. But Nelson Lee had been looking for such methods, and he was ready. Deadly calm, he met every attempt at fouling with a powerful, well-directed blow. Hudson was soon staggering drunkenly, and at last he went down.

He had just come rushing in, with an attempt to kick at Nelson Lee's shins. Quick as a flash the detective side-stepped, and brought his right with appalling force up under Hudson's chin.

Thud!

The man went down with a dull, sickening crash. He lay still, moaning slightly. He was whacked to the wide. And in the meantime Handforth had not been exactly idle.

At last his desire was attainable. He had been waiting for a dust-up like this, and now he had got it. He selected Captain Niggs, and quite careless of the odds, hurled himself to the attack.

Niggs expected to deal with Handforth with one blow. But Edward Oswald's fists were like battering rams. One caught the captain in the chest, and another thudded upon his chin, and then he received a simply fearful swipe on the nose. He roared and staggered.

Handforth followed up his advantage, and ably assisted by Pitt, he succeeded in beating Captain Niggs to the floor. At the same moment I settled with Mr. Croke. He wasn't much of a man to look at, but he was all wiriness and sinew. He could stand any amount of punishment. He gave me several nasty blows before I got the better of him.

Church and McClure were butting in now and again. And so, between the lot of us we got the three scoundrels in such a state that there wasn't an atom of fight left in the three of them.

All this time Sir Montie had been standing well in the rear, holding Nelson Lee's electric torch, and casting a bright light on the whole scene. It was not exactly a big part to play, but quite important. Without the assistance of that light, steadily held, we might not have won.

But everything was all serene. At last Hudson and Niggs and Croke were beaten. They had been caught red-handed at their villainy, and there was no prospect of them getting away.

Nelson Lee, in fact, bound them up hand and foot, before they could recover themselves. And in this state they were propped up against the wall, looking sullen, bruised, and disconsolate.

"Well, this is about the finish of it all," I said. "To-morrow the whole truth will come out, and then there'll be a bit of excitement at the school. Won't the chaps be bowled over when they hear all about it?"

"Rather!" said Handforth. "Of course,

they'll soon get over their surprise when they know that I did everything. They expect that kind of thing from me. I don't want to boast, but I think you'll all admit that I've done practically everything to-night."

"Good old Handy!" I chuckled. "As practical as a chap can be—but always subject to delusions!"

CHAPTER IX.

A NAME AND A FORTUNE.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE lolled back in his easy chair, and placed his feet upon the fender.

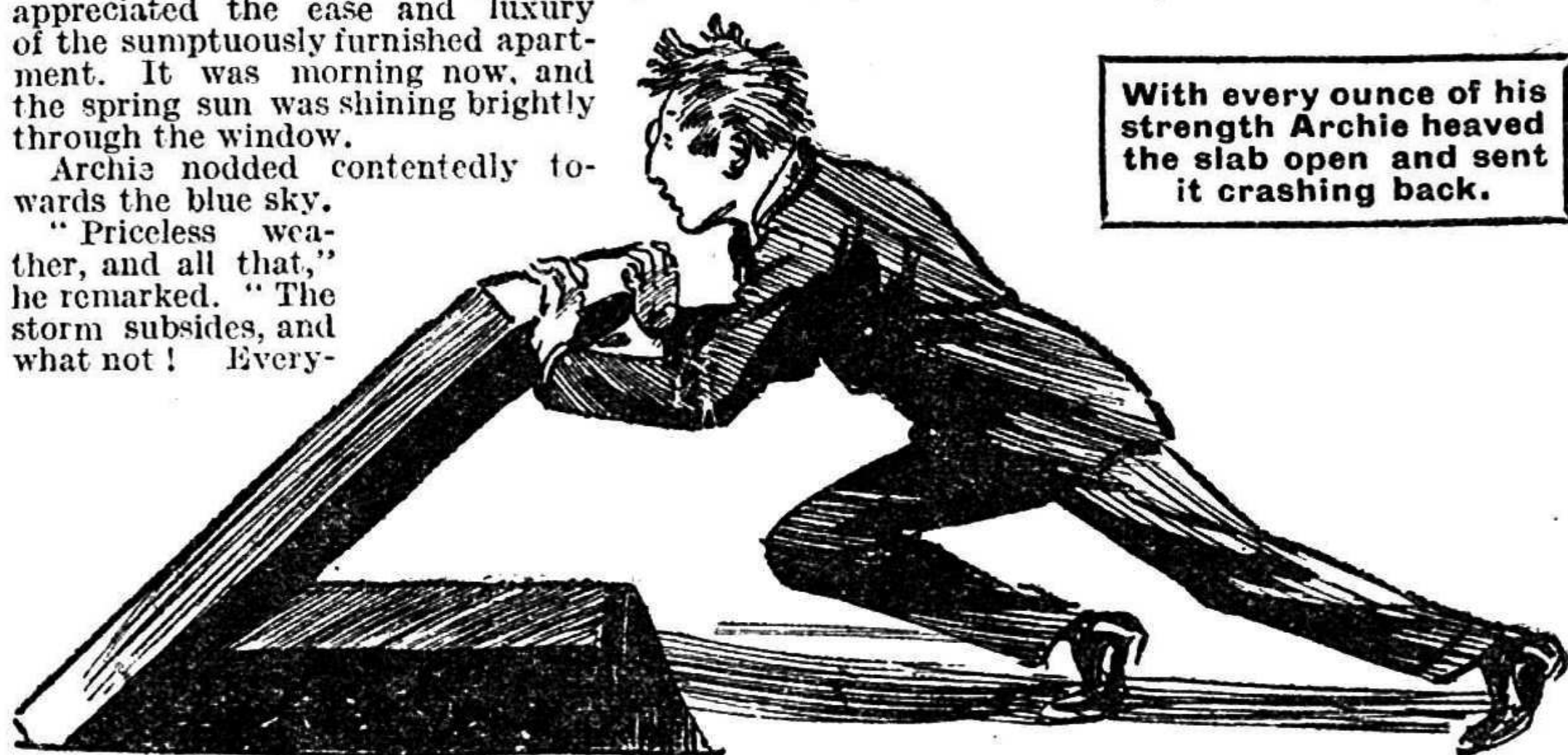
"I mean to say, distinctly the stuff to give them!" he observed languidly. "Precisely

