

A Fine Sketch of St. Frank's as Seen from Playing Ground!

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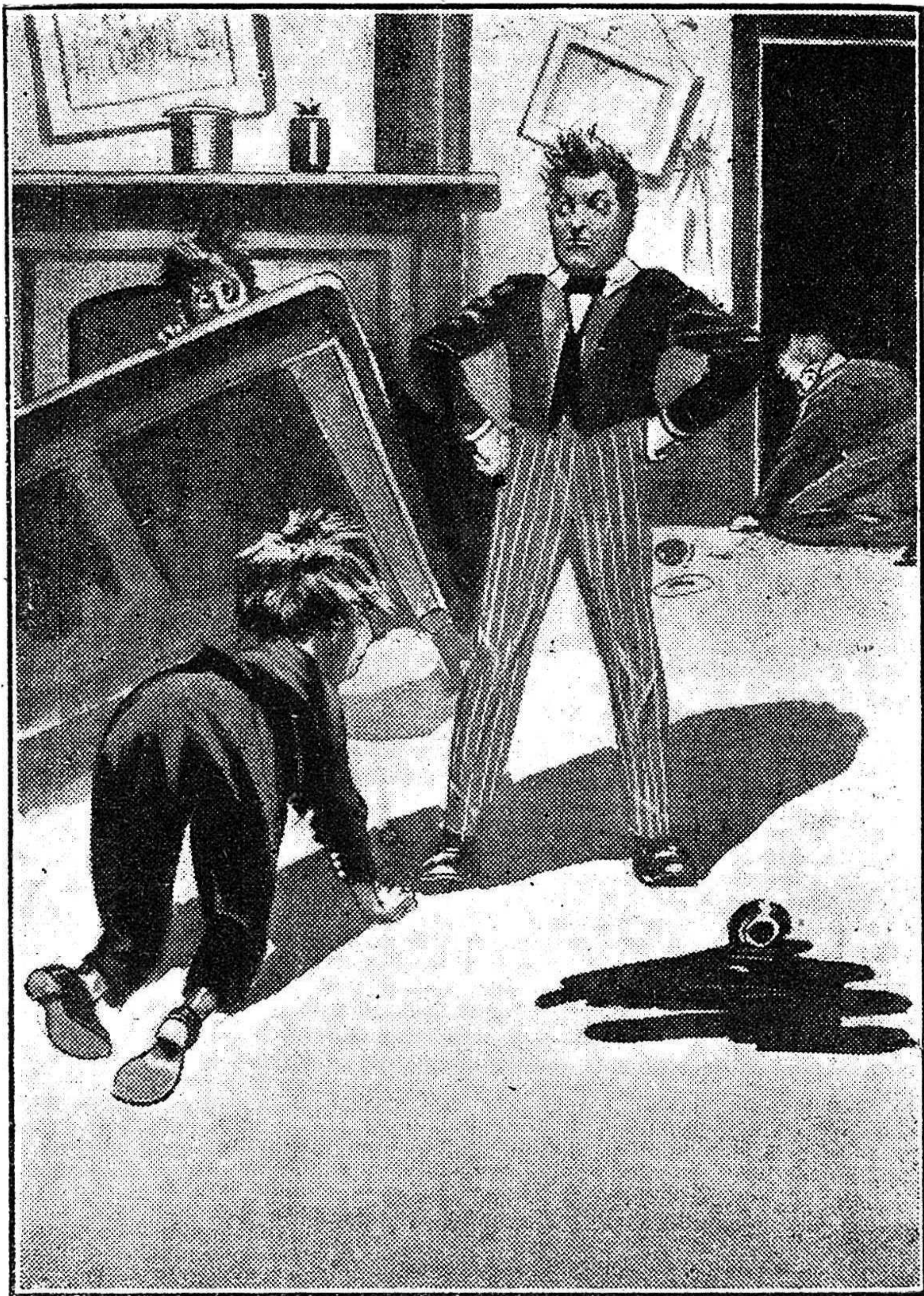
"Hallo!" said Handforth.
"Who the dickens do you think you are?"

THE

NEW PAGE BOY

OR, PHIPPS TO THE RESCUE.

*A Capital Story of Archie, the Genial Ass of St. Frank's.
Introduces Clarence, an old acquaintance of Archie's.*



"Get up!" shouted Handforth grimly. "You spying bounder! I'll show you what you'll get for playing a game of this kind!"

The NEW PAGE BOY.

Or, PHIPPS TO THE RESCUE.



The following story is mainly about our popular new character, Archie, and his indispensable valet, Phipps. Archie has undoubtedly scored a great hit, not only with the regular reader, but with everyone who can enjoy a really good laugh—and who does not? You can, therefore, safely recommend this story to your friends, and know that he or she will want to read more about the Genial Ass. Other stories by the same Author are:—
 “The Trials of Archie,”
 “The Amazing Inheritance,”
 “The Lost Schoolboys,” etc.
 —The EDITOR.



(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
 THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING WRONG WITH ARCHIE.

BIFF—Crash—Bang!
 “That’s just to be going on with!” said Handforth grimly.

“Ow-yaroooh!” howled McClure.

“Oh, my goodness! Ow!”

McClure was not exactly in a happy position. He sprawled on the floor of Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank’s, with his head in the coalbox, and with the study table resting on his chest.

“And if I have any more of your rot, I’ll give you something to remember!” said Handforth.

“You rotter! If you think you can call me a slab-sided maniac, you’ve made a mistake.”

“I—I’m half killed!” moaned McClure.
 “You—you murderer! One of these days you’ll be lugged off to prison for this kind of thing, Handy. Oh, my hat! I’m smothered in coal!”

“That’s not my trouble it’s yours!” snapped Handforth.

“Still, it was a bit steep,” remarked Church.
 “Dash it all, there was no need to chuck the table at him, Handy.”

Edward Oswald Handforth spun round.

“Do you want something, too?” he bel-
 lowed.

“Keep your giddy hair on!” said Church.
 “Blessed if I know what’s the matter with you this evening, Handy. Your temper’s like a giddy file. Just because old Crowell gave you

a hundred lines for biffing Armstrong in the lobby, that doesn't mean to say you should take it out of us."

Scenes of this kind in Study D were, of course, of every day occurrence. Sometimes they took place more or less every hour. It all depended upon Handforth. He was a most erratic junior, there was never any telling what he would do. Church and McClure lived constantly on tenterhooks.

Sometimes Handy would be as sweet as honey. It was quite likely that the day would be raining, and everything would go wrong. But Handforth would go about as cheerful as a monkey with a bag of nuts.

And at other times, without any reason whatever, he would suddenly let fly with one of his famous punches. This was just one of his little ways. Taking him altogether, he was a generous, free-and-easy junior. But even Church and McClure, although constantly associated with him, never quite understood him.

It was a glorious evening, and the dusk had settled down with a clear sky and a soft, warm breeze, giving promise of lovely spring weather on the morrow. And in Study D all had been cheerful.

Tea was quite a happy meal. Handforth was flush, and he had whacked out handsomely providing the festive board with an unusual supply of good things. Then, after the meal was over, the table had been cleared, and Handforth & Co. had chatted amiably in front of the fire.

Then, most unfortunately, McClure started off the conversation on the subject of football. He had compared Handforth's goal-keeping with senior form, and this had led to an argument.

A few hot words resulted, and then McClure felt the weight of Handy's right. He caught the punch fairly and squarely in the chest, after dodging all round the table in trying to avoid it.

Over he went with terrific force, turning a somersault over the table, alighting in the fender with the table on top of him. This was just one of Handforth's little ways of showing his disapproval.

"You needn't think I like doing this!" he growled. "But when you start saying that those fatheaded Sixth Formers can beat me at goal-keeping, I'm jolly well going to hit out. You called me a maniac, too!"

"I—I didn't!" snorted McClure, struggling up. "I simply said that any chap who thinks the seniors are no good at football is a slab-sided maniac. I wasn't talking about you."

"We won't say any more about it!" snapped Handforth. "It was all your fault, going over the table like that. I've never seen such weak asses. You can't stand a tap!"

"A tap!" groaned McClure, holding his chest. "If that's what you call a tap, a full-sized punch would be enough to knock the school over. You're dangerous, Handy. You don't know your own strength."

Handforth grunted.

"We'll drop the subject," he said gruffly. "By the way, Clurey, you're a bit short, aren't you? I don't mind lending you five bob, if you like. I was going to mention it before, but I forgot."

Handforth threw a couple of half-crowns into McClure's lap, thrust his hands deep into his trouser's-pockets, and strolled across the study. He stood regarding a map on the wall with great interest, although he had seen that map every day for weeks and weeks.

Church glanced at McClure, and winked. They knew their leader of old, and this was one of his favourite dodges. If Handforth considered he had gone too far, he always tried to make it up by becoming extra generous in the matter of lending money.

He always had a good supply, and Church and McClure enjoyed the benefit of it. They weren't spongers by any means, but they considered that life in Study D needed a little extra attraction.

"Now, what about prep?" asked Handforth, turning round and facing his chums. "We won't say anything more about football. I'm fed up with the subject, anyhow. Let's get to work."

This was unusual for Handy, but he evidently wanted to show his chums that the whole incident was forgotten. It was quite likely that Handforth and Church would forget it. McClure was not so liable to.

All the fellows were back in the Ancient House now. The Cadet camp on Willard's Island had broken up a day or so earlier, for the repairs to the Ancient House dormitories had been completed.

And now the old school was going on in the same way as of yore. Everything was running smoothly. In point of fact, things had been rather quiet during the past week.

The Cadet Corps was still a very live proposition. But the members of it only turned out for parade and drill twice a week. The neat khaki uniforms were not seen every day as they had been during the camping period.

Upon the whole, the fellows were glad to be back. Camp life was all very well, but it was far more enjoyable in the summer-time. It was generally agreed that there was to be a big camp later in the year.

As commander of the Cadet Corps, I was responsible for its doings, and Nelson Lee had given me to understand that things would be much better very soon. The corps was to be greatly enlarged, fellows from the other Forms being recruited. The Cadets, in fact, were to be a big feature at St. Frank's. But at present we were waiting for the warm weather to come.

Handforth, of course, was a sergeant, and he was still inclined to throw his weight about. This was simply a natural habit of his, but he had developed it considerably while on duty in the capacity of sergeant.

"Silly rot, having rows every minute!" he growled, as he sat down at the table. "As you chaps know, I simply detest arguing."

"Oh, of course," said Church sarcastically.

"So the best thing we can do is to get busy at work," said Handforth, who could never

detect sarcasm. "I've got to do some rotten geography this evening. Old Crow's-feet wants me to draw a giddy map of Italy. Absolute rot, of course; but it's got to be done."

"That's not prep.," said Church. "You did a map of Italy this afternoon, and Crowell said it looked like a nightmare. He thought you'd spilt the ink over the paper!"

Handforth sniffed.

"What's the good of a Form-master as a judge?" he said sourly. "That map of Italy was better than you see in a blessed atlas. And old Crowell told me to do it again, and I've got to mess my time away on it this evening. By the way, where's the atlas? I must have a guide."

"You had the atlas last," said McClure. "You—you awful bounder! You're always losing it."

"I'm an awful bounder, am I?" roared Handforth. "Look here, Arnold McClure. If you start again——"

"Who's starting?" snorted McClure. "You know jolly well you used the atlas to draw the fire up with! And then you were surprised it caught alight. We haven't got one now."

"Better borrow Glenthorne's," suggested Church. "He's got a beauty. About the best in the Remove, I should think. He's a good sort, he'll lend it to you without any trouble. You might have a difficulty in some of the other studies. The chaps know what happened to our atlas."

Handforth rose.

"I'll go and get Archie's," he said.

He passed out of the study, and strode along the passage until he came to the end. The Fifth Form quarters really formed a continuation of this passage, and Archie Glenthorne resided in Study No. 13. It was the last study in the Fifth Form corridor.

Archie Glenthorne himself, of course, was in the Remove. But as the Remove studies were full up, he had been placed in No. 13—which suited him admirably. It was the most luxurious study in the school.

Archie was a knut—a johnny of the most pronounced kind. But, although he was not renowned for his brain power, he was a thoroughly good sort, and immensely popular in the Remove.

Handforth halted in front of Study No. 13, grasped the door-handle, and walked forward. The next moment he caught his nose a fearful bang against the door. For it refused to open, and Handforth hadn't been prepared for this. He had meant to walk right in, but was brought up short.

"Yow!" he howled. "Great pip! What the——"

He rubbed his nose and glared at the door.

He grasped the handle, and turned it again. But, although he shook it violently, the door refused to budge. It was fairly obvious, in fact, that it was locked on the inside.

"Of all the giddy nerve!" snapped Handforth indignantly.

He had frequently locked his own study door inside, and had thought nothing of it. But he regarded it as unadulterated nerve for anybody else to do the same thing. He gazed at the door

as though it had done him an injury—which, after all, it actually had.

"Hi!" he roared. "Archie! Open this giddy door!"

He shook the handle, thumped the top panels with his fist, and kicked at the bottom with his feet. He certainly let the occupant know quite plainly that he wanted to enter.

"Dash it all, as it were, what!" came a voice from inside. "Earthquakes, and so forth! Kindly desist, dear old lad! Perfectly priceless of you to call, but there is, so to speak, nothing doing!"

"Open this door!" roared Handforth.

"I mean to say, dashed awkward!" protested Archie, from within. "Bally inconvenient and what not! The fact is, old fruit, I'm frightfully busy. Absolutely! I might even say, I'm working the old bean in the top gear!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I don't care about that!" he shouted. "If you don't open this door within ten seconds I'll bust it down! You lazy slacker! You fat-headed rotter! Do you think I'm going to stand this?"

"Well, there you are!" came Archie's voice. "Somewhat insulting, don't you know! I mean to say, slacker! Fatheaded rotter! Deucedly near the jolly old knuckle! In other words, rather off! Absolutely!"

Handforth fairly danced. Considering that he had come to Archie's study for the purpose of asking a favour, it was hardly polite of him to act in this way. But he quite overlooked little details of this kind. Handforth was quite capable of presenting a fellow with a black eye, and then asking him for the loan of a dictionary, or some such useful article.

"Just wait till I get inside!" he hooted. "Keeping me out here like this! Who the dickens told you to lock your door?"

"Well, don't you know, absolutely not!" replied Archie. "That is to say, nobody, old dear! But the fact is, the door's locked! Absolutely secured, and so forth! Dash it all, a chappie can be his own bally master in his own castle, what? Yards of apology, of course, but there it is! I mean to say, that's it! As I already warbled, there's nothing doing! Kindly trickle away!"

The very idea of Handforth trickling was rather comic. And he certainly didn't proceed to trickle now. He was determined to get into this study, and nothing but wild horses would drag him away.

"I give you fair warning!" he bellowed. "If you don't unlock this door in a couple of seconds, I'll smash it down! And after that I'll punch your nose until it's the size of an orange! Then I'll kick you down the passage, and drag you round the Triangle by your hair!"

This awful threat took a few moments to sink in.

"I mean to say, what?" came Archie's voice. "I've been exercising the old brain, my dear sportsman! It seems a frightfully good idea to keep the door locked, don't you know? What?"

"Locked?" roared Handforth.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Fearfully sorry to disappoint you, old bean, but there it is! I mean to say, I have rooted objections to being dragged over the landscape by the old locks! Must be dashed painful, and all that sort of rot! Deucedly undignified, as you might say! Rude stares from the populace and what not! Have you gone, laddie?"

"No, I haven't gone!" howled Handforth.

"Great gadzooks!" said Archie. "This is frightful! Absolutely!"

Bang! Thump! Crash!