the material, don't you know! Absolutely!"

Archie was back in Study No. 13, and he appreciated the ease and luxury of the sumptuously furnished apartment. It was morning now, and the spring sun was shining brightly through the window.

Archie nodded contentedly towards the blue sky.

"Priceless weather, and all that," he remarked. "The storm subsides, and what not! Every-



With every ounce of his strength Archie heaved the slab open and sent it crashing back.

thing, in fact, is deucedly ripping. What-ho! What-ho! So here we are. On the spot, what?"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "Good morning, sir."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "How goes it, laddie? What about the merry old cup of tea? And why in the name of dashed dickens didn't you call me early, mother dear?"

"I am sorry, sir, but things were somewhat upset," replied Phipps. "I trust that you slept well, sir?"

"Well, rather!" said Archie. "Top's not in it, and so forth! Yards of the good old dreamless! Well, Phipps, I think we can congratulate ourselves, what? We've been doing great things, old tulip! Absolutely!"

"So I understand, sir."

Phipps had glided noiselessly into the study, and now he stood respectfully at attention. Phipps was Archie's man—his valet and butler, and everything else rolled into one.

In addition Phipps was also performing

duties in the capacity of butler to Dr. Stafford, the Head. He looked after Archie in his spare time. It was the standing mystery in the Ancient House how Phipps found enough time to do everything. But he never seemed in a hurry, and yet performed wonders. Phipps was certainly a bit of a marvel.

Of course it was utterly opposed to all precedent for a junior schoolboy to have a man to wait upon him. But Archie was so different—so completely helpless—that nobody minded. He was allowed privileges which no other fellow would have thought of asking for.

"Yes, Phipps, great things!" repeated Archie. "I mean to say, the dear old local rags will be bubbling over with extra print, as it were. A sensation in the district, and what not! We shine, Phipps—we positively glitter, don't you know! To be exact, gaze upon the hero!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps, unmoved. "I am delighted that you distinguished yourself, sir. I have heard certain rumours to the effect

that a great deal of gold has been discovered. Is this a fact, sir, or merely an idle piece of gossip?"

"Oh, fact—absolutely!" replied Archie. "Gold by the bushel. I mean to say, as it were, riches lying about like logs of wood! I've got a few chunks of bullion on my own account, Phipps, but this stuff fairly breaks records. Absolutely smashes them up!"

"So I believe, sir."

"And the excitement!" went on Archie. "Gadzooks! Fights with desperate criminals, and all that sort of rot. Deucedly fagging, Phipps. I mean to say, I feel used, laddie. I'm feeling pretty limp now, as a matter of fact. The strenuous life is simply dashed frightful!"

"It evidently suits you, sir," said Phipps.

Archie adjusted his monocle and stared.

"What? I mean to say, really!" he asked. "Can you see the diff., Phipps? Any sign on the dial, and all that?"

"If I may be allowed to say so, sir, I certainly think that you appear more lively this morning

than usual," replied Phipps. "There is a sparkle in your eye, sir, and you seem to have suffered no ill-effects."

"Oh, but I mean to say!" protested Archie. "What priceless rot, old lad! Sheer piffle, and all that! Why, I'm two hours short of the slumber stuff. Heavy-eyed, and what not! But it seems that excitement suits the young master, what! The fact is, Phipps, we're doing bally well in this resort!"

"Quite so, sir!" said Phipps.

Before he could say anything else, the door was flung open, and an elderly gentleman marched in. He was tall, straight, and his face was florid and bronzed. A bristling white moustache adorned his upper lip.

"What's this? What's this? What's this?" he barked, in a voice that nearly shook the furniture. "Ho! So there you are, Archibald! Good-morning, my boy! How are you? I hear you've been up to something, eh? Young rascal! Young puppy! How the deuce are you?"

Archie rose languidly.

"The dear old pater!" he said. "Squat down, old fruit! Make yourself at home! Take a couple of chairs! In fact, do any old thing you like. Absolutely! Priceless morning, what?"

Colonel Barclay Glenthorne, V.C., D.S.O., snorted.

"Same twaddle!" he rapped out. "All you can do is to talk piffle, boy! No sense! Absolutely brainless! How on earth I was such a fool to bring you up I don't know! What the deuce is the good of you?"

"I mean to say, rather the limit," protested Archie. "Dash it all, pater! Useful isn't the word when it comes to me. What's the good of me? Well, as it were, Phipps finds a lot to do, what?"

"I'm an idiot to let you have Phipps!" snorted the colonel. "But there you are, unless you had somebody you'd probably die in a couple of days! It's a wonder the Headmaster doesn't appoint a night watchman to look after you. But let's be serious, Archibald. Good gad, boy, what's all this I hear? I've come over this morning to find out the truth. Never turned out so early before!"

"That is to say, I was just wondering, old tulip!" said Archie. "Somewhat beastly form to call upon a chappie so fearfully early, what? Puts him off his stroke, and all that! A fellow ain't prepared to receive visitors——"

"Don't talk such nonsense to me, sir!" roared Colonel Glenthorne. "Do you call me a visitor?"

"Well, there you are!" said Archie mildly. "You don't bally well reside on the old premises, do you? Not what you might call a member of the household. Absolutely not!"

"Look here, Archie, tell me what all this means!" growled the colonel. "About Willard's Island, I mean. Out with it, you young rascal! All this drivel about gold being found!"

"I mean to say, drivel!" said Archie, somewhat shocked. "Absolutely not! The fact is, pater, we've had several quantities of excitement trickling round! All sorts of adventures, don't you know, and gold by

the ton! Absolutely! Lying about like turnips in a bally field!"

"Nonsense!"

"I'll just explain," said Archie generously. "The fact is, pater, it was like this. I happened as it were, to be doing the old waltz round the grounds—round the landscape, and all that. Well, there you are! I, to be exact, b'ew in upon the old stunt! Do you catch on, laddie? Do you follow the trend?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do!" retorted Colonel Glenthorne. "I was a fool to come here at all. I might have known what to expect. If you start explaining, Archie, it'll take you six hours, and then I shall know no more than I did at first! Can't expect a boy without brains to talk common-sense!"

And Colonel Glenthorne stormed out of the study.

"Well, that, as it were, is that!" observed Archie mildly. "Rather terse, what? The dear old lad was somewhat pipped, as you might say!"

"Just his way, sir!" said Phipps.

"Yes, I suppose you're right," replied Archie. "You know, Phipps, when the pater rolls in, I got hot and cold! The voice, don't you know! Several roomfuls of it, so to speak! The old dad would make a priceless megaphone!"

And Archie sank back into his chair and continued chatting about his father. The colonel was, indeed, a peppery old sort, but it was more his manner than anything else. He was really quite fond of Archie, although one might not have thought so, to judge by appearances.

The colonel made his way to the Headmaster's study, and when he arrived there, he found that Nelson Lee was already in conversation with Dr. Stafford. The newcomer was greeted warmly.

"I am very sorry, Colonel Glenthorne, to bring you over so early in the day," said Dr. Stafford. "But I thought it advisable to 'phone you up at the first opportunity. The matter is most important!"

"Infernal nuisance, of course, but never mind that!" said the colonel. "But what's the hurry? What the deuce does it matter whether I'm here or not? Something to do with my property, I understand?"

"Exactly!" said the Head.

"Some gold, or something, hey?"

"A very considerable quantity of gold," put in Nelson Lee. "In addition to that, colonel, we are at present holding three men in custody. But, before handing them over, to the police, I thought it only right that you should be consulted. The men are safely under lock and key in one of the outbuildings."

"Quite right, too!" said the colonel. "No need to have waited for me—not at all! The rascals ought to have been handed over to the police! Trespassing on my property, hey? Infernal rogues!"