Handforth fairly made the door shake. He kept it up, too. Archie's voice came feebly through the din, but this made no difference. Fellows came out of their studies to know what on earth all the noise was about. As soon as they saw Handforth they went back. They expected a noise from him.

"By George!" snorted the leader of Study D. "I'm fed up with this!"

He grasped the handle, and heaved at the door with all his strength. Unfortunately, Archie unlocked it at that very moment. The genial ass simply couldn't stand the racket any longer.

Handforth entered Study No. 13.

He entered, to be exact, on his neck. The door flying open, he hurtled through the opening, tripped on the edge of the carpet, and sprawled full length. In any ordinary study he would have hurt himself. But in Archie's study the carpet was thick. Handforth sat up, and pulled his necktie out of his ear.

"You—you babbling lunatic!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A shockingly bad habit, don't you know, to talk to yourself, old dear——"

"I wasn't talking to myself!" bawled Handforth, jumping up. "What the dickens do you mean by opening the door?"

Archie Glenthorne blinked mildly.

"Well, I mean to say, that's rather rich, what?" he observed. "Two dozen earthquakes, and so forth, in order to get the door open, and then you start the old questioning stuff! I thought, old walnut, that you required the portal to swing wide, as it were!"

"I didn't ask you to swing it as wide as that, you fathead!" said Handforth gruffly. "Now, what's the matter?"

"Nothing—absolutely," replied Archie. "I mean to say, I thought the matter was on your side. A fearful amount of commotion, and all that. The fact is, I think you wanted to see me? You were anxious to enter into the old disenchance?"

"That's got nothing to do with it," said Handforth. "I'll tell you what I came here for later on. Why didn't you let me in at first?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I, as it were, rather wanted to be private!" explained Archie. "Surely a chappie can have a quiet hour, and all that sort of thing? What I mean is, he doesn't expect the frightful commotion——"

"Blow the commotion!" roared Handforth. "I was justified! Why did you lock your door? Why did you refuse to admit me?"

Archie looked rather helpless.

"Exactly!" he said. "What-ho! Well, rather! I—I mean, of course!"

"Gone dotty?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Absolutely! That is to say, of course, absolutely not!" said Archie hurriedly. "The old bean may be somewhat weak, but it's perfectly sound. Positively unimpaired, and all that. Now, old top, kindly slide into the next hemisphere! Fearfully sorry to turn you out, don't you know. But there it is!"

"Who's turning me out?" asked Handforth gruffly.

"Well, I mean, this is where you go, what?"

"No, it isn't!"

"But, my priceless old carrot——"

"Are you calling me a carrot?" bellowed Handforth fiercely. "Look here——"

"Sorry!" interrupted Archie, holding up his hand. "That is to say, sorrow! No offence, old top! Not at all! Absolutely none! A distinct slip, don't you know. I should have said, old sportsman! Exactly! What about it? How about the buzzing off stuff? Anything doing?"

Handforth regarded Archie pityingly.

"As soon as ever I get inside you want to chuck me out!" he exclaimed. "You're a jolly fine host—I don't think! Ask a chap to come into his study, and then you treat him like this!"

"But, really, that is to say, great gadzooks!" said Archie. "The old memory fails, don't you know! Did I ask you to stagger in? Surely not? In other words, absolutely nix! In fact, old lad, I'm most deucedly anxious for you to slide! Dashed perturbed, in fact. Would you mind floating away?"

Handforth looked round suspiciously.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"What's the idea of all this? Locking the door so that nobody can get in, and then jumping about like a cat on hot bricks all the time I'm here! What are you doing in this study that you don't want me to see?"

Archie gulped.

"Nothing. I—I mean to say, nothing!" he panted desperately. "Absolutely! In fact, I might say, nothing at all! Dear lad, I'm fearfully worried. Work to do, and all that. Affects the old nerves——"

"Oh, well, it's your business!" said Handforth. "And it's a sheer waste of time to stand here jawing to a blessed dummy! I've met a few asses in my time, but you fairly take the bun!"

"Oh, quite!" said Archie. "Every time, old dear!"

"I won't tell you what I think of you now," continued Handforth. "I've got some work to do. And that reminds me. I came here to borrow your atlas. I suppose you don't mind lending it to me?"

Archie was rather breathless.

"I mean to say, yards of nerve!" he murmured. "You trickled round, so to speak, in order to borrow the old map stuff? And you created the noise, and what not! Beastly tall, don't you think? But never mind—in fact, don't bother! The atlas? Well, rather! Take it, old sport. Take any bally thing you like! Only kindly filter away!"

Archie obligingly fetched the atlas, and handed it to the visitor. Handforth took it, gave a final glance round, and then marched to the door. Archie followed him with much more than his usual energy. Handforth paused just before going out into the passage.

"What's up with you to-night, Archie?" he asked. "You're not the same as usual."

"Dash it all, what priceless imagination, old tulip!" said Archie. "Not the same as usual? Absolutely! I mean, sheer piffle, and all that kind of thing! Going? Good! I—I mean——"

"Glad to get rid of me, eh?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Great gadzooks! Sorrow, old dear! I should have said, absolutely not! Frightfully cut up to let you go! Must you drag yourself away? Good! Toodle-oo!"

Handforth was outside now, and Archie closed the door, and Handforth stared hard at the panels. There was no doubt about it. Archie had deliberately edged him towards the door, and had then practically pushed him out. For some unearthly reason, the one and only Archie was extraordinarily anxious to be left alone.

This was most unusual. As a general rule, Archie welcomed everybody who came to his study. He told them to make themselves at home, to sit down, and to regard the study as their own property.

It was, therefore, decidedly surprising for Archie to act in this way. There was something exceedingly wrong. And Handforth glared at the closed door with a considerable amount of ferocity.

Yes, it was true. He had been turned out! He, Handforth, had been led into the passage, and the door closed upon him. This, of course, was more than flesh and blood could stand.

"You boulder!" shouted Handforth.

He seized the door handle, and shook it. The door was locked again. Archie had taken good care to see to that point.

"You rotter!" roared Handforth. "Open this door! I was an ass to walk out! Open this door, and I'll give you a good hiding! D'you hear? Unlock it, you ass! I'm going to smash you up!"

"Frightfully awk., don't you know!" came Archie's voice. "Dear laddie, can't you really disappear? I'm most shockingly worried, and your voice, as it were, is not what a chappie might call soothing. Absolutely not! Reminds one of a bally saw mill, and all that!"

Thump-bang-thump! Thump-bang-thump! "Unlock this door!" howled Handforth furiously. "You—you——"

"Good gracious me!" came the voice of Mr. Crowell from the rear. "Handforth! What is the meaning of this? How dare you make this unearthly din? Answer me at once, boy?"

Handforth turned round, looking startled.

"Oh! It—it's nothing, sir!" he said casually. "Just calling upon one of the fellows, you know!"

The Form master looked severe.

"If it is your usual habit to call upon your friends in this way, Handforth, you had better

refrain from doing so in future," he said curtly. "You are making a most disgraceful noise!"

"The—the fact is, sir, I——"

"You have no excuse to offer, Handforth!"

"But look here, sir——"

"I shall require you to write me fifty lines!" said Mr. Crowell coldly. "I really cannot allow such a thing to pass unnoticed. And if there is any further noise here, Handforth, I shall be very severe indeed. Go away at once."

Handforth instinctively clenched his fist. It was only by a supreme effort of will that he kept himself in hand. Many and many a time Mr. Crowell had been in danger of receiving a violent punch on the nose. But, fortunately, Handy always managed to check the impulse.

"All right, sir!" he growled thickly.

He marched off, and Mr. Crowell passed on. Shortly afterwards, sounds of fearful and awful strife came from Study D. It was impossible for Handforth to go for Mr. Crowell. But it was quite easy for him to go for Church and McClure.

He had to take it out of somebody!

CHAPTER II.

THE TROUBLES OF CLARENCE.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE stood in the centre of his study, and looked round with exaggerated caution. He noted that the blind was drawn, and he made quite certain that the

door was locked.

Then he screwed his monocle more firmly in his eye, and surveyed the big lounge which adorned a corner of the study.

"What-ho!" he murmured. "The coast, as it were, is absolutely serene! Emerge, old dear! Materialise!"

A head appeared over the back of the lounge.

"You—you are quite sure, Archie?" it said weakly.

"Absolutely!"

The head rose, and it could be seen that a body supported it. There were some legs, too, a pair of arms. The apparition climbed over the back of the lounge, and sank down into the cushions.

Archie's strange visitor was a somewhat peculiar specimen. He was, in fact, a young gentleman of between sixteen and seventeen—somewhat older than Archie himself. He was by no means robust.

In fact, many people would have described him as weedy, and unkind folk would have declared that his legs closely resembled a couple of broomsticks. He was attired in a lounge suit of a reddish brown tweed with a most pronounced check. His socks were startling in hue, his collar was high, and he was evidently something of a dandy.

His nose projected far out of his face, and his chin started all right, and then gradually petered out. His hair was parted in the middle,

and there was a look in his eyes which Handforth would have described as soppy.

No, he was certainly not a very prepossessing looking young gentleman. Obviously, he was a member of the idle rich—a knut. Not that he could compare in any way to Archie himself. But he seemed to be of the same class.

"Oh, Archie!" said the stranger. "It's awful! Absolutely frightful! I'm positively a mass of bally nerves! I hope nobody will come! I don't know what to do—I'm in shocking trouble!"

Archie nodded.

"That's all right, laddie!" he said cheerfully.

"Absolutely all serene. The fact is, Clarence, we're pals. We're a couple of real sportsmen, what? Known each other for years, and all that sort of thing. What about it? What, in fact is the idea? Trot out the old narrative."

Clarence FitzGibbon sat on the edge of the lounge, looking unutterably miserable. There was, indeed, an almost wild look in his eyes. And he kept casting nervous glances towards the door.

This young gentleman was the only son and heir of Sir Cyril FitzGibbon, Bart., of Helmford Hall, Helmford. Sir Cyril was the most influential landowner in that neighbourhood, and quite wealthy. It was decidedly rough luck that this weedy young gentleman should be Sir Cyril's sole heir. A great many people had silently sympathised with the baronet on the matter. Clarence was not exactly an ideal type of youth.

He and Archie Glenthorne had known one another since boyhood. Archie considered himself to be a chump—he admitted it. But he regarded Clarence FitzGibbon as a positive imbecile. At the same time, they were pals. Archie and Clarence had a good many things in common. But, all the same, Archie was not particularly delighted to have Clarence at St. Frank's.

"I had to come to you, Archie—nowhere else!" said Clarence. "I'm in beastly trouble."

"Oh, absolutely," said Archie. "I gathered that, old top. A chappie doesn't come stealing through the old window unless he's in something of a mess. I judge, laddie, that you're fairly up to the hilt, what?"

"Worse than that!" said Clarence miserably. "You must help me, Archie! I don't know what I should do if you turned me away! I'm in a beastly trouble!"

"Well, what about it?" asked Archie. "What about the old explanation? In other words, Clarence, trot it out! Choke it forth, and all that stuff! Archie is waiting with his ears flapping, as it were. Bring forth the bally old yarn. I'm most deucedly interested."

At the same time, Archie was slightly worried. He didn't like this sort of thing. He simply hated secrecy, and this was thrust upon him. He couldn't avoid it. Clarence had come to his window half an hour earlier, having stolen secretly across the Triangle in the dusk. And Archie had been compelled to admit the young gentleman. But, so far, he had had no time of asking for an explanation.

"The—the fact is, Archie, I can't explain," said Clarence weakly.

"I mean to say, what?" said Archie. "Nothing doing in that line? But, my dear old stick of rhubarb! What priceless rot! You've simply got to choke up the frightful yarn. The fact is, Clarence, you've been up to something. Absolutely! You've been a bad lad!"

"No, I haven't, really," said Clarence. "It was quite an accident."

"Which was, old thing?"

"I—I can't tell you!" faltered Clarence. "But I'm in beastly trouble."

"Dash it all—dash it all!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, dash it all! What? But, my dear old bean, you've said that before. Twice, I believe. Absolutely! We know all about the bally trouble. But what is it? What, to be exact, is the precise posish?"

Clarence shook his head hopelessly.

"I—I can't tell you," he said. "But I'm in beastly trouble——"

"What-ho! I mean to say, becoming somewhat monot." interrupted Archie. "Kindly remove the old record. What about another selection? Anything doing? The fact is, Clarence, you're a most frightful chump, don't you know."

"I'm in beastly——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie hastily. "You know, Clarence, I always had a suspicion that you were lacking in something. You are. Positively lacking! The old bean, I might say, is somewhat hollow. Dashed cracked, in fact!"

Clarence seemed to pull himself together.

"You've got to help me!" he said fiercely.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Any old thing. Cash? The good old doubloons? What's the fig., old spiff? Pray mensh the amount. Trot out the information, and all that sort of rot!"

"But I don't want any money," said Clarence.

"No?"

"I've got plenty," said the other. "But I'm in beastly trouble, Archie. I can't tell you what it is, but it's awful! It's terrible! It's ghastly! It's absolutely horrible!"

"As you might say, somewhat near the edge?" asked Archie. "But, my dear laddie, you've got to be more explicit. We can't have this. Absolutely not! Bally waste of time, and so forth. Come, come! I mean to say, come. What-ho! Trouble? Such as what? Annoyed the old pater?"

"He doesn't know anything about it—yet."

"Not betting?" asked Archie horrified.

"My dear laddie, you don't mean that you've started on the giddy old flutter? Clarence, old top, I don't believe it. Absolutely not!"

"No, it's not horse-racing," said Clarence.

"Then what the bally old dick. is it?" demanded Archie.

"I can't tell you—it's—it's too awful!" groaned Clarence, holding his face in his hands. "All I know is that I can't go back home. I daren't! You've got to let me stay here, Archie."

"Here!" exclaimed Archie blankly.

"Yes."

"But, don't you know, impossible, and all

that!" said Archie. "Absolutely out of the ques. In other words, it can't be done, old tulip. A considerable quantity of sorrow, and what not, but there you are. Deucedly awkward posish. A chappie can't do the imposs."

Clarence clutched at Archie's sleeve.

"You've got to help me!" he said feverishly. "Oh, Archie, you must! Trust me! Don't ask me any questions, but trust me! And let me stay here."

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"The fact is, Clarence, I wouldn't do it for anybody else," he said. "Absolutely not! But it's different with you. Positively diff. Old pals, and all that sort of piffle! Kids together, don't you know. I'll see what can be done. Yes, laddie, I'll rally round."

"I knew you would!" said Clarence fervently.

"I'll stagger forth and interview the good old sportsman who rules the old roost," said Archie. "That is to say, I'll buzz into Mr. Lee, the Housemaster, don't you know. He'll probably get busy on the job. A bed, and so forth——"

"But it's impossible!" gasped Clarence. "You mustn't go to a master! Nobody must know I'm here. You—you don't understand! I want you to hide me. I want you to keep me here in secret."

Archie looked blank again.

"Oh, but really," he said. "In secret, you know. Pray be reasonable, Clarence. It simply can't be done. It absolutely can't! You must realise, old lad, that the thing's imposs."

"It isn't," said Clarence weakly. "And even if it is you've got to help me! Oh, Archie, you don't know—you can't realise. You see, I—I mean, it's this way—— I can't explain. But I'm in a beastly hole!"

"I had an idea you were," said Archie, nodding. "But kindly gather the old wits together and concentrate. How, as it were, can I keep you here in secret, old dear? There'll be other chappies coming along soon. They'll stagger in, and there you are. Dash it all, you can't hide behind the bally lounge all the time. You can't live in this apartment."

"I don't mind what I do——"

"It isn't a question of minding," interrupted Archie. "Not at all. Quite diff. The thing is, Clarence, it's positively hopeless. I'll admit that there might be other ways—but the old brain isn't capable of thinking. But you can't stay here. Absolutely not! By the way, what's the idea? How long do you want to do the disappearing act for?"