"It is not merely that," said the Head. "These men, Colonel Glenthorne, were attempting to gain possession of a large treasure. There is a secret cavern beneath the island which contains an enormous quantity of gold."

How this gold got there is a mystery. We only know that it was originally placed in the cavern by old John Willard, who owned the island many years ago."

"The man was mad!" grunted the colonel.

"I hardly think so," put in Nelson Lee. "I am greatly interested in the matter, and I am not quite satisfied as to how this gold was obtained. On the face of it, one would take it for granted that the metal was melted down and turned into the form of ingots. But, startling as it may appear, I have formed a theory that old Willard might have manufactured this gold."

"Good gad!" said Colonel Glenthorne. "Made it? Absurd!"

"It would appear so," agreed Nelson Lee. "But recently scientists in several parts of the world have claimed to have discovered methods by which gold can be manufactured from the baser metals. These metals are subjected to certain processes in the electric furnace, and, by careful experiment, it has been proved that gold can be actually produced. The process, however, is so expensive that the game is not worth the candle."

"I thought there was something fishy about it!" said the colonel.

"Well, hardly fishy," smiled Nelson Lee. "Now, it is quite possible that this old eccentric—a man who was considered mad by the neighbourhood—it is quite possible that he actually discovered a method of producing gold in quantity. The truth will never be known, I am afraid; but I have every reason to believe that Willard made every atom of this gold which we have discovered. The cavern is filled with furnaces, strange machinery, and chemicals. It seems that he worked in this laboratory in absolute secret."

"But I understand that quite a number of gold coins were found?" asked the Head. "Surely that points to the fact that Willard was melting them down?"

"It might point to that, I will admit," said Nelson Lee. "On the other hand, it is equally possible that he had a supply of sterling gold on the spot for the purpose of comparison; and the old man died without revealing his secret, because he realised the terrible peril which existed."

"Peril?"

"Precisely," said Nelson Lee. "We will imagine that this process became general knowledge. The value of gold would drop to a mere nothing. Cannot you picture the consequences? The markets in every part of the world would be in the utmost state of confusion. Trade would be ruined, and complete and disastrous chaos would result. Old Willard could see all this, and so he died, taking his secret with him to the grave. I may be wrong, but I am firmly convinced in my own mind that this explanation is the true one."

"H'm! h'm! Well, well!" grunted the colonel. "You may be right, sir; you may be right. I won't argue. And what about this gold? It was discovered on my property, I believe? But that doesn't mean to say that it's mine. I don't want it. It, naturally, becomes the property of this man Willard's

next-of-kin. Is there anybody to claim the fortune?"

"There is John Willard's son," said the Head quietly.

"And the boy is here—at St. Frank's?" asked the colonel.

"Yes; I will send for him."

A few minutes later John Martin was brought into the Head's study. He was looking rather flushed and excited, for he knew now that Enoch Snipe's wild stories were true.

"I think you know most of the facts, my boy," said the Head quietly. "In future you will drop the name of Martin, for that is not your real name. You will become a member of the Remove in exactly the same capacity as the other boys, and from henceforth you will take your own name—John Willard."

"It—it seems impossible, sir!" said John huskily.

"I quite agree," said the Head. "But it happens to be true—er—Willard. You are the sole heir to every penny of your father's property. This property, I understand, is worth a very great deal. You are rich, my boy, fabulously rich. As far as I can gather, your only relative is this man, Hudson, the man who has been criminally plotting against you."

"An infernally bad lot!" snapped the colonel. "You mustn't have anything to do with him, my boy, nothing at all. Dr. Stafford, wouldn't it be a good idea if you became the lad's guardian? It could be arranged, surely?"

"I should love it, sir!" exclaimed John eagerly. "You've been kinder to me than any man I've ever known!"

"We will see—we will see," said Dr. Stafford, flushing slightly. "I shall be quite delighted, John."

"With regard to Niggs and Croke, I think they were merely the tools of this man Hudson. I do not think we shall be sinning if we are charitable. They have had their lesson, and perhaps they will take it to heart."

William Hudson was sent off to Australia with enough money to set himself up with land of his own, and he made a faithful promise that he would work his hardest to blot out the past. Snipe was awarded the biggest thrashing of his life.

THE END.

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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, formerly the usher, and now the Head, has ousted Mr. Wrasper by threats, and the latter is now the usher. Moore is Tom's worst enemy, and the extutor plots to get Tom thrown into a burning lime-kiln.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Foster Moore's Queer Behaviour.

PASSING through the hall, Tom made his way to the large schoolroom, turned the handle of the door, and stepped quietly in.

Instead of advancing to his seat, he stood on the threshold, taking in the scene.