"Always!"

"I mean to say, how dashed awkward!" said Archie. "Always, don't you know. In other words, you're not returning to the old homestead? You'll never stagger back to the good old hearth?"

"Never!"

"It's frightfully diff.," said Archie, shaking his head. "You know, Clarence, I believe you've been robbing a bank. Something ghastly like that."

"I haven't!"

"The police will be round here——"

"The police!" gasped Clarence hoarsely.



**Thump—bang—thump! Thump!
Bang! Thump!**
"Unlock this door!" howled
Handforth furiously. "You—you——"

"If they come, Archie, don't let them see me! Oh, don't!"

Archie paced up and down.

"This is appalling!" he said. "It's positively shocking! The fact is, old sport, you're just about under the surface. You're absolutely well in for it. You've done the deed, as it were. I'm bally well stumped. All the works are buzzing round in the attic. Positively chasing one another."

Archie held his head; then, suddenly, he looked up. There was an intelligent look in his eyes.

"I mean to say, it's come!" he exclaimed. "It's arrived, old dear. The idea. The stunt. The bally old scheme. All of a sudden, don't you know! Zing! I've arrived at the old conclusion!"

"You've thought of something?" asked Clarence eagerly.

"Phipps!"

"What?"

"Phipps!" said Archie triumphantly. "The very chappie! The brainy cove who dos

things! He's the merchant, Clarence! We shall have to bring Phipps into it. Absolutely nothing else. Deucedly reliable old buffer. Faithful to the young master, and what not. Phipps will think of something. Phipps, in fact, will rally round, and come to the old rescue!"

Clarence shook his head.

"Phipps is your man, isn't he?" he asked.

"Absolutely!"

"But we can't tell him all about it——"

"Dash it all, there's nothing to tell!" said Archie. "I don't know a thing. I'm fairly groping. You're deucedly close, Clarence. Oysters not it, you know. You see, we'll just tell Phipps there's some trouble. No details, of course. Phipps won't ask questions. A frightfully discreet chap. He'll do the trick. I've got absolute confidence in Phipps. We'll tell him what's required, and there you are! Ideas will flow forth! Phipps will work the stunt!"

"Do—do you think so?" asked Clarence doubtfully.

"I'm bally sure of it!"

"But he might give me away——"

"Never!" said Archie stoutly. "I mean to say, never! To be absolutely exact, not at all! Well, rather not! Phipps will keep the dread secret! Right in the old bosom, as you might say! Packed away and all tucked up! Leave it to Phipps, Clarence, and you're on a cert!"

"If—if you really think so——"

"My cheery old knut, it's there!" said Archie. "Absolutely! Phipps is the man. Phipps, in fact, is the precise merchant. Now, I've got to talk to the lad seriously. Something's got to be done. I think you had better disappear. You catch on? Bob up when you're wanted, as it were."

"You mean get behind the lounge again?"

"That, old sport, is it!" said Archie. "Carry on!"

Clarence climbed over the back of the lounge and disappeared. He was certainly in a state of great nervousness, and Archie was tremendously curious to know what the exact trouble was. But as Clarence wasn't disposed to tell, the only thing was to help him without pressing him further.

Archie touched the bell-push.

Phipps, the invaluable manservant, had fixed up an electric bell, which communicated between Archie's study and the butler's pantry. This, of course, was quite a novelty in a public school. But then the very idea of Archie having a man was unprecedented.

Having rang the bell, Archie waited. Phipps, he was certain, would wangle things. Phipps was an absolute expert in the art of wangling.

CHAPTER III.

PHIPPS RALLIES ROUND.



TAP-TAP!

"I mean to say, walk in, and all that!" said Archie languidly.

The handle of the door was turned, but nobody walked in. Archie adjusted his monocle, and stared. Then, suddenly, he rose to his feet and beamed.

"Dashed remiss of the old memory!" he murmured. "Of course! Absolutely! The bally old door's locked! Positively sealed!"

He passed across, turned the key in the lock, and swung the door open. Phipps was standing outside. Phipps was looking just the same as usual, calm, impassive, and highly respectful.

"Come in, old Spiffer!" said Archie. "Enter, and all that!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "I think you rang, sir!"

"Oh, rather!" replied Archie. "You've hit it, Phipps. In fact, you've struck the idea! Oh, by the way. I mean, don't you know, by the way! The old door—the portal! Turn the locking apparatus, and what not!"

Phipps obeyed without question.

"Now, Phipps, I've got something frightfully serious to say!" exclaimed Archie. "I might even mention that this thing is deucedly private. Absolutely confidensh! You've got to use the old discresh, in large chunks!"

"Very well, sir," said Phipps.

"You quite understand, old top, that there must be no chatting with the other members of the old staff?" asked Archie.

"I trust you can rely upon my judgment, sir."

"Of course—of course!" said Archie. "I mean to say, absolutely! Sorrow, Phipps—considerable amounts of it! No slur upon the old character! Not at all! Now, to get down to the stuff! The fact is, Phipps, I'm in a hole. But not exactly. As a matter of fact, not at all. It's another chappie who's in a hole—that's it! A priceless old pal of mine. He's simply in the very dick, of a mess. Wallowing, as it were, right up to the bally neck. Nearly submerged, and so forth."

"I gather, sir, that your friend is in serious trouble?" said Phipps.

"That is to say, putting it mildly!" said Archie. "The dear old lad is going grey. Absolutely turning colour as you watch him! Frightfully sad business. Well, we've got to rally round, and shove out the old hand. You know what I mean. Bung him the glad fist, as it were."

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps.

"Good! Brainy chap, Phipps—you always grasp the scheme!" said Archie approvingly. "Now, to proceed. This old lad is Clarence, don't you know. Dear old Clarence! A perfectly priceless ass, but there you are—Ahem! Clarence, I should say, is quite a decent chappie."

Archie cast a glance towards the lounge—having momentarily overlooked the fact that

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Clarence was capable of hearing all that was said.

"Dear old Clarence!" repeated Archie. "One of the best, don't you know, but somewhat short when it comes to scheming out things. And I am a bit that way myself, Phipps. Somehow the old box of tricks won't get into gear just when I want it to. Dashed rotten, as you can guess. But there it is. A fellow can't be everything, can he?"

"Certainly not, sir," said Phipps. "I understand that your friend is Master Clarence FitzGibbon, from Helmsford Hall?"

"Now, don't you know, how really topping!" said Archie admiringly. "I simply must applaud, Phipps!" he added, clapping his hands. "The way you know these things staggers me—simply makes me reel, as it were. But you're right on the nail. You've hit the thing squarely on the top. Absolutely! Clarence, to be exact, is in frightful trouble. So frightful that I don't know what the bally trouble is!"

"That is somewhat awkward, sir."

"Most inconvene!" agreed Archie. "But Clarence has, to put it bluntly, done a guy. In other words, Phipps, he's slid from the ancestral roof. And, in fact, the dear chappie is here."

"Here, sir?" said Phipps.

"Absolutely!"

"I take it that you are joking, sir?"

"Not at all—absolutely not at all!" replied Archie. "I was never more serious in all the old exis. Clarence, I repeat, is on the spot. Now that you are prepared for the shock, as it were, we might as well proceed. Clarence, old lad, kindly come on view!"

Phipps gave one little start as Clarence slowly appeared from behind the lounge. But the valet's face remained as impassive as ever. He regarded Clarence without any change of expression.

"This, Clarence, is Phipps!" said Archie, waving his hand. "Phipps, old lad, this is Clarence. Good! Intro. over! Now we'll continue with the old trend. This cheerful cove, Phipps, is in trouble."

"So I understood you to say, sir."

"He has bunked—positively scooted!" went on Archie. "And he has sailed in here in order to find a haven of refuge. A harbour, don't you know. A sheltered nook where he can rest the old bones until things do the calming stunt."

"I quite understand, sir," said Phipps. "I gather that Mr. Clarence has severely offended his father——"

"No, oh, no!" said Clarence. "That's not it. Of course not! The pater knows nothing. But he's bound to find out, and he mustn't know where I am. I want you to hide me!"

"That's the scheme!" said Archie. "Do you follow, Phipps? Clarence, in short, requires to be packed away. It doesn't matter where. But it's up to you to think of something. Commune with yourself, old son. Gather the wits together, and think out one of your priceless stunts."

"Please let me get this quite clear, sir," said Phipps. "Am I to understand that Mr.

Clarence is anxious to remain here—in the school?"

"Precisely."

"And he doesn't want that fact known?"

"Precisely twice," said Archie.

"I'm afraid it will be very difficult, sir," said Phipps. "However, I have thought of a little scheme——"

"I mean to say, not really!" exclaimed Archie, staring. "Dash it all, Phipps, not really? I know the works run smoothly, and all that, but it couldn't be done—not in the time!"

"It all depends, sir, whether you approve," said Phipps. "This little idea of mine could easily be worked. It will mean just a little arrangement, and careful handling——"

"If it comes to that, you're the very chappie to do it," said Archie. "And as for mundane matters, there'll be a deucedly fat tip, old son. I'll see to that. Don't worry!"

"Oh, no, that's not fair!" put in Clarence. "It's decent of you to help me, Archie, I'll give Phipps a good tip, you know. Leave that to me!"

"I'm sorry, sir, if you suspected I was thinking of any financial gain," said Phipps stiffly. "Nothing was further from my thoughts sir. I've always tried to do everything that will be satisfactory."

"Of course—exactly!" said Archie. "Most rotten, Phipps. Two apologies—one from each of us! Now, that's settled, what? About the idea. Trot it out, old tulip! Let's hear the brain wave!"

"In the first place, sir, it will be quite impracticable to conceal Mr. Clarence in the school," said Phipps. "There is no place that I know of where a young gentleman could be hidden."

"I mean to say, that's dashed beastly!" said Archie.

"However, sir, there is no need to despair," said Phipps. "I take it that Mr. Clarence is anxious to remain under this roof for several days?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "All his life, as you might say!"

Phipps didn't even smile.

"Quite so, sir," he said gravely. "I hardly think that will be necessary, however. I imagine that Mr. Clarence will be quite satisfied if I can arrange to fix him up here for a week—or possibly a fortnight?"

"Yes, that would do—for now, I mean to say," said Clarence. "Anything, in fact. But I must be hidden. I can't let people see me. That would be simply frightful, don't you know?"

"Quite possibly, sir," said Phipps. "But it is unavoidable. Nevertheless, it can be so arranged that there will be practically no danger. Do I understand, sir, that you will be willing to adopt any device in order to remain concealed?"

"Anything," said Clarence. "It doesn't matter what!"

"You would, then, be willing to work?"

"Work!" said Clarence. "I—I don't know any work!"

"Dashed awkward!" murmured Archie. "Work's a frightful bore, and all that."

"The scheme, sir, is quite simple," went on Phipps. "I happen to know that young Tubbs, the page-boy, is very anxious to leave the school for a short holiday. I can quite easily arrange for him to depart this evening, and Mr. Clarence can step into his shoes during the period of Tubbs's absence."

"I mean to say——"

"In the character of the page-boy, sir, Mr. Clarence will attract no attention whatever," said Phipps. "He will, in fact, be quite disguised, and the prospects of discovery will be negligible. Do you follow me, sir?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie wonderingly. "This is simply amazing, Phipps! A priceless scheme! In fact, a winner every time! You know, Phipps, you're a marvel! You're simply a walking wonder!"

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps modestly. "Just a little suggestion, sir. Nothing more, I assure you!"

"It takes a master brain to scheme out such ideas," declared Archie. "Positively a stunning stunt, as it were. Good enough, Phipps. It shall be done. What do you say, Clarence? How does the idea go?"

Clarence looked rather doubtful.

"I—I'll do it!" he said. "It's splendid, but—but I'm afraid I shall make a mess of the work!"

"That will be quite all right, sir," said Phipps. "Please don't worry on that account."

"A page-boy, you know!" went on Clarence. "Bally menial, and all that. But it's the only way, isn't it? There's nothing else?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Then it's got to be done."

"My dear old tulip, it's easy!" put in Archie. "In fact, there's nothing in it. Absolutely nix! All you've got to do is to stagger about, and carry messages, and so forth! Open doors, and all that kind of rot!"

"Exactly, sir," said Phipps. "But it will be necessary, I think, to give you just a little coaching."

"Coaching?" repeated Archie. "I mean to say, why the necess.?"

"Well, sir, I hardly think that Mr. Clarence is suitable for a page-boy in his present condition," replied Phipps. "A page-boy belongs to the lower sphere of life, sir, if you understand what I mean. Mr. Clarence is a member of the higher circle."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "I grasp the old scheme! Of course—rather! You mean that Clarence is too bally posh? Too knutty, and all that?"

"Exactly, sir!"

"But what's to be done?" asked Archie helplessly. "I knew there was a catch in it, don't you know! There's always a catch in these bally things! This is where we strike against a snag!"

"Not necessarily, sir," said Phipps. "It will merely be essential for Mr. Clarence to cultivate a few words belonging to the coarser set, as it were. It will be further necessary for him to drop an aitch here and there, and to add

one when it is not really required. This will sound more realistic."

"How perfectly prepos.!" said Archie. "Still, you know best, Phipps. You're the lad with the brains! Say the word, and it's all O.K. Proceed to suggest the coarse words, which must be employed? Deucedly interesting!"

"Well, for example, sir, Mr. Clarence can make use of the expression 'bust!'" said Phipps. "That would do for one, and——"

"Oh, but dash it all!" protested Archie. "I fail to grasp! Bust, don't you know! A perfectly ripping word! Lots of people have busts, my dear chappie. My mater, for example, had a ripping bust of herself sculptured by one of those bally merchants who mess about with marble, and so forth! A priceless effort, and frightfully expensive. The only drawback, don't you know, was that the dashed thing looked no more like the mater than it did of me!"

"You have not grasped my meaning, sir," said Phipps. "When I say 'bust' I am using it in quite another way. 'Bust' is the common method of pronouncing the word 'burst'!"

"How deucedly queer!" said Archie. "Now that's wonderful, Phipps. How do you know these things? Of course—of course! Forgetting, and all that. Of course, you come from the lower strata yourself, what? No offence, Phipps—no slur upon the old dignity. But facts are facts."

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "Mr. Clarence, I would suggest, must make use of such an expression as, 'Oh, bust it! I'm halways running about for heverybody! Blow these bloomin' herrands!' Something like that, sir."

Archie and Clarence stared, fascinated.

"But, I mean to say, what frightful language!" said Archie. "Do you think you could manage that, Clarence? Do you really think, old lad, that you could talk so deucedly?"

"The thing may be done—I'll try," said Clarence dubiously. "And there's no other choice. I'm here now, and I daren't leave. And if anybody inquires about me, I'm not here. I—I don't feel safe, even now!"

"I would suggest, sir, that you come round to my own quarters," said Phipps. "It is hardly wise for you to remain here."

"But how can it be done, laddie?" asked Archie. "I've been taxing the old bean for some time on that question. But I'm afraid that the dear fellows will spot old Clarence, and start in on the questioning stunt."

"I take it, sir, that Mr. Clarence entered by means of the window?"

"Absolutely!"

"It would then be advisable if he departed by the same method," said Phipps. "I will accompany him, and take him straight to my own room. I shall then be able to give him quite a number of hints, and see that everything is correct. And Mr. Clarence will begin his duties in the morning."

Archie nodded.

"Topping!" he said. "I knew you'd turn up trumps, Phipps. I simply left everything to you—and the whole thing's ripping. Clarence

old walnut, it's up to you to do the gentle smile. I don't know what the bally trouble is, but you're safe. Phipps will see you through. Absolutely!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW BUTTONS.



REGINALD PITT halted, and stared. "Do my eyes deceive me, or do they not?" he asked. "Gaze upon it, O ye little ones! Feast your eyes upon the wondrous vision!"

Pitt was standing at the top of the stairs, and he stared down into the lobby. I was coming

"We'd better go down and make inquiries," I said, grinning. "I expect Tubbs has been taken ill, or has got a holiday. We'll ask this funny-looking bounder all about it."

We certainly could not have guessed that the new page-boy was the only son and heir of Sir Cyril FitzGibbon, the wealthy baronet of Helmford. But the scheme which had been concocted by Phipps and Archie was just coming into operation.

Before we could get to the bottom of the stairs, Handforth arrived in the lobby. He was on his way outside. But, suddenly, he paused in his stride, came to a dead halt,



Archie's strange visitor was a somewhat peculiar specimen. He was, in fact, somewhat older than Archie.

along just behind, with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. It was morning, and we were descending for the work of the day.

"What's the excitement about?" I asked.

"No excitement," said Pitt. "But possibly you can tell me what the object is down in the lobby? Either Tubbs has been taking antipon, or my eyesight's got twisted!"

We looked down into the lobby. The page-boy was down there, attempting to pin a notice on the board. He was doing it most clumsily, and, indeed, making a hash of it. And he was certainly not Tubbs.

The previous evening, Tubbs had been in evidence, as usual. We had heard nothing about him going away, and it was rather surprising, therefore, to find a strange buttons in his place.

The newcomer was extremely weedy, and by what we could see, he had been born without a chin. He was obviously wearing Tubbs's uniform, for it hung loosely upon his frame, and his ankles protruded well out of the trousers.

and stood glaring aggressively at the unfortunate Clarence.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "Who the dickens do you think you are?"

This question was fairly roared out. Handforth had a most unfortunate habit of shouting at the top of his voice, in a most aggressive tone, if he happened to come upon something which was new to him. He always seemed to take it as a personal affront that anything fresh should take place at all.

Clarence turned, and tried to smile.

"Great pip!" said Handforth blankly.

"He had seen a few page-boys, but never one like this. Clarence was by no means a handsome youth at the best of times. His very prominent nose, and his extremely weak chin gave him the appearance of a comic drawing. And now his usually well-plastered hair was all brushed up into an untidy mop. This, as Phipps had explained, was more suitable for a page-boy, and would help the disguise.

"What's the idea?" demanded Handforth.

"Where's Tubbs? What the dickens are you doing in his place? And who are you, anyhow?"

"I—I— Rather!" said Clarence weakly.

"What?"

"I—I mean, jolly decent of you to——" Clarence paused, pulling himself up with a jerk. "Bust these notices!" he went on. "They're most deucedly hawkward, don't you know! Hi was hordered by the 'Ousemaster to pin these 'ere papers hup. Hand the bally things won't stick. By gad, they won't!"

Handforth reeled back.

He was astounded—and well he might have been. This extraordinary new page-boy spoke with an affected drawl—a real "toney" touch. But the addition of unnecessary aitches simply made his speech ludicrous.

"You—you funny idiot!" snapped Handforth. "What are you doing here? And what's the idea of all this fatheaded talk? I don't believe you're a page-boy at all! It's some dotty joke or other——"

"Oh, really!" protested Clarence, in alarm.

"Don't rot, you know!"

"Don't what?"

"I should say, you make a fellow nervous," said Clarence, taking a deep breath. "Hi ham the new page-boy. Gad, that's it! Tubbs 'as gorn hairway, don't you know. On his 'olidays—hon 'is bally vacation."

"Then Tubbs ought to be ashamed of himself!" said Handforth. "To leave a chap like you in his place is disgraceful! And what do you mean by telling me not to rot? Who do you think you are?"

"My dear fellow——"

"Dear fellow!" bawled Handforth. "One more word, my lad, and you go over backwards! And don't forget to call me 'sir.' I'm not going to be jawed at by a blessed buttons."

Clarence pulled himself together.

"Hi am sorry," he said nervously. "I'm blowed if I hain't, and all that sort of business. I 'ope you'll hexcuse me. I 'ave got to do some more busted work!"

Clarence scuttled off, thankful to escape. And Handforth stood looking after him wrathfully.

"The blithering fathead!" he said. "Just as I was going to dot him one on the nose, too! All right—I'll meet him later in the day. I'm blessed if I'm going to let a page-boy cheek me!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" I grinned. "The chap wasn't cheeking you intentionally. He couldn't help it."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it's just his way," I replied. "The fellow seems to be a bit of a novelty in the buttons line."

"He must have picked up a lot of ways from a classy family," chuckled Pitt. "He probably thinks he's talking the right stuff, but he made a terrible hash of it. I wonder why Tubbs has gone?"

"I'm going to find out!" said Handforth. "The nerve! Leaving a freak like that here! We didn't even ask his name."

Clarence, in the meantime, was hurrying to the servants' quarters. Arriving there, he went up the back stairs, and then along the

corridor until he came to a door. This, in fact, was the door of Archie's bedroom.

Archie had arrived at St. Frank's while the alterations were being effected to the Ancient House dormitories. He had therefore been placed in a room to himself. Now that the dormitories were completed, Archie still remained in his private room.

As his pater had explained to the Head, he was afraid that Archie would only get into trouble if he slept in the dormitory with the other juniors. He was different from everybody else. And Colonel Glenthorne was quite willing to pay extra fees. Consequently, Archie still reigned supreme in his own bedchamber.

Clarence tapped quickly upon the door.

"Enter, Phipps, lad—enter!" came Archie's voice.

Clarence entered, and found Archie sitting up in bed, attired in gaily coloured silken pyjamas. He was just about to rise—for he always believed in taking things easy.

"I mean to say, what!" he exclaimed blankly.

He stared at Clarence in a dazed kind of way.

"Do—do I look all right?" asked Clarence.

"Well, dash it all, not exactly!" said Archie. "Deucedly rotten, and all that, but a chappie must speak the truth. The fact is, Clarence, you look frightful! You look positively repulsive, and so forth! I'm dashed if you didn't give me quite a turn."

"I don't know about this idea!" said Clarence. "Your bally man is smart, but I don't think this will work. Oh, Archie, can't we think of something else? Something more secret?"

"Imposs., laddie—quite imposs.!" said Archie, shaking his head. "The scheme, as it were, is a priceless one. No trouble—nothing! I don't know what your deuced worry is, but you're safe. Absolutely secure! Nobody would suspect a page-boy, don't you know!"

"I—I hope not!" said Clarence fearfully.

"But really, so to speak, don't you know!" said Archie. "Really, and what not! The clothing, old sport! The clobber! Simply ghastly! Nothing more nor less than horrible! You look absolutely appalling!"

"That's what I thought, but Phipps says it doesn't matter," explained Clarence. "He reckons, you know, that it's all the better, and all that sort of business. And he ought to know. Phipps is brainy. I wish I had brains like Phipps—I'd soon think of something then."

"Don't you worry; it's all serene," said Archie. "Everything, in fact, in the garden is sublime."

"Perhaps it'll be all right after a bit."

"You'll be as comfortable as any old thing!" declared Archie cheerfully. "That is to say, old tulip, you'll be settled down. And now I think you'd better stagger away, or the chappies might think things. That would be frightfully awk.! Trot out, old lad—in other words, skid!"

Clarence took his departure, and went back to the servants' quarters. He had only been gone a few minutes when Phipps noiselessly

entered Archie's bedroom. He carried a newspaper in his hand, and he handed it to his young master. It was that morning's issue of the "Bannington Gazette."

"The jolly old rag, what!" said Archie. "Sporting of you, Phipps, but nothing doing! I'm not anxious to peruse——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I would suggest that you glance at the item in the stop-press news," said Phipps firmly. "It will be interesting, sir."

"But, I mean to say——"

"It is most important, sir."

"Dressing, and all that," said Archie. "What about it, you know? Something ought to be done, Phipps. The hour, as it were, is becoming somewhat late. Breakfast calling, and what not. The old rag can wait——"

"I repeat, sir, that it will be advisable if you glance at the paragraph I have mentioned without any delay," insisted Phipps. "I think you will agree, sir, that it is highly vital."

"Right ho, Phipps!" said Archie resignedly. "Right ho! It shall be done. Absolutely! While I'm allowing the old stuff to sink in, you might as well trot out the light-grey Norfolk."

"The Norfolk suit, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"Hardly suitable, sir," said Phipps. "I would suggest the lounge suit of blue serge, with the light-grey fancy vest as a possible addition."

"You really think so, Phipps?"

"I do, sir."

"But the jolly old Norfolk, don't you know, is frightfully comfortable," said Archie. "I'm not exactly keen on blue serge——"

"You look distinguished in it, sir," said Phipps.

"By Jove! I mean to say, really?" asked Archie. "Well, that's all right, Phipps. Quite, as you might say. Proceed with the old blue serge. And now I'll just cast the optics upon the printing material."

Archie gazed at the stop-press column, and commenced reading the short paragraph which Phipps had pointed out. He read it through, frowned somewhat, and then looked puzzled.

Once again he read through the paragraph, and this is what he saw:

"SHOCKING AFFAIR NEAR HELMFORD."

"A terrible shooting tragedy occurred just on the edge of the FitzGibbon estate, near Helmford, last night. Thomas Reed, a farm labourer, was found lying on a little-used foot-path in a dying condition, and suffering from a fatal shot wound.

"He was discovered by two of his fellow farm workers, and managed to gasp out the following words: 'He shot at me—I'm done!' The police have been informed, and further details are awaited.

"The brutal scoundrel who committed this crime has not been found, but there is a rumour to the effect that a young man dressed in a reddy-brown suit was seen in the vicinity, carrying a gun. The police are following up this clue.

"At the time of going to press no further information is available."

Archie laid the paper down, and gazed at Phipps.

"Awfully decent of you to think of me, laddie, but the good old enthusiasm fails to bubble!" he said. "These frightful affairs may interest you, Phipps, but I'm absolutely disgusted. Appalled, and so forth. The gory story interests me not, dear lad."

"You have read the item through, sir?"

"Absolutely."

"But surely, sir, you must be struck by this case?" asked Phipps. "Might I venture to remind you of the reddy-brown suit, that is mentioned? Rather significant, sir."

"Signif, what?" said Archie. "I'm afraid I don't follow the trend, Phipps. That is, I fail to grasp the——"

"Mr. Clarence, sir."

"Eh? What about the dear chappie?"

"His suit, sir," said Phipps. "Distinctly brown with a reddish hue. Then there is a mention of the FitzGibbon estate. And you are aware, sir, that Mr. Clarence came here asking to be concealed. He was flustered, sir, and——"

"But, but—I mean to say!" broke in Archie, horrified. "What? Dash it all, Phipps—— Oh, no! Never! I mean to say, absolutely imposs! I'm surprised at you, Phipps. Old Clarence? Positively imposs!"

"I wish I could share your opinion, sir."

Archie gazed at the newspaper again.

"But—but this is quite ghastly!" he said blankly. "I mean, as it were, dashed rotten! Old Clarence shooting a chappie, and all that! There must be some horrible mistake, Phipps. Oh, absolutely!"

"I'm afraid it is only too obvious, sir."

Archie had gone somewhat pale, and now he jumped out of bed and paced up and down in his pyjamas. He found his monocle on the dressing-table, and seemed slightly relieved as he jammed it into his eye.

"Gives a chappie more confidence, and all that!" he exclaimed. "But, I mean to say! Clarence! You really think, Phipps, that the lad has been perpetrating some frightful deed? You think, in fact, that the whole thing is ob.?"

"I'm afraid I do, sir."

"But—but—— I mean—— Well, as it were—— Dashed if I can command the old flow!" said Archie helplessly. "The bally words refuse, Phipps—positively stick in the jolly old throttle!"

"The whole affair is very disquieting, sir."

"Disquieting!" echoed Archie. "I mean, what priceless rot! Sorrow, Phipps, and all that, but I really must speak bluntly. Absolutely! Disquieting is not the word to use—a bally silly word, in fact. This business is positively staggering. Frightful, don't you know. To be quite candid, putrid!"

"How do you intend to act, sir?" asked Phipps.

"Act?" repeated Archie vaguely. "That

as to say, how—Dash it all, Phipps, you're not going to desert me? This is just when I need you, old lad! This, in fact, is where you do the rallying round stunt! You've got to gather up the old forces and get busy!"

"I take it, sir, that you wish me to look into this affair?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then I would suggest, sir, that you get dressed as soon as possible, and go downstairs," said Phipps. "I will then bring Mr. Clarence into your study, and you will have an opportunity of questioning him. I think we shall soon know whether Mr. Clarence is at all connected with this Helmford outrage."

"Brilliant, Phipps—sparkling, to be exact!" said Archie admiringly. "What-ho! I mean to say, just the very stuff! Get old Clarence, and put him through it, what? Shove the old inquiries forward, and demand truthful replies? We'll go to work in a masterly way, Phipps. And now for the blue serge, and so on."

Archie was dressed much more quickly than usual. Nevertheless, when he emerged, he was looking spick and span from top to toe, and he lounged downstairs, and made his way to Study No. 13. He was very glad that none of the juniors stopped him on the way. His head was buzzing with anxiety, and he wanted to find out the truth about Clarence without any delay.

Phipps was as good as his word—in fact, better. For Clarence was already waiting in Archie's study when the latter arrived. He was looking nervous and scared.

"Oh, so here you are, old fruit!" said Archie. "Bright and chirpy, what? I mean to say, not exactly! The old face, don't you know, is somewhat pasty, and all that kind of rot! What's the trouble, Clarence? Speak up laddie, and explain. You've been up to something appalling—I know it. Bring out the narrative. In other words, trot it up!"

"I—I can't explain, Archie!" said Clarence shakily.

"That's dashed awkward!" said Archie. "Now, old bean, I'm going to put it to you straight. Just like the chappie in the detective story, don't you know. Stand there and gaze at me!"

Archie adjusted his monocle, and regarded Clarence sternly.

"The fact is, laddie, you've been doing things with a bally gun!" he said. "Shooting people, and all that! I mean to say, murder, and so forth! Deucedly serious business, Clarence!"

Clarence went white, and clutched at the table.

"Murder!" he whispered. "But—but—Oh, Archie! It can't be true! The man isn't really dead——"

"Great gadzooks!" said Archie blankly. "Then—then, as it were, you actually did the trick? You positively potted the poor old cove?"

"Yes!" muttered Clarence wretchedly.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESPERATE CRIMINAL!



ARCHIE sank weakly into a chair.

"The fact is, I'm too young!" he observed, in a hollow voice. "But this is just the time when a chappie needs a whacking stimulant,

and what not! The good old B. & S. would be the pater's reviver, but there's nothing doing in that line with Archie. But I mean to say, I need things! The cup of tea would come in frightfully useful. Awfully priceless stuff, tea, don't you know. Steadies the old nerves wonderfully!"

"What does it matter about tea?" asked Clarence. "How—how much do you know, Archie!"

"Everything!"

"You—you mean all about the gun accident?"

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "Eh, what? I mean to say, what-ho! What-ho! What's this, old dear? Accident? That is to say, didn't you shoot the cove on purpose?"

"On purpose!" said Clarence huskily. "Of course not! It was an accident, Archie! Oh, but they won't believe it—I know they won't! I can't think of anything!"

"Well, there you are?" said Archie. "As a matter of fact, Clarence, you always were somewhat scattered, what? That is to say, the works in the attic are frightfully sluggish, and all that. Pints of lubrication required, don't you know. But here you are. Gaze upon it, laddie!"

Archie handed over the newspaper, and Clarence read the report in the stop-press column with eyes that fairly bulged from his head. The newspaper fell from his shaking fingers when he had finished.