The boys were bending over their exercises, many of them with their heads suspiciously close together. Mr. Wrasper was at his desk, ruling some copy-books—just as Foster Moore had formerly been wont to do; while the new Headmaster now sat idly in his big chair, his eyes fixed upon the floor. Evidently he was deep in thought.

"Wish the beggar would look in this direction!" thought Tom. "The sight of me might give him as big a scare as it did Wooden Jerry!"

At that very instant Foster Moore raised his eyes and glanced towards the door.

Then from the master's lips there broke a hoarse cry, and he staggered to his feet and stood swaying unsteadily.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Wrasper in alarm, as he rushed to Moore's side. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Look! Look!" gasped Foster Moore, extending a trembling finger. "Can't you see him, Wrasper?"

Every eye now turned towards Tom, who advanced into the middle of the room, and calmly confronted Foster Moore.

"Sorry I've been away so long, sir," he said. "I had rather a queer experience down at the limekiln."

Moore's breath was still coming in short, quick pants, and he was looking at Tom with staring eyes, as if even now he were not quite sure that it was Tom in the flesh and not his ghost.

"Is—is—it—really—you—Tartar?" he asked slowly.

"Certainly it is, sir," answered Tom. "I hope you haven't been anxious about me."

"I feared something had happened to you," said Moore, dabbing at his clammy forehead with his handkerchief. "I heard about the boy Ralph, and—and it made me uneasy."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom, and sat down in his usual place at one of the long desks.

He was determined not to gratify the curiosity of Foster Moore, who looked terribly puzzled.

Among the boys, too, there was much curiosity as to what had happened to Tom. But not a word could they get out of him.

After tea, however, Tom drew Sam Smith, Turrell, McLara, and Gray on one side, and told them to adjoin to a shed near the cricket-field, where they would be safe from intrusion.

Once in the shed, Tom lost no time in telling his chums the story of his narrow escape from death.

With what happened up to the moment when Posh Powner had Tom at his mercy on the brink of the limekiln, the reader is already familiar; so from that point we now take up his narrative.

"I hadn't an atom of a chance against the brute," explained Tom. "He told me

he was going to burn me in the kiln, and he meant it, too.

"He had me fairly pinned down, and I was powerless. But in clutching at the ground, I got hold of a handful of dust, and I kept hold of it. Jolly lucky for me I did!"

"How? Why?" exclaimed Sam Smith breathlessly.

"Well, you see," said Tom, "when Powner raised me up to chuck me into the kiln, I threw my handful of dust in his eyes. The brute gave a frightful yell, and flung me forward."

"Into the kiln?" gasped Turrell.

"No, not right in, thank goodness! I fell short of where he intended I should. My body fell upon the brickwork, but my boots went into the burning lime. You bet I drew 'em out jolly sharp! Look! You can see how the leather is scorched."

Tom held up one foot, and his chums gazed with horrified eyes at the singed sole and toecap.

"Well," continued Tom, "I got out of the kiln and looked round for Powner. He was rolling on the ground in agony, with his hands to his eyes."

"Burn—burn!" he kept yelling. "Ang ye! I'm glad ye'll burn for this!" He evidently thought I was being roasted.

"Well, as I stood there getting back my breath, he, still blinded, began to crawl away. He was afraid somebody might come and find me burning in the kiln, and charge him with having chucked me in."

"As soon as he was out of hearing, I hurried off in the other direction."

"You may guess I was pretty well exhausted. I had been badly shaken up, and I was covered with dust and lime from head to foot. So I made my way to Noddy Berrill's cottage, and found him, as I expected, just come home to dinner."

"He, of course, wanted to know what was up, and after binding him to secrecy, as I bind you for the present, I told him everything. Mrs. Berrill gave me a brush down and some dinner. Afterwards I had a little sleep, and then I came back to school."

"But why not say what happened?" asked Sam. "You could at least tell the police."

"Why?"

"To put them on the alert for Posh Powner."

"Can they be more alert than they are now?"

"Well, no."

"Or is there anything more wanted to make Powner's punishment sure—when they catch him?"

"I suppose not."

"Then why need I say anything about my affair, Sam?" asked Tom. "I can see that there has been a regular conspiracy against me, and I want to get at the originator of it."

"Who is that?" asked Cautious Johnny.

"Who do you think?"

"Foster Moore!"

"Exactly!" said Tom. "And Wooden Jerry is his tool. I scared him, for he took me for a ghost."

"So did Foster Moore," said Sam.

"Just so," nodded Tom. "Now I tell you chaps—"

He stopped short, and turned his face towards the door, listening intently. The others were all as still as mice.

"I thought I heard something," he whispered. "Sam, see if anybody is outside."