"Oh, it's too awful!" he muttered. "They—they'll have me!"

"Well, rather!" said Archie. "Most horribly foul, as you might say, but there it is! The gallows, and all that!"

"Don't!" said Clarence, with a gulp.

"Dear old lad, it must be faced!" said Archie firmly. "You've got to be brave—you've got to gather up the old courage. I mean to say, it's deucedly hard on me! Losing a pal, and so forth!"

Clarence fairly shook.

"Hard on you!" he said weakly. "What about me? They'll take me away, Archie—they'll execute me, you know!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Quite horrid, but these things do happen! A chappie can't go about shooting people——"

"But it was an accident!" persisted Clarence. "I—I was afraid to tell you before, but I suppose I'd better make a clean breast of it. You've got to help me, Archie—you absolutely must!"

"But, really—I mean—— Well, proceed with the old tale!" exclaimed Archie. "I'm dashed worried, don't you know. The whole posish. is frightfully diff.!"

"It's not difficult for you——"

"Harbouring a criminal, and things like that!" said Archie. "Why, dash it all! I mean to say, dash it all! They'll shove me in chokey, Clarence! Positively bung me behind the old bars! Aiding and abetting, and what not! It's a dashed serious business!"

"Oh, but Archie, you wouldn't desert me!" pleaded Clarence, with a choke in his voice. "Listen! I'll tell you what happened!"

"Good! Carry on, darling!"

"You see, I was out last night for a bit of sport," said Clarence. "I mean, in the evening, while it was dusk. You've been to Fitz-Gibbon Hall, haven't you?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Thousands of times, my dear sportsman. I've staggered to the old spot once a year, at least."

"Then you know that there are some priceless rabbit warrens just near the Bannington Road end of the estate," said Clarence. "I'm rather keen on rabbit shooting. A real sport, in fact. Dead shot, Archie. Well, I took the pater's rifle out last evening——"

"But, here, I say!" interrupted Archie. "I say! Apply the brake, old lad! Ease up! What about it? I mean to say, a rifle! Rabbit shooting, don't you know! Decidedly unusual, what?"

"I know that," said Clarence. "But I couldn't find a shot-gun. The pater's rifle was handy, and there's more sport in it, too. You've got to be a dead shot to hit a rabbit with a single bullet. Well, I saw a rabbit just against a hedge, and I took aim, and pulled the trigger."

"And the rabbit expired?"

"I—I don't know," said Clarence. "Oh, it was awful! Terrible, Archie! Absolutely terrible!"

"Because you missed, what?"

"No, no! Of course not!" muttered Clarence. "Directly I shot, I heard somebody give a frightful cry, just on the other side of the hedge."

"By Jove!" said Archie. "A frightful cry, what?"

"Yes! And—and I knew that I'd done something awful!" said Clarence. "For a few moments I was rooted to the spot—frozen, don't you know. Positively frozen with horror, Archie!"

Archie nodded sympathetically.

"I've had it!" he said. "Absolutely! The same old sensation. Makes a chappie most deucedly uncomf. I remember once, in the summer, don't you know. I was strolling down Piccadilly with the pater. Then I found a bally button missing from my waistcoat! Most horrid shock, you know. Just the same as you, Clarence. Rooting business, and all that. I positively froze solid; and the sun was streaming down like what-not."

"But that wasn't like this—it couldn't have been!" said Clarence impatiently. "It's not half so bad to lose a button as it is to kill somebody."

"No, I suppose not," said Archie. "Although dear lad, they're both frightfully beastly things to happen to a chappie."

"After a bit, I sort of came to myself," said

Clarence. "So I ran forward, pushed through a gap in the hedge, and then I found a—a man lying there. Oh, Archie! It was fearful! I can see him now."

"I mean to say, not really!" said Archie, looking round.

"In—in my mind, I mean!" exclaimed Clarence. "He was lying there, Archie—absolutely still, you know. As still as anything. And there was—you know—blood, you know. Oh, I can't talk about it! I'd shot him. I'd killed him. I think I lost my wits at first."

"Oh, come," protested Archie. "I mean to say, come. A chappie can't lose something he hasn't got. Quite imposs., Clarence! But I gather the trend. I grasp the old idea. I take it that you were somewhat flustered?"

"I didn't know what to do," said Clarence. "So, after a bit, I just ran off. I ran like mad. I daren't go home, and I daren't do anything. Then—then, like a flash, I thought of you."

"Frightfully decent!" said Archie. "At the same time, old walnut, it would have been a dashed lot better if you'd have thought of somebody else! You see, the posish. is quite appalling here. School, and all that. Publicity, you know. We're in a ghastly pickle, Clarence. Fairly, as it were, in the old gravy—that is to say, the soup. Wallowing, to be exact."

"I came to you because there was nobody else," said Clarence. "And now I suppose you'll turn against me. Oh, Archie, what are you going to do?"

"Send for Phipps," said Archie.

Clarence looked startled.

"But—but Phipps mustn't know——"

"I mean, what rot!" said Archie. "Phipps knows everything."

"You've told him?" gasped Clarence.

"My priceless ass, he told me!" said Archie calmly.

"Then—then he'll inform the police, and—and they'll come!" moaned Clarence. "I'm going, Archie; I've got to escape."

"Don't be so bally ridic.!" said Archie. "Phipps is the lad with the brains. He'll see that everything is all serene. Phipps, in fact, will do the trick. Leave it to him, laddie, and there you are. The stuff!"

Clarence sank back into his chair, and had nothing to say. And then the door silently opened, and Phipps glided in. His face was quite expressionless as he stood looking respectfully at Archie.

"You rang, sir?" he said.

"The fact is, Phipps, yards of trouble!" said Archie. "Tons of it, in chunks! Dear old Clarence is under the surface, as you might say. The shocking truth has come out, and all that sort of thing. What's to be done, Phipps?"

"You are referring, I presume, sir, to the little matter mentioned in the morning newspaper?"

"Little matter?" echoed Archie. "I mean to say! The fact is, Phipps, we all look like taking a spell in the old jug!"

"The jug, sir?"

"That is to say, the place where chappies wear broad arrows, and what not," said

Archie. "I don't want to be frightfully gloomy, and depressing to a fellow, but the facts are rotten. Absolutely! If the police trickle round, we shall all be landed, Phipps. And, to tell the truth, I'm expecting a whole squad of the bounders to appear on the horizon at any moment."

Phipps shook his head.

"I hardly think so, sir," he said. "Do I understand that Mr. Clarence acknowledges his connection with the unfortunate affair?"

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "The dear lad can't do anything else. He shot the poor chappie, and that's it. A fellow can't bluff it out, you know. The bally thing's obvious."

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps.

"And serious."

"Very, sir."

"Oh, don't tell on me!" pleaded Clarence pitifully. "It—it was an accident! I was shooting at a rabbit, you know, and that chap was behind the hedge. I didn't do it on purpose."

"I quite appreciate that, sir," said Phipps. "A most regrettable accident. The position is somewhat grave."

"Supposing they catch me?" asked Clarence fearfully. "I—I suppose I shall be charged with murder, and then they'll hang me. Oh, it's awful! I'm in a ghastly pickle! You've simply got to help me, Archie!"

"Rather!" said Archie. "Phipps, what about it?"

"I hardly think that Mr. Clarence would be charged with murder, sir," said Phipps. "He can undoubtedly prove that the whole affair was an accident. And that, of course, makes a great deal of difference."

Clarence looked hopeful.

"Do you think they might let me off?" he breathed.

"Well, not exactly, sir."

"But they won't hang me?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Phipps. "If you are unfortunately captured, the charge will probably be one of manslaughter."

"Oh, dear!" said Clarence weakly. "Is—is that bad?"

"Very serious, sir."

"Chokey, and all that?" asked Archie.

"Possibly a term of fifteen years' penal servitude, sir!"

"Fifteen years!" shrieked Clarence. "But—but I shall be over thirty then! And I've got to go up to Oxford, and my pater—"

"Of course, sir, things might not be quite so bad as that," interrupted Phipps smoothly.

"Being a minor, you will probably be sent to a reformatory—Borstal, for example. And by good behaviour you might even be released after a comparatively brief period—say, for instance, a matter of five years."

"Oh, I think I shall die!" groaned Clarence feebly.

"I say!" exclaimed Archie. "Dear old fruit! I say! Come, don't you know! I say! Somewhat gloomy, and all that! Phipps, old lad, we've got to buck the poor bounder up! We have, as it were, glanced upon the dark side. What about the bright and cheery

prospect? How do we stand? Any glimpse? Any glimpse of the good old hope?"

"Quite a distinct glimmer, sir," said Phipps.

"Gadzooks! You've thought of something?"

"In a way, yes, sir."

"There you are!" said Archie. "Dear old Clarence, what did I tell you? Haven't I always said that Phipps is a marvel? Fact is, he's simply one large mass of brain fitted with legs! Trot it out, Phipps—roll up with the scheme!"

Phipps coughed.

"Well, it is hardly a scheme, sir," he said. "And at the moment I do not feel justified in going into details. I suggest, however, that Mr. Clarence shall remain in the school until the evening—that is, until darkness falls."

"And then the old smuggling stuff?" asked Archie. "Spiriting the dear chappie away, and all that kind of rot?"

"Something like that, sir," agreed Phipps.

"But what's to be done now—right on the spot, so to speak?"

"I consider it would be inexpedient for Mr. Clarence to show himself, sir," said Phipps. "When I made the suggestion that Mr. Clarence should become temporary pageboy, I was unaware of the true state of things. The matter is far more serious than we first imagined, sir."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Absolutely!"

"I would suggest, therefore, that Mr. Clarence remains within this apartment as much as possible," said Phipps. "During the period when lessons are proceeding, he will be quite undisturbed. At the luncheon hour I will see what can be done to make the position more easy."

"There you are, Clarence, dear lad!" exclaimed Archie. "Nothing to worry about. Of course, it's deucedly frightful, harbouring a criminal, and so forth, but these things are sent to try one, what?"

Phipps glided silently out, and Clarence did not look quite so nervous.

"Oh, I wish I knew how it was going to end!" he said huskily. "It—it's all so uncertain, Archie. Beastly undecided, you know."

Archie gazed at Clarence through his monocle.

"Well, old top, we're doing the best," he said. "Phipps is rallying round like one of the real lads. I mean to say, you ought to have trotted out the whole bally yarn last night. Then we should have known things. As it is, we hadn't the faintest notion that you were in such a ghastly old mess!"

"I—I was so scared!" said Clarence.

"Well, there you are! Potting chappies with rifles rather makes a fellow nervous, I should think," said Archie. "I'm doing something frightful by allowing you to remain. But, dash it all, I can't go back on a pal. I can't leave him in the old mire, as it were. Cheer up,

(Continued on page 25.)

THIS WEEK'S BAD BOY'S DIARY—"THE PARTY!"

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1922.



ST. FRANK'S
FROM THE PLAYING FIELDS.



FROM LAST WEEK.

The Bad Boy has three grown-up sisters, whose good looks have attracted many suitors in the town. Bent on mischief, the Bad Boy gets hold of a number of photos belonging to his sisters of their admirers. The photos have been humorously touched up and inscribed with uncomplimentary remarks by his sisters for their own amusement. Unbeknown to his sisters, the Bad Boy returns the photos to each of the young men concerned. A party is to be given the following week, and these young men are invited. How the party "went off" is told in the following amusing extract from the Diary.—

THE EDITOR.

O DERE! O dere! Wot a world this is! Little boys are born to trubble as the sparks are to fly upwards. It's over a week since I've had the harte to rite one word in my diry.

Poor diry! 'The reckord of a braking harte, I come to thee for consultashun!

On this paige will I inscribe my wose. It hurts me yet to sit down square on my sete, but I will tri to bare it for thi sake.

It all dates from the day I carrid the fellers back their fotografs. As I said, the girls they tezed ma to give 'em a party, wich she promised, so they was in hi fether, an' begun to rite out the list of those they meant to ast, that afternoon.

They wur all three as bizy as bees, an' I was bein' good, settin' on a chare, a listenin' quietly, coz I was tired, when the bell wrung, an' who do you s'pose it proofed to be but our Aunt Betsey, she that lives at Hoppertown an' comes to see us twicest a yere.

My sisters was put out, 'cause they gnu she'd stay a week, an' be here to the party. Lily made a rye face when she herd it.

"Nasty ole thing!" sez she; "she alwis comes at the most unconvynyant times."

"She'll be sure to stay," says Bess, "if she heres about it, and she'll ware that old green silk o' vera, with a yellow hed-dress, and them lile thred gloves."

"She'll mortify us awfully," sez Sue.

I b'leve Aunt Betsey is witch, but she's that old-fashioned you'd think she come out of the ark, with the animals, too an' too, only Aunt Betsey must a come alone, 'cause she is a ole made.

So when I heard 'em say they hoped she wouldn't stay to the party, I hoped she wouldn't too. To tell the truth, I had a gilty conshuns 'bout those fotografs wich I had done for spite.

Oh, it is drefful to hav a gilty conshuns, it ways like lead. I wisht I hadn't done it, but there's no use cryin' for spilt milk, so I resolved I'd do suthing for my sisters to make up.

When tea was over, I got Aunt Betsey by herself into 'he hall, and said to her:

"Wood you like to make my sisters happy?"

"What do you mean?" sez she.

"'Cause if you wood," sez I, "please go away before the party. They don't want you here that night. I herd 'em say so. Don't let on I tole you, Aunt Betsey, but jus' go home quiet the day before nex' Thursday, an' I'll be obliged to you as ever was."



My sisters lektured me for half an hour on how to behave at parties.

I don't think it was well-bred o' her to get angry when I spoke to her so polite, do you? It was rele mene to go an' tell when I ast her not to speke about it, wich she did so quick as ever she could, an' the next mornin' she up an' went away, sayin' she'd never, never, never visit us agane.

But that ain't all. It seems my papa had borroed a lot o' money frum 'er, 'cause the times is 'ard, she twitted 'im with that, an' givin' parties on borroed capital.

Of coarse the rath of all fell on one poor little ait yere ole boy. Suthin' else fell two. I'll not disgrace thee, my diry, by sayin' wot—it is enuff to ad they spoiled the child, altho they did not spare the rod.

Betty pitied me, an' maid me a rele soft quishion out of a ole pillo. I ain't gone out fur fear the boys would notis there was suthin' rong; time passes awful slow. I do not think I'd care to be a Robinson Crusoe. When I grow up and have a little boy I will not trete him so. I will not punish him fur wot he didn't mene to do, but fede him on sponge-cake three times a day, nor let his older sisters speke to him that rude as if he was a monstir.

All this time my mind was never esy about them fotografs. I expected evry hour the cat would be let out the bag wot I had done.

Day after day passed by; the nite of the party came at last. Betty drest me in my best sute, tide on my new cravat, an' put lots o' sent on my handkercher, my sisters lektured me for half an hour on how to behave at parties or I'd be sent to bed, an' I was aloud to come in the parlor.

The house was all lit up, there was bokase everywhere, a man come to play the peano. My mouth watered to think o' the ise-cream an' cake, the orranges an' gelly, the chicken salad, an' the sandwiches wich was in the dinin'-room. The girls looked awful handsome dressed in white, their crimping-pins took out, their eyes brite, flowers in their hair.

The company began to arrive. All the fashunable yung ladys of the villedge wot moved in our set come—the clock struck nine—the only gentleman present was Dockter Moore, the one that's going to marry Sue. My sisters began to look trubbled. I was shakin' in my shoes.

The feller at the peany plaid an' plaid. Some of the girls took hold of one anuther an' woltzed around, but they did not seme to enjoy it much. Half-pas' nine struck on the clock!

Oh, how my guilty conshuns wade me down! I said to myself:

"The trane is lade, the slo-match is applide, now for the jeneral bust-up!"