Sam jumped up and ran to the door. After looking right and left, he went round to the back of the shed, which commanded a view of the cricket-field.

The next moment he came tearing back.

"It's Foster Moore! He's hurrying across the cricket-field!" he said.

"Then he has overheard what I have been telling you," said Tom, "and I hope it will do him good."

"But won't he make it warm for us?" asked Turrell.

"It will be a fight," rejoined Tom. "If any of you shirk it—say so now."

But they all said "No!"

They would stand by Tom's leadership and see the end of it.

CHAPTER XL.

Rogues in Hiding.

THERE was nothing the next day in the outward demeanour of Foster Moore to show that he had really been playing the spy.

He still acted the role of merciful master, and the punishments inflicted for all sorts of inevitable offences were ridiculously trivial.

But under the mask of forced serenity Tom could see the turbid, troubled spirit.

The only persons to whom Moore was openly brutal were the Wraspers.

His old principal he did not spare, humiliating him in every possible way—on Pubsey he visited the full weight of his sarcasm, and set him lessons that were a tax to the boy. Of Mrs. Wrasper he now took no notice whatever.

What he really aimed at was pretty clear. He wanted to drive them away.

Mr. Wrasper, in all probability, would have gone, for he was already sick and weary of his position. It was Mrs. Wrasper who held on.

She did so in the hope of one day seeing things righted, and of all in the school she looked to Tom Tartar to do it.

Not a word on the subject passed between him and her, but Pubsey had been talking to her, and she gathered hope from him.

The next day's news of Rosy Ralph was rather favourable. The doctors thought there was a slight change for the better, and the intervals of consciousness increased in frequency and duration.

Posh Powner was still at large; but his

capture was, according to the police, merely a matter of time.

Diggles had also disappeared. He had vanished like a puff of smoke.

The police had instructions to find him also.

There was no definite charge made against Diggles. He was simply "wanted." The idea was, without doubt, to get out of him evidence against Powner.

But not a sign of him could be discovered.

All this was very mysterious. It puzzled all who were keenly interested in the case.

From Powner a vast amount of cunning was to be looked for, but Diggles was a fool, who, without assistance, could not possibly have eluded the police.

On the night of the third day following the affair at the limekiln, Wooden Jerry, having finished his duties in the school, repaired to his sleeping quarters, which were on the ground floor, near the kitchen.

As he drew near he heard the voices of two men wrangling.

Hurrying forward, he opened the door, and said:

"You two mad fools, do you want the police on you?"

It was Posh Powner and Diggles whom he addressed.

The poacher was seated on Wooden Jerry's bed, smoking a short pipe, and Diggles sat in a chair, a wretched object, white, and hollow-eyed.

"I was only saying, that I wish I was across the sea," said Diggles.

"Well, so do I," growled the poacher, "but how are we to get there?"

"You can't go yet," said Wooden Jerry, "for the police are on the move everywhere. There's a reward out for you, Diggles."

"What for?" asked Diggles, quailing. "I haven't done anything."

"They say you chucked a boy into the limekiln," grinned Powner. "I say, have they found out what became of him yet?"

"No," said Wooden Jerry; "but his friends have been told that he's run away."

"All right," grinned Powner; "I'm satisfied now that he's a goner! How's that cub o' mine?"

"The doctor says he's getting better."

"Is he? Then as soon as he's quite well," said the ruffian, "I'll kill him again! Ain't you got any more beer about?"

"No," said Wooden Jerry. "Jane's gone to bed, and took the cellar key."

"Then break open the door."

"I can't do that, and you mustn't do it. There's a policeman just outside the house, and another not fifty yards away. Do you want to hang?"

The poacher quieted down, and after muttering something not exactly complimentary to policemen generally, he lay back on the bed and smoked in silence.

It will be seen from the foregoing that Posh Powner believed Tom to be dead. Be-

ing in hiding, he was not able to get at the facts.

As for the policeman outside, and another fifty yards away, that was pure invention, but Wooden Jerry was obliged to have a bogey of some sort to keep the villain within bounds.

The presence of Posh Powner was not suspected by anyone who would have sent for the police, and how Wooden Jerry kept him and Diggles close by day is a matter that will be explained ere long.

Finding there was no more beer forthcoming, the "wanted" pair presently retired to their hiding-place, and were quickly asleep.

But Wooden Jerry did not go to bed for some considerable time. He sat there smoking pipe after pipe, and taking frequent gulps from a big bottle of rum.

And not until the bottle was empty did he lurch unsteadily to his bed and throw himself full-length upon it, without troubling to undress.

He overslept himself, and awoke with a splitting headache, and a raging thirst. To assuage that thirst he took a fresh bottle of rum from its place of concealment beneath his mattress, and opening it, dipped pretty freely into its contents before going out to commence his daily duties.