The gests began to whisper, the girls looked like they would sink thru a augur'-ole. Then the bell rung rele loud; everybuddy britened up, but it was only Betty brought a card in an' 'anded it to my sisters. They turned all colors when they seed wot it was. It wasn't "regrets" at all—only a fotograf wich they 'ad writ an' wich used to be in their drawer of their desk. The bell rung again—another foto! Phancy the seen!

That bell rung twenty times, an' every time it was anuther, an' anuther, an' anuther.

At last two yung men arrived. I knu in a minit how they happened to come. On their cards was writ: "Oh, you darling felloe!" An' "Too bright, too butiful to last!" wich was clerk in a shoe-store, but he didn't see the pun.

They got up a set o' lancers, with three gentlemen an' five ladies. Miss Hopkins, she giggled a good deel of the time; my sister most cried. The supper was tip-top, but I knu the party was a fizzle. I felt so unesy I had to give up on my fifth saweer of ice-cream.

"If I knu who did it," I herd Sue tellin' the dockter, "I'd shoot 'im—yes, I wood! A mene, dastardly, practical goke. I hate such gokes! They're mad at us now. We can never make it up. We'll have to move to some other town to live. I shall never dare to show my face on the strete agane. I wish I could find out who did it!"

"P'raps George can give you some information," sez the dockter, lookin' me strate in the eye.

"Oh, no!" sez I, "lest it was Towser. I give 'im some of them fotografs to chew on, an' he may a dropped 'em on the strete."

"Then you had them?" sez she, quite awful like.

The cat was out o' the bag. I slipped away an' went to bed. I didn't want to be around when the folks went away.

I lay and thunk, and thunk, a long time. I knew I was in for another whipping. I have not yet rekuvered from the effects o' the tother one. It seemed to me I could not bare the trials wich morning had in store for me.

I couldn't sleep a wink. I was detyrmined to run away. There was Aunt Betsey; it was only fifty miles by rale to her house. I'd bin there oncet. I had two dollars in my bank. The moon was shinin' brite as day. I got up and drest myself, took my bank krept down-stares as still as a mouse, unlocked the front door, and stept out.

I run as fast as I could lick it to the station. It was gettin' daybrake. A goods trane stood on the switch blowing off steme. I wotched my chance, an' krept into a car wich was empty.

Pritty soon the bell rung—we wur off! "Farewell, my friends," sez I. "You won't be bothered with that bad boy no more. He's goin' to lye lo till the storm blows over."



I ran as fast as I could lick it to the station.

Further Confessions of the BAD BOY will be told next week under the title of:

THE ELOPEMENT



Pogo in the Pyrenees.

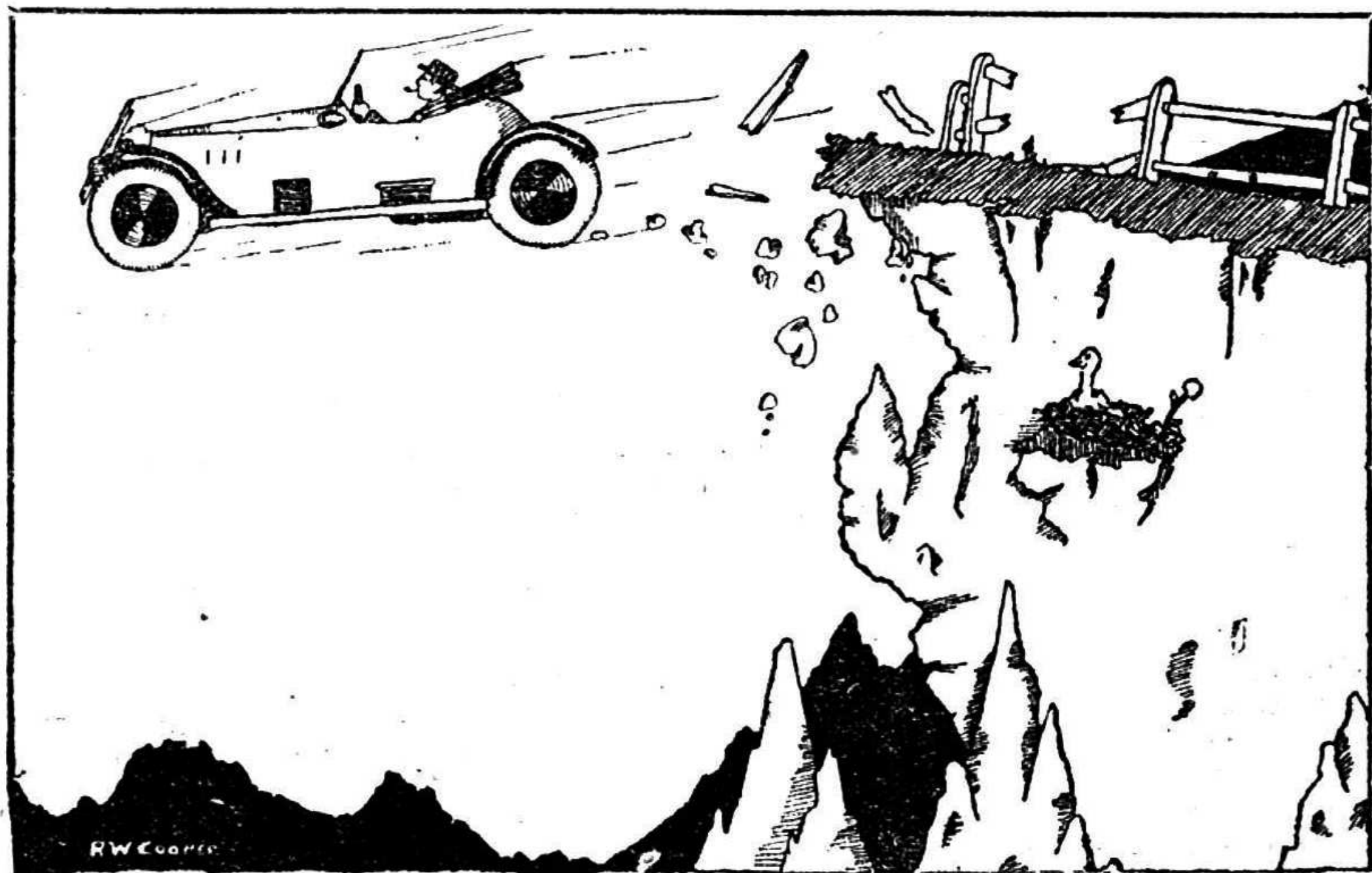
A SCHOOLBOY ARTIST.

THE two sketches on this page are by a young artist whose work has never before been published. Robert Cooper is, in fact, only fourteen years of age.

He is the son of Mr. Henry St. John, the popular author of so many famous boys' stories. He has never had any training as an artist. But he has been trying to make sketches ever since he was old enough to hold a pencil.

Robert lives at Sunbury, a small up-river resort on the Thames. He has read the NELSON LEE LIBRARY ever since it first appeared, so that he can justly call himself one of its oldest readers. And it was his greatest wish that one day his sketches should appear in it. This wish has been granted him—and very much earlier than in the case of most boys.

I think this is a very good illustration of the old motto, "Keep on Trying," for it mustn't be supposed that Master Cooper has done these sketches so well by accident. They are the result of great patience and perseverance. And their publication in NIPPER'S MAGAZINE is very well earned.



Short-sighted Motorist: "Best bit of road I've struck for weeks!"

SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS.

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



Where Nuts Come From.

During a geography lesson on the peninsula of Spain and Portugal, the master of a school in Marylebone had an incidental experience which was quite as

diverting as it was unforeseen.

Towards the close of the lesson, he touched upon some of the exports of the peninsula, such as wine, raisins, oranges, lemons, nuts, etc.

In connection with the export of nuts, the lads heard with much interest that everyone of the "little nuts"—or reddiees—which were sold in English shops, came from over the seas, and, in fact, were gathered in the extensive woods around the town of Barcelona. The master assured his class that, in the neighbourhood of this town, the nuts grew wild and in millions; and hence the reason that they could be sold so very cheaply.

On receiving this information, certain of the boys seemed to become extraordinarily excited; and one lad in particular could not contain himself, but committed a breach of discipline by whispering something in the ear of the scholar who sat next to him. The boy thus whispered to forthwith broke out into a half smothered laugh.

The master fixed his eyes sternly upon the two culprits, and said—

"Tell me instantly what that unseemly merriment is all about! Ben Chapman, what has Crossley said to you to make you laugh so?"

"Why, sir," replied Chapman, "it was abart them millions o' nuts growin' wild at Barcelona; he just said to me, 'Oh, golly there be some truantin' at them Barcelona Board Schools'!"

A Bit o' Luck!

The following incident also took place in a school which drew its children, for the most part, from the poorest classes.

A certain kindly-disposed gentleman had offered to give the children a magic-lantern lesson or entertainment, provided that the schoolmaster had no objection.

Amongst the pictures displayed was one entitled "A group of French peasants at supper." The lecturer, in speaking about this picture, explained to the lads in a chatty way that the French peasant's "supper" might be compared to the English labourer's "tea." And, moreover, he endeavoured to make clear to the children that our English meals, and the time at which we took them, did not quite correspond to those of the French, or other nations.

"For instance," he said, "if you lads have a meal at twelve o'clock noon, what do you call it?"

And one ragged, hungry-looking little urchin cried out from behind:

"Why, sir, a bit o' luck!"

I do not know whether this lad's answer—so eloquent in its way—made it occur to the gentleman that perhaps he was not giving these poor urchins the very best or most appropriate form of entertainment, or, at any rate, that it might well have been supplemented with something else.

* * *

"Admission" Defined.

During a reading lesson in a village school, the word "admission" happened to occur in the sentence which a lad had to read.

"What is the meaning of 'admission'?" asked the dominie.

The boy, taken by surprise, thought for a moment, and then stammered out—"Sixpence, sir!"

"How do you make that out?" the master asked.

"Why, sir, it says so on the Circus bill wot's on the Green!"

"Yes," added a lad next to him, by way of clinching the matter, "it's quite true, sir; an' children half-price!"

* * *

"Do take some jam," pressed the lady, kindly, "it is really very nice."

"No, thank yer," replied the lass, "I works where they makes it!"



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.

THE MAN WITH THE GREEN NOSE.

A Strange Client!

TRACKETT GRIM regarded the visitor curiously. The latter was certainly strange in appearance. He was a tall man, well dressed, and his face was almost completely hidden by a silk scarf which was wrapped round and round his head. Only his eyes were visible.

"Ah, good morning!" said Trackett Grim. "Pray be seated, sir. I can see you have a bad cold."

"Not at all!" said the client. "I will explain, Mr. Grim."

Trackett Grim looked hurt. This was the first time for ten years that any one of his deductions had been proved incorrect. But, as he explained to Splinter afterwards, the slip was a most natural one.

The client was obliged to unwrap the silk scarf before he could speak. And then he revealed to Trackett Grim's gaze an extraordinary deformity. His nose was a brilliant green in hue!

The Chemist's Revenge!

"Good gracious!" said Trackett Grim. "I can see, my dear sir, that you are suffering from some unfortunate malady!"

The client looked fierce.

"My name is Seymour Mutton, and I am a butcher in the village of Silverside," he said. "I have come to you, Mr. Grim, because you are the only man who can track down the author of this dastardly outrage!"

"Kindly tell me the facts," said Trackett Grim.

"I have an enemy, Mr. Grim—a miscreant who is black to his very soul!" said Mr. Mutton. "His name is Philip Fizick, and he is the village chemist. It was he who caused this beastly disfigurement."

"But how did he do it?" asked the great detective.

"My nose, for some reason unknown, has recently become rosy red," replied Mr. Mutton. "I have taken every kind of

stimulant, but to no purpose. Indeed, my nose got redder! I therefore went to Mr. Fizick for advice."

"But he is your enemy," said Trackett Grim.

"Unfortunately, he is the only chemist in Silverside," replied Mr. Mutton. "I was compelled to go to him. I will explain. Both Mr. Fizick and myself are in love with Miss Rosie Redd, the daughter of the man who owns the local dye works."

"And you objected to your nose resembling your fiancée's name?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Mutton. "Miss Redd

favoured me, and Mr. Fizick was cut out. And in his heart he nursed a vile hatred towards me. I didn't know this, for he kept his secret well. He gave me a pot of ointment to rub on my nose, and told me to apply it before going to bed. I did so—and this morning I awoke to find my nose a brilliant green!"

A Stiff Problem!

Trackett Grim rose, took out his magni-



Trackett Grim took out his magnifying lens and closely examined Mr. Mutton's nose.

ying lens, and closely examined Mr. Mutton's nose.

"Frightful!" he muttered. "A rotten outrage!"

"The scoundrel's object was clear," said Mr. Mutton fiercely. "He did this as a means of revenge, and to ruin my chances with Miss Rosie Redd. She will not look at me now. She says she will never look at me again!"

Trackett Grim sprang to his feet.

"Come!" he cried. "We will go to Silverside!"

A Startling Surprise!

Two minutes later Trackett Grim's magnificent racing car was speeding into the country, with the detective at the wheel, and Mr. Mutton clutching for dear life to anything that he could hold. For Trackett Grim never drove at anything less than sixty miles an hour.

Splinter had been left behind, to deal with thirty-four important clients who had made appointments for that morning. And Splinter could be relied upon to keep them waiting until Trackett Grim returned.

Silverside was reached without mishap, and just as Trackett Grim's car pulled up, the well-known figure of Sir Coppem Sharp crossed the pavement. The Chief of Scotland Yard nodded to Trackett Grim.

"So you are engaged on this case, too, Grim!" he said briskly. "A serious business. Mr. Reuben Redd has died!"

"But he's always dyeing!" said Trackett Grim.

"Exactly," agreed Sir Coppem. "But this is different. The poor man was foully murdered during the night!"

"Murdered!" gasped Mr. Mutton. "Rosie's father murdered! Impossible!"

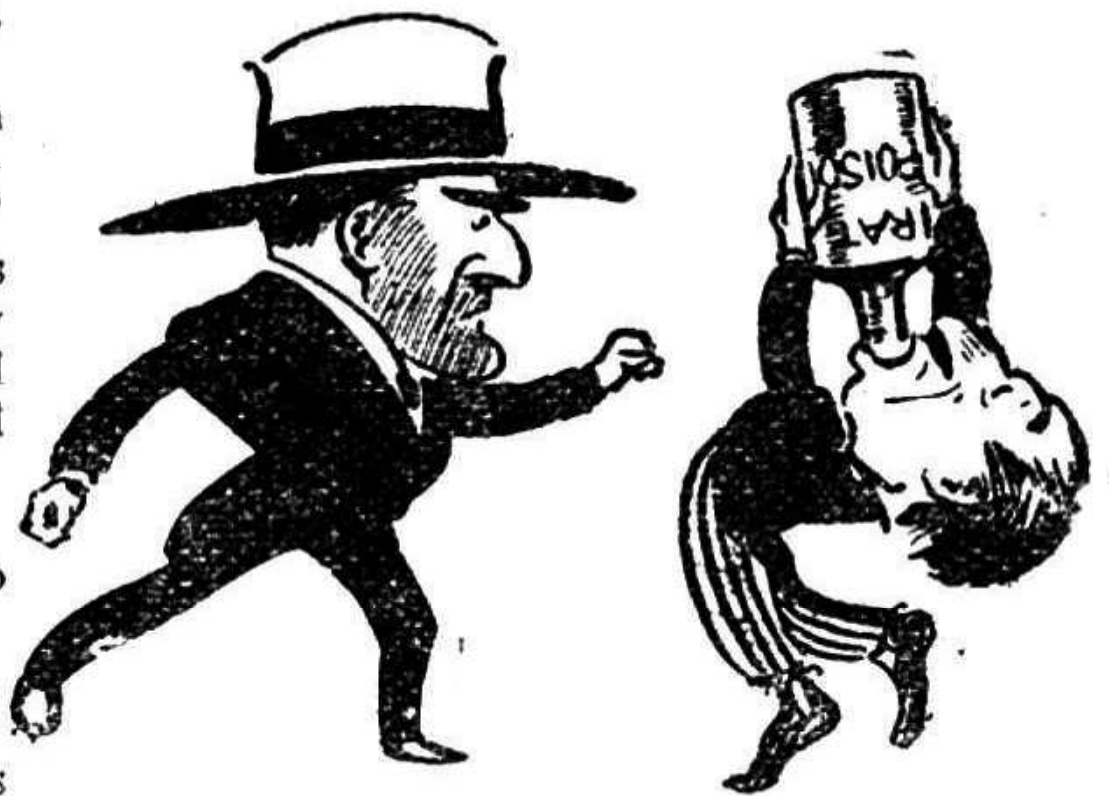
"Ah!" said Sir Coppem Sharp. "I know you! Your name is Seymour Mutton, and you have been missing since early morning! I arrest you on the charge of killing Mr. Reuben Redd. You foully did him in by ducking him in a vat of his own dye!"