Consequently, when Mr. Wrasper and the boys entered the dining-hall, they found that the breakfast-table was not half laid.

Wooden Jerry was rebellious.

He brought in plates of bread-and-butter, and dashed them down on the table in a defiant manner, and when asked for the tea-urn, said, "he didn't know nothing about it."

"Pubsey," said Mr. Wrasper to his son, "go and ask Mr. Moore to come here."

Pubsey, with a frightened face, got up from the table and went out of the room. All the other boys sat still awaiting the coming storm.

Wooden Jerry leant against the wall, with his arms folded, breathing defiance and rum.

There was a brief silence, and then the heavy tread of Foster Moore was heard.

He came into the room, with Pubsey behind him, and glared angrily at Mr. Wrasper.

"Can you not keep order without me, Wrasper?" he asked irritably.

"Not," was the short reply—"not if that drunken fellow is instructed to be persistently insolent."

Foster Moore turned upon Wooden Jerry, who screwed up his eyes, compressed his mouth, but did not look at him.

"Jerry," said Foster Moore, "do I instruct you to be insolent?"

"No," said Jerry, "and I don't call it being insolent to him. Who's he?"

"You hear him," said Mr. Wrasper.

"I do," said Foster Moore. "Jerry, you must end this."

"And I will end it!" cried Jerry. "I'll let the tiger loose!"

The face of Foster Moore assumed that dreadful leaden hue which showed that all the evil in his nature was aroused.

With a curious gasping sound, he sprang upon Jerry and seized him by the throat. In a moment the defiant tool was out of the room.

They could hear Foster Moore dragging him down the passage, while gasping cries for mercy came from Jerry's lips. A door was opened and shut, then all was still.

In the breakfast-room there was a hushed silence, until the voice of Foster Moore was heard, calling for Jane.

"Go and wait at table this morning," he said. "Wood has been drinking again."

Jane came in, and in her quiet way, soon had everything in order.

The breakfast was soon disposed of, and the boys went out for their accustomed half-hour in the playground.

Naturally, the recent scene was the theme of general conversation.

"What did Jerry mean by 'letting the tiger loose'?" asked Chucks, addressing Jonah Worrey.

"How should I know?" snarled Jonah.

"You might know," said Tom, "for you seem to be behind the scenes more than most of us."

"I?"

"Yes, you!"

"Tartar, you are always down on me, and it isn't fair."

"How can it be down on you to say that you are in the confidence of Moore?"

"I'm not!" said Jonah violently.

"I say you are!" retorted Tom, as he walked off.

Cautious Johnny followed, and took his arm.

"Tom," he said, "what is it? I am sure you know."

"No more than you do," was Tom's reply.

"Last night," said Cautious Johnny, looking round. "I heard something very strange. You know where I sleep? It is one of the compartments near the chimney in our room."

"Yes, I've seen it, of course."

"Well, Tom, last night I was wakened up by somebody speaking in the chimney."

"Doing what?"

"Speaking in the chimney! I sat up and listened. It was a man's voice."

"Go on," said Tom, interested.

"A rough man's voice," continued McLara, "and he was saying that he could not stand it all day, but what it was he could not stand I did not catch. Then somebody said he must do it unless he wanted the police to be down on him. Then they both wrangled, and their words were mixed up."

"Did you recognise their voices?" asked Tom.

"No," replied Cautious Johnny, "they were muffled, just as if they had a handkerchief over their mouths."

"You are sure you were not dreaming?"

"No, I thought I might be, so I got my handkerchief and tied a double knot in it and laid it on the bed to make sure. Then when the voices stopped I laid down and slept again. In the morning, when I woke up, I found the handkerchief, double-knotted, where I had put it."

"Well, Johnny," said Tom, "you have made a discovery."

"Have I?"

"Yes—an important one! Posh Powner is hiding somewhere about the school—and I think I know where he is to be found!"

CHAPTER XLI

Wooden Jerry Catches It Hot!

WHERE Tom suspected Posh Powner to be in hiding he would not say.

He wanted to make sure before he took any steps to secure the scoundrel. The least alarm would scare him away, and justice would be defeated.

Tom determined to keep awake on the next night, and watch for evidence of the poacher's presence.

Wooden Jerry's malevolence had not in any way abated, but he hated so many that he hardly knew on which to begin to work out sundry schemes of revenge he had in his mind.

He hated the Wraspers, Tom, the boys generally, and, above all, Foster Moore.

Towards the latter the feeling was growing rabid. Next to him, he hated Tom the most.

But he feared both—with different kinds of fear.

From Tom he knew he would get ridicule and humiliation, and from Foster Moore something much worse.