Arrested!

Mr. Mutton staggered back with a hoarse cry.

"You fathead!" he roared. "You babbling lunatic! Do you think I killed the father of the girl I love?"

"The evidence is obvious!" said Sir Coppem curtly. "Mr. Redd was drowned in green dye—and a splash of it has fallen upon your nose. Such a clue is certain proof. You are under arrest!"



"Ha, ha! Too late!" jeered Mr. Fizick mockingly, as he emptied a bottle of rat poison down his throat.

Mr. Mutton turned frantically to Trackett Grim.

"Save me!" he wailed. "Save me, for I am innocent!"

"Have no fear!" said Trackett Grim, his voice soft and silky. "Have no fear, my friend! I am sure of your innocence, and I care not for all the evidence in the world. I will prove that you are not guilty. Be brave!"

Face to Face!

Sir Coppem Sharp laughed sarcastically.

"Do you think that you can whack Scotland Yard?" he asked contemptuously. "This man killed Mr. Redd, and stole the secret of Mr. Redd's marvellous new dye. That formula is worth a million, and the motive for the crime is clear."

Trackett Grim said no word, but jumped into his motor car, and sped away. He pulled up outside the chemist's shop, and dashed in. And there, behind the counter, stood Mr. Philip Fizick, surrounded by bottles of medicine. He was sleek and sinister looking.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"My name is Trackett Grim, the famous criminal detective——"

"Curse you!" snarled Philip Fizick. "The game is up! Once Trackett Grim is on the trail of a man, he is doomed! It would be useless for me to make any attempt to escape! Good-bye!"

"Don't go!" said Trackett Grim quickly. "My Heavens!"

"Ha, ha! Too late!" jeered Mr. Fizick, mockingly, as he emptied a bottle of rat poison down his throat. "I have foiled you!"

Mr. Mutton's Triumph!

Trackett Grim sprang forward, but it was useless. With a yell, the chemist collapsed into a heap on the floor. Two seconds later Trackett Grim had found the valuable dye formula. And at that moment Sir Coppem Sharp entered the shop with Mr. Mutton.

"Here is your prisoner!" cried Trackett Grim victoriously. "He may be dead, but he is the murderer of Mr. Reuben Redd!"

"Yes—yes, I confess!" gasped the dying man. "I wanted to make a fortune from the dye formula. I knew that Mr. Mutton is frequently at the Redd's house, so I placed green dye in his ointment so that he would be accused of the murder!"

But for Trackett Grim, my plot would have succeeded!"

Trackett Grim smiled.

"Take him away!" he said. "He has only consumed rat poison. In his flurry he made a mistake! Not being a rat, he will live!"

And the murderer was placed in handcuffs, taken away to the police court, and tried on the spot. Before the evening came, he had been hung—he had paid the full penalty for his crime.

And Mr. Mutton came off pretty well. For now he had Miss Redd for his own—and the dye works as well! Fortunately, his nose resumed its normal colour after a good wash.

Still again, Trackett Grim had proved his astounding powers.

THE EDITOR'S DEN

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

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

My Dear Chums,—I am giving Handy a rest next week. That is to say, I am holding over his Trackett Grim story in order to give some of the other fellows a chance to appear in print. Besides, I have found it necessary to make it plain to Edward Oswald that he is not the only fellow who can write things for the Mag.

ST. FRANK'S IN THIRTY YEARS' TIME.

Perhaps the most novel of next week's features will be a contribution by Jack Grey, entitled: "In Thirty Years' Time." It is a delightful glimpse into the future at St. Frank's. We are carried forward to Visitors' Day, 1952. Those whom we know so well as boys are now grown men of the world. Some have won wealth and fame; others have failed to achieve anything. Nevertheless, though they all bear the marks of time, they still retain much of their old characteristics.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS.

Reginald Pitt will give us another very human article, called, "The Book-Title Fiend," and Cecil de Valerie something quite out of the ordinary, entitled, "Impossibilities."

Your old Pal,
NIPPER (The Editor).

(Continued from page 16.)

Clarence—keep smiling, laddie. Rely on Phipps, and you'll be fixed up."

But the unfortunate Clarence FitzGibbon did not look very cheerful.

CHAPTER VI.

ROUGH ON CLARENCE.



THE hours seemed to pass terribly slowly.

Clarence, locked up in Archie's study, was comparatively safe for the time being. He had taken the precaution to secure the door on the inside—although there was not much likelihood of anybody trying to get in. Morning lessons were still in progress, and Archie was away.

While proclaiming that all lessons were a bore and a frightfully bally lag, Archie really seemed to enjoy being in the Remove Form-room. He was practically no trouble to Mr. Crowell, and his only serious complaint was that comfort in the Form-room was appallingly lacking.

However, Archie made up for this by spending most of his spare time lounging about in his own study, waited upon by the faithful Phipps. The genial ass didn't believe in doing anything himself if he could get somebody else to do it.

Clarence was not blessed with a large amount of brain power. At any ordinary time he was singularly obtuse and languid. His present predicament and peril had aroused certain dormant flashes of intellect within him. Ordinarily, he was one of the dumbest fellows it was possible to meet.

He was particularly fond of lolling about and doing nothing. But this morning he couldn't rest. He was on his feet nearly all the time—pacing aimlessly up and down Archie's study.

The solitude lent to his fears, and he was constantly expecting a few dozen police officers to pour into the Triangle—in search of him.

Time after time he went over the unfortunate incident which had led to the disaster. It wasn't his fault—he knew it wasn't. But the police wouldn't look at it in that way. It was rather strange, he thought, that they hadn't come for him already. But then, of course, they wouldn't think of looking in a big school like St. Frank's.

He read that report through in the stop-press column of the Gazette a dozen times. It gave him no comfort.

The unfortunate Thomas Reed was dead by this time, no doubt. He had been dying when the newspaper was printed—in the early hours of the morning. And the reference to a young man in a red-brown suit alarmed Clarence more than a little. The police couldn't fail to follow up a clue like that.

Clarence would be missing from home, of course. His father might even go to the police, and give a description. And this description would tally with that of the supposed mur-

derer. And all this meant, in brief, that the country was now being scoured, not for an unknown ruffian—but for Clarence FitzGibbon.

There was no clock in Archie's study, and Clarence couldn't see the high old clock tower of the school. But he thought that five or six hours had passed. The time ran slowly and painfully.

At last Clarence could stand it no longer.

He felt reckless and desperate, and he was tremendously uncomfortable because he hadn't got a handkerchief. So he rang for Phipps. As it happened, Phipps was busily engaged upon his duties as butler for Dr. Stafford, and didn't even hear the ring. So Clarence pushed the bell again.

The result was the same. In the end, Clarence unlocked the door, and peered cautiously up and down the passage. Everything was quiet and still. While lessons were on the junior corridors were always deserted. It seemed safe enough, and so Clarence took his courage in both hands.

He closed the study door, and crept softly down the passage. He wanted to find Phipps—but he certainly wouldn't find him by taking the direction he now chose. Clarence was unfamiliar with St. Frank's, and he certainly thought he was going the right way. As a matter of fact, he simply went down the Remove passage towards the lobby—whereas, the domestic quarters were in the opposite direction.

He found out his mistake quickly enough.

It was extremely unfortunate that such a thing should happen just while Clarence was out of Archie's study. But things generally happen like this. The fugitive junior could not have ventured forth at a more unsuitable time.

For, just as he was beginning to realise that he was going wrong, a small, thin gentleman appeared from the direction of the lobby. He was walking uncertainly, peering over the tops of his spectacles. It seemed as though he was not quite certain as to his bearings.

Clarence came to a halt, and nearly expired on the spot.

"The pater!" he muttered fearfully.

He stood rooted there, and clutched at a doorpost. He closed his eyes, gasping for breath, and all the colour had fled out of his cheeks. The sight of his father was so unexpected and so significant that Clarence felt like sinking through the floor. His alarm was terrible.

Fortunately for him, Sir Cyril FitzGibbon was decidedly shortsighted, and if he saw anything at all, it was merely a blur—just an indistinct figure up the passage which could not even be recognised as a pageboy. But Clarence, in his alarm, overlooked his father's shortsightedness. One thought gripped him—he must make himself scarce—he must vanish.

The most simple method, of course, was to scoot back with all speed, and take refuge in Archie's study. But Clarence hadn't the presence of mind to do a sensible thing like this. He lost his head completely.

And he simply dived into the first doorway—and found himself within Study D. This, of course, was just a pure piece of chance.

But, anyway, he was safe for the moment.

He closed the door, and breathed hard. His father was here—at St. Frank's! Clarence was so startled that he had gone as pale as a ghost. What could it mean? Why was Sir Cyril at the school?

So far as Clarence could remember, his pater had never been to St. Frank's before. Then why should he come to-day? Obviously because he was in search of his son. Something had been discovered—perhaps the full truth was out!

In his panic, Clarence shivered and shook as he stood. This was awful—really too awful to stand. He sank limply into a chair.

And then, dimly, he became aware of the fact that fellows were shouting out in the Triangle. There was a stamping of feet in the passage. The Remove, in fact, had been released from morning lessons.

For a moment or two the significance of this fact did not penetrate into Clarence's mighty brain. But then suddenly he heard a much louder voice than the others. It was the voice of the terrible fellow who had questioned him earlier in the morning!

Clarence was in a fearful fix.

Realisation came to him in a flood. The fact that his father was at St. Frank's was bad enough, but it would be truly appalling if he was discovered in this study by its rightful owners.

Some sort of instinct told Clarence that not a second was to be lost. With a little yelp of dismay he dived head first under the table. This, fortunately, was provided with a cloth so that he was concealed.

And then the door opened, and Handforth and Co. marched in.

Clarence caught his breath in with a gulp. Only in the nick of time had he found cover. The narrowness of his escape nearly caused him to faint on the spot. He crouched there, shivering with apprehension.

"You chaps can say what you like, but it's fishy!" exclaimed Handforth. "I've been thinking about it all the morning. The silly ass isn't a page-boy at all! There's some spoof about it, I believe!"

"Well, suppose there is?" said Church. "What's it matter to us? No need to make a mystery out of nothing, Handy!"

"I'm not asking for your opinion!" said Handforth tartly. "In any case, you're not expected to investigate. It needs a detective to do real work of that kind. I've had lots of experience, and when I get an idea that something is fishy, it's always an absolute fact. My instinct is unerring!"

"All right, go ahead, Trackett Grim!" said Church. "The Mystery of the Strange Buttons! Trackett Grim grimly on the track!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very funny, isn't it?" roared Handforth. "You leave Trackett Grim alone! I created him—the greatest detective in modern fiction! But we're not talking about the Mag. now. I want to find out who that imbecile is who pretends to be a page-boy! I'm going to rout out his secret!"

Clarence shivered. He didn't want to overhear things that were not meant for his ears, but he couldn't very well avoid it; and this conversation vitally concerned himself.

"I say, Handy, better chuck it up!" said McClure. "After all, what does it matter about a page-boy? Your powers are worthy of some greater cause. Don't waste your time——"

"I don't want any rot from you, McClure!" interrupted Handforth. "The best thing you two chaps can do now is to dry up! I want to think; I've got to concentrate! This problem needs a lot of unravelling!"

"Which problem?" asked Church.

"Why, that page-boy."

"But he's not a problem——"

"Are you going to dry up, or shall I punch your nose?" snapped Handforth tartly. "If either of you speak again, I'll let fly! When a detective's got to think, he must have perfect quietness!"

"Yes; but look here! We're not going to sit here like a couple of dummies!" protested McClure. "I wanted to have a chat about football. There's an important match on Saturday——"

"I gave you warning, and now you'll have to suffer the consequences!" interrupted Handforth deliberately. "Will you put up your fists, Arnold McClure, or shall I punch your nose on the spot?"

"Look here, Handy——"

Handforth pushed up his sleeves and gave the table a jerk. He lifted one corner and heaved the edge up so that the table toppled completely over with a crash. This, of course, was a usual proceeding in Study D. Sometimes the table went over when it was full of things.

"Now!" said Handforth grimly. "We can move about now, my sons! And you'd better put your hands up—— Why, what the dickens! Well, I'm jiggered! Great pip!"

Handforth stared blankly at the spot where the table had just been. There, crouching down and looking as pale as a ghost, was the unfortunate Clarence. The sudden removing of the table from over his head had come as a tremendous shock, and he had not been prepared for it. All he could do was to kneel on the floor and blink.

Church and McClure stared at him in astonishment. They had had no suspicion that the remarkable new page-boy was in the study. Handforth simply glared, and then became icily calm.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Oh, so that's it, eh? Spying! Sneaking into the studies and eavesdropping! Get up!"

"I—I—that is, I—I——"

"Get up!" shouted Handforth grimly. "Don't kneel there mouthing at me! You rotter! You spying bounder! I'll show you what you'll get for playing a game of this kind!"

Clarence rose shakily to his feet.

"But, don't you know, I—I couldn't help it!" he stammered, in a feeble voice. "That is, I came in by accident. Absolutely an accident! Frightfully sorry, old chap! Er—I—I think I'll go, if you don't mind!"

"Well, I do mind!" said Handforth curtly. "You've got to explain just why you were hiding under that table, my lad. You've got to explain a few other things, too!"

Clarence clutched at the overturned table for support. This, of course, was the end. He was trapped—hopelessly and horribly trapped!

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST STRAW!



HANDFORTH looked at Clarence sternly.

"Now then, my lad, cough it up!" he exclaimed. "Church, stand by the door in case he bolts! I'm not going to hurt the chap;

I don't believe in that sort of thing. But I'm jolly well going to find out the truth!"

"I'm—I'm in—in a fearful hurry, you know!" said Clarence desperately.

"Very likely, but I'm not," said Handforth. "I don't believe you're a page-boy at all. You don't talk a bit like one, and I've suspected something ever since you first appeared; and now I mean to get to the bottom of it. What's your name?"

"Clarence. I—I mean——"

"Clarence!" gasped Handforth. "Great pip! Of all the nerve! A page-boy having a name like Clarence! Why, it's unheard of; it oughtn't to be allowed! And it proves that I was right!"

Clarence was so scared that he hardly knew what to do. He realised that he had made a terrible slip by giving his real name. He felt at that moment that he would like the floor to open and swallow him. Anything to get out of the presence of these curious juniors.

Before Handforth could put any further questions—and he had about a hundred and sixty-five all ready—the door opened and Reginald Pitt looked in.

"Coming out for a kick-about, you chaps?" he asked cheerily. "Why, hallo! What's the trouble here?"