The state Wooden Jerry went about in was pitiable, although he did not deserve pity. He had the look of a man who got no rest night or day, and was in momentary dread of being found out.

For he knew full well that he was running a great risk by harbouring two men who were being sought for by the police.

On the morning after the events just related, Wooden Jerry, on rising at his usual time, was alarmed to find Tom Tarter just outside the door of his room, which adjoined the pantry.

It was an early hour for one of the boys to be about—in that part of the house especially.

"Wot are you a-doin' of here, young feller?" demanded Jerry.

"Oh, just having a stroll round the premises," answered Tom airily. "You're late, Jerry. If you can't keep better time you'll get the sack!"

"What!" exploded Jerry. "Me get the sack! There's nobody in this here school durst give it me!"

"Don't be too sure of that!" retorted Tom.

"You clear out o' this, you cheeky varmint! I've no time to waste on—Hullo! Bust me if my pantry door ain't open! 'Wot's the meanin' o' that? Who's been nosin' about in my pantry?"

"I have!" said Tom coolly. "I've been examining the place to see that you keep things in order. And you don't, Jerry—you don't! The pantry's in a most disreputable condition—and it smells of stale tobacco, too!"

"Clear out, I tell ye!" snarled Jerry, almost choking with fury. "How dares you lectur' me? What next, I wonder?"

"That remains to be seen!" smiled Tom, and leisurely strolled off.

"You're a cunning chap in your way, Jerry," he mused; "but I rather think the trap is set that will catch you!"

Wooden Jerry, muttering angrily to himself, entered the pantry, and got out the plate-box to begin the usual morning cleaning.

Scarcely had he commenced the job when an idea flashed into his cunning mind.

"Why not?" he asked himself. "It's easy done—dead easy! Yes, bust me if I don't do it!"

Having decided on carrying out his idea, he selected three of the best plated forks, placed them carefully in his pocket, and went on with his work.

In a little while he heard the boys clattering downstairs. Then, as soon as he thought the coast was clear, he crept out of the pantry and listened.

Not a boy was in sight, and everything upstairs seemed very quiet.

He waited another minute or two, then, silent as a cat, he crept upstairs to the dormitory in which Tom Tartar slept.

Wooden Jerry, of course, knew Tom's particular compartment—if so it may be termed. The reader will remember that the beds were partitioned off, and made into what were practically small, separate chambers.

As Jerry cautiously entered the dormitory, Jane, the housemaid, came out of a room at the further end of the corridor. She was just in time to see the serving-man disappear through the doorway, and, guessing that he was in the dormitory for no good purpose, she determined to find out what he was up to.

As she wore soft house-boots, and was, in addition, very light-footed, she made not the slightest sound.

Arriving at the door, she peeped in, and saw Wooden Jerry kneeling down beside one of Tom's boxes which he kept unlocked.

That was enough for Jane, and she glided away back to the room from whence she had come.

There she waited until she heard the creak of the stairs as Wooden Jerry stole below.

Her next step was to go to the dormitory and examine Tom's open box.

There, of course, she found the forks.

"A pretty trick," snorted Jane in disgust. "But it won't come off this time, Mister Jerry!"

(To be continued.)

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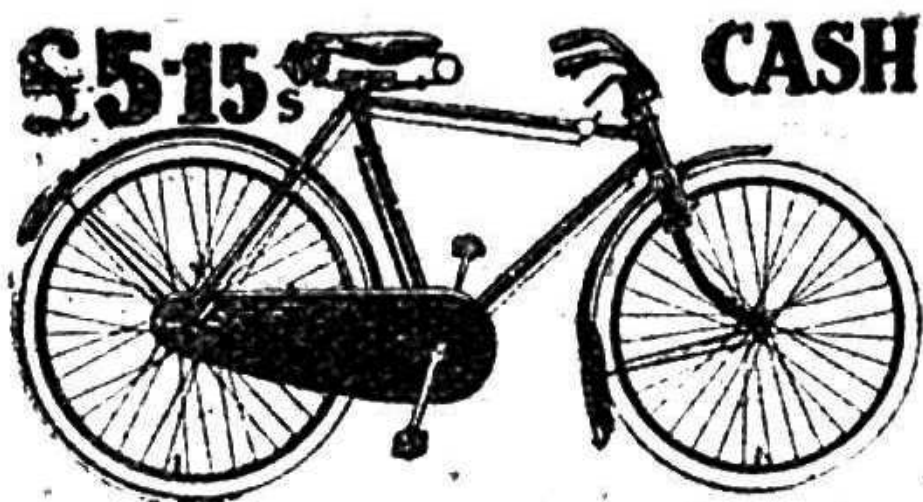
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