Pitt had a football under his arm, and he was evidently on his way outside. He looked at Clarence, and then he turned his attention upon Handforth's set face.

"What time does the murder happen?" he asked pleasantly.

Clarence gave a violent start.

"Murder!" he panted hoarsely. "I—I mean, murder! Oh, I——"

"Don't be a silly young ass!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm not going to hurt you! You needn't take any notice of this ass! If you'll answer all my questions, I won't even punch your nose. But you'd better understand at once that I'm not willing to put up with any nonsense!"

Clarence felt that the world was about to come to an end. He was going to be questioned. He knew that he would give himself away if he made any replies at all, and if he didn't reply the alternative was to receive a fearful

thrashing. The position was certainly pretty ghastly.

And then Clarence saw a loophole. Under ordinary circumstances, he could never have done it; but when a fellow is desperate it makes all the difference, and Clarence, just now, was ready to go to any extreme. He felt that he was capable of pushing a 'bus over, as he afterwards confided to Archie.

Handforth, at the moment, had his attention distracted by Pitt, and he was not even looking at Clarence; and the latter acted before the opportunity slipped away.

With a gasping squeal of apprehension, he dashed to the door.

Church tried to stop him, but wasn't quite quick enough. McClure was too far away, and Reginald Pitt made no attempt to pull Clarence up. It wasn't his business, anyhow.

I was coming along the passage with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, and we had just got opposite Study D when Clarence came flying out. He fairly scuttled down the passage.

Then we heard a mighty roar, and Handforth came charging out right on the top of us. He bumped into Tommy Watson, and Tommy gave a wild gasp and collapsed into Sir Montie. The pair thudded to the floor, with Handforth on top.

"You—you silly asses!" howled Handforth, sitting up. "I've lost him now! He's gone!"

"Begad!" moaned Sir Montie. "This—this is frightful, dear old boys! It is, really! My clothin' is ruined! Pray take your foot off my waistcoat, Tommy boy!"

"Which way did he go?" demanded Handforth. "Never knew such fatheads! You've spoilt everything! I'd got that imitation page-boy in the study, and I was just going to ask him all sorts of questions! It's a pity a chap can't do things in his own study without being messed about like this!"

I grinned.

"Hard lines, Handy!" I said lightly. "Better luck next time, perhaps. What startling mystery were you about to unravel? I'll admit that page-boy interests me a bit, but I don't make too much of it. Take my advice, old son, and leave the chap to himself. He's quite harmless!"

Handforth snorted and stalked down the passage, but he found no sign of Clarence. Clarence was safely behind the locked door of Study No. 13. He sank limply into an easy chair.

Archie was there, and he regarded Clarence severely through his monocle.

"Disregarding orders, what?" he said. "The fact is, old top, you don't deserve to have a chappie rallying round you. Phipps distinctly gave out the old word that——"

"Yes, I know," panted Clarence. "I was a fool to go out. Oh, Archie, I've had a perfectly fearful time!"

"I mean to say, what about it?" asked Archie. "Explain, my dear old sportsman. Bring out the horrid story. I'm most deucedly interested. The old cheeks, I may say, are somewhat pasty, as it were."

"I feel as weak as anything," said Clarence

"You don't know what a time I've had Archie! I only went out for a minute, and then I nearly ran right into the pater."

"Eh? I mean, what? The pater? The dear old dad?"

"Yes."

"But, laddie, it's impos," said Archie. "Quite ridie, don't you know! You can't mean that your pater has trickled round. Because if so, it's positively frightful! The thing's becoming dashed rotten."

"It is for me!" groaned Clarence. "I didn't know what to do, Archie. There was the pater coming down the passage, and I simply froze to the floor. Then I knew that something had to be done."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "So you stirred up the old brains, what?"

"Well, rather," said Clarence. "I had to, you know. I went into the first doorway I could see—one of these study places. And just as I was thinking everything was all right, three chaps came in."

"Frightful!" said Archie. "I suppose you obliged with a fit?"

"No. I—I was under the table."

"Topping scheme," exclaimed Archie approvingly. "I didn't know you had such ripping brains, Clarence. Under the table, what? Still, the posish. was something deuced, all the same."

"It was worse than that," said Clarence. "But then some other bounders came along. This was after the first bounders had pushed the table over. Anyhow, I dashed out and

escaped. I don't know what's going to happen next."

"Well, old dear, I think I'll tinkle for Phipps," said Archie. "Nothing like Phipps for bucking a chappie up. The man's like a bally tonic, don't you know. You might just jazz across and give the old push a flip."

Clarence obliged, and pressed the bell-push.

"But what can Phipps do?" he asked weakly.

"Absolutely," replied Archie. "That is to say, everything, old tulip. You mustn't worry too much, Clarence. Dash it all, it'll end up by your going off your onion. We shall have to send round for the jolly old van. You'll be carted off to the loony house. I mean to say, as it were, not very far to go, what? Just a degree or so, and all that."

"It's terrible," said Clarence, going to the window. "I can't stand it, Archie! It's getting too much. Oh! Look—look! Help!"

"Why the plaintive cry for assistance?" asked Archie. "Great gadzooks! The chap-pie's slipped under the surface! I say! Clarence, old top! I say! Buck up, you know!"

Clarence had fallen limply into the nearest chair, and was whiter than ever. There was a fixed glassy expression in his eyes.

"They—they've come!" he whispered feebly.

"I mean to say, come!" exclaimed Archie. "Somewhat obscure, and so forth. I fail to

(Continued on next page.)

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gather the old chat. Where's Phipps? Why doesn't the bally man come? Here, I say! Smelling-salts required. Large doses of restoratives, and what not. This is frightfully upsetting, don't you know?"

Archie rose to his feet, and went to Clarence's side. He glanced out of the window, started, and his monocle dropped to the end of its cord.

"Dash it all," he said. "That is to say, dash it all! Decidedly near the limit. By what I can see, Clarence, this is where you skate off to the place with the barred-window. In other words, you're booked for the cell department, with bolted doors and skilly, and all that sort of rot!"

Archie continued to look into the Triangle. He had just caught a glimpse of a uniformed figure striding towards the private doorway of the Ancient House. This figure was that of Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police. It was hardly surprising that Archie and Clarence were startled.

"He—he's coming," whispered Clarence fearfully.

"My dear laddie, he's come," said Archie. "He's here—positively on the old foundations. At this very minute he's waltzing along the spacious corridors to the old quarry. That's you, old fruit. A quarry, don't you know, is a chappie the bobbies are running down, and all that. Deucedly silly, but there you are. It seems to me that we can do nothing."

"But—but I've got to escape!" gasped Clarence wildly.

"Absolutely."

"You've got to help me, Archie."

"I mean to say," protested Archie. "Don't be dashed silly, old walnut."

"But—but——"

"Leave it to Phipps," went on Archie placidly. "Rely on the Phipps bird."

"But he isn't here."

"No," agreed Archie, gazing round. "Phipps doesn't appear to be on the old spot. Most deucedly awk., you know. Frightfully rotten, Clarence! What's become of the man? Has he failed me in the hour of need?"

Archie began to look somewhat anxious. He was even more anxious when a second jab of the bell was devoid of result. Phipps, apparently, was in some place where the summons could not be heard.

"I say, this is somewhat beastly!" declared Archie. "Nothing doing, if you know what I mean. We're stuck, Clarence. Absolutely. That is to say, things are looking somewhat foul."

"Oh, why doesn't Phipps come?" groaned Clarence. "The police are here, and they'll have me soon. Can't you dash out and find him, Archie?"

"Dash out," said Archie. "I mean to say, rather undignified, what? A chappie can't go dashing about like that, old lad. Besides, what could I do? I don't know where Phipps is, I can't run him to earth, and rout him out of his bally lair! The fact is, we're stymied!"

Clarence paced up and down like a caged tiger. The extremity of his position had suddenly forced itself upon him to the full. The

police had arrived, they had come to arrest him. He would be hauled away, placed in the dock, and charged with murder.

He gave a little squeal of terror as this thought came to him. And yet he was innocent. The whole affair had been an accident!

"Archie!" he gasped. "Archie! I mean to say, Archie!"

"Dash it all, no need to carry on!" protested Archie. "I'm here, old lad! Gazing at you, in fact. I'm fearfully worried."

"But what about me?" wailed Clarence. "You saw that policeman, didn't you?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "With both eyes, darling."

"He's come to arrest me."

"Absolutely twice."

"What shall I do?"

"Well, there you are," said Archie. "I mean to say, what does a chappie do in these cires? If Phipps would only come we might wangle something. That is to say, we might do the old spiriting away, stunt. The old bean is buzzing like anything, Clarence, but nothing comes, absolutely nothing! I mean to say—— Great gadzooks!"

Archie stared in front of him, and his colour increased.

"Have—have you thought of something?" asked Clarence eagerly.

"My dear old top," said Archie. "What-ho! What-ho! Have I thought of anything? Absolutely not! I mean to say, yes. A brain wave, as you might say. One of those flashes that only come to a chappie once in a jolly old century."

"Oh, Archie! What is it?"

"Don't flurry me, old boy; don't bother me!" said Archie. "The fact is, I've done old Phipps in the eye. Positively beaten the bouncer at his own bally game! All you've got to do is to change clothes with me."

"What!" gasped Clarence.

"A most deuced sacrifice, and all that, but a fellow must do something for a pal," said Archie generously. "You get the idea, Clarence? You catch on to the wheeze? Get into my old glad rags, and stroll out. Brave the natives, as it were. They won't know the diff. They'll take you for me, and there you are! You'll slide out, and freedom yawns before you."

"It's wonderful," said Clarence admiringly. "I don't know how you think of these things Archie!"

CHAPTER VIII.

PHIPPS EXPLAINS.



PHIPPS glided noiselessly to the door of Study No. 13, and turned the handle. The door was locked. Phipps tapped. It was nearly dinnertime, and the bell would soon be sounding.

"What-ho!" came a voice through the door. "Sorry, old bean, but there's nothing doing! I'm most frightfully busy——"

"Very well, sir!" said Phipps.

"Oh! Dash it all! Phipps, what?"

exclaimed Archie. "The very lad! Wait until I unlock the old chunk of wood, Phipps! By the way, are you alone? Any of the lads in the offing?"

"I am quite by myself, sir."

"Good!"

The door was unlocked, and cautiously opened. Phipps entered, and found that Archie Glenthorne was half behind the door. Phipps looked at him, and gave a slight start. But this was the only sign of astonishment he revealed. Phipps was very well trained.

For he had plenty of excuse for blank amazement. Archie's appearance had undergone a startling transformation. He was, to be exact, attired in Tubbs's old page-boy uniform. As he stood there, with his monocle fairly screwed into his eye, he looked absolutely ridiculous. Phipps restrained a roar of laughter with difficulty. The man didn't even smile.

"Somewhat ghastly, and all that?" said Archie. "Phipps, laddie, the young master is in putrid trouble. Rally round, and fetch the good old tweeds, what? I can't exist like this, you know!"

"Hardly, sir!" said Phipps.

"Do I look frightfully bad?"

"Your appearance, sir, if I may say so, is quite shocking," said Phipps. "I gather that you have been carrying out some plan of your own invention, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"Very unwise, sir."

"Unwise?" repeated Archie. "Well, dash it all! I mean to say, as it were, rather thick, what? The fact is, Phipps, I'm annoyed—I don't mind saying that I'm deucedly annoyed! I'm boiling, to be exact!"

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir!"

"Sorry? That's a dashed lot of good!" exclaimed Archie, severely. "You deserted me, Phipps. You let me down, and all that sort of rot. Absolutely let me down! I'm surprised, Phipps! In fact, I'm most confoundedly disappointed."

"I'm sorry, sir, if such is the case," said Phipps. "But I must confess that I do not quite see how I have caused you this annoyance."

"What about the old tinkler?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The jazz wire—the bell!" said Archie. "I've pushed it until the bally thing's knocked sideways! And you didn't come, Phipps. Just when dear old Clarence was right in the soup, you failed me!"

"I was absent from the pantry, sir, and could not hear the bell," said Phipps. "At the same time, sir, I should like you to know that I was actively engaged upon the task of assisting Mr. Clarence."

"I mean to say, you were?" asked Archie. "What? I mean, what?"

"May I ask where Mr. Clarence is at the moment, sir?"

"The old chappie has gone."

"Gone?" said Phipps. "Begging your pardon, sir——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "We spotted the inspector cove—the buffer in the blue uniform, and so forth. The chappie had come

to shove the bracelets on, and to haul Clarence off to the old cells. So Clarence legged it."

"In your clothing, sir?"

"That, old lad, is precisely it," said Archie. "Rather a brain-wave, what? A priceless stunt, in fact. What do you think, Phipps?"

"Meaning no offence, sir, I should remark that the idea was not exactly a sound one," said Phipps, respectfully.

"But, dash it all! I say! Dash it all——"

"There was no necessity for Mr. Clarence to run away, sir," said Phipps. "I happen to know that the police-inspector came to St. Frank's on quite another matter. I personally conducted him to Mr. Nelson Lee's study. The inspector had no knowledge whatever of Mr. Clarence's presence."

Archie stared.

"Wait!" he said, firmly. "Wait, Phipps! Allow me to gather the old wits together? This is somewhat thick, as it were. I'm decidedly at sea, old lad! The inspector knew nothing about dear old Clarence?"

"Nothing whatever, sir," said Phipps. "He merely came to the school to seek Mr. Nelson Lee's advice concerning one or two clues connected with a local burglary. And it may surprise you to learn, sir, that the police have no intention whatever of interfering with Mr. Clarence."

"But—but the murder?" asked Archie, faintly.

"There was no murder, sir."

"Well, the manslaughter—the shooting stuff?" asked Archie. "Clarence potted a poor cove——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, Mr. Clarence did nothing of the kind," interrupted Phipps. "He was under that impression, certainly, but the impression was totally erroneous."

Archie fell back into his chair, and beat the air feebly.

"I say!" he protested. "This is rather frightful, what? So much all at once, Phipps! I'm groping, don't you know! What about Clarence's pater? He's here—on the spot!"

"I requested Sir Cyril to come, sir," said Phipps.

Archie gulped.

"You—you——. I mean to say!" he exclaimed. "Dash it all, Phipps! You sent for him? You asked the old chappie to stagger over?"

"Yes, sir."

"But—but I fail to gather the scheme!" said Archie. "The fact is, Phipps, I'm in the dark—surrounded by chunks of gloom! What's the idea? What's the wheeze? You've got to explain, Phipps. Trot it out, old lad."

"I am endeavouring to do so, sir," said Phipps. "When Mr. Clarence arrived last evening I gathered that something of a particularly unfortunate nature had occurred. At your request, sir, I made arrangements for Mr. Clarence to be hidden away."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Good lad, Phipps!"

"But this morning, sir, the whole matter took on a different complexion."

"Sort of changed colour, and all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, and what about it?"

"I at once realised, sir, that if Mr. Clarence had actually shot the unfortunate man while rabbit-hunting, it would be no kindness on our part to give him shelter," said Phipps. "It would be far better, sir, to hand him to the police, and advise him to explain the full details."

"But you didn't say anything about it this morning, Phipps."

"No, sir, I preferred to make inquiries."

"Inquiries?" said Archie. "I mean to say, that never occurred to me, old tulip! But I suppose you did the right thing, what?"

"I'm sure I did, sir," said Phipps. "If Mr. Clarence was guilty, as he thought, it would have been our duty to send for the police. That may sound unkind, sir, but we could never have become a party to harbouring the young gentleman."

"And what did you do, Phipps?"

"I rang up the office of the 'Bannington Gazette,' sir."

"Oh, you did, eh?" said Archie. "Brainy, Phipps—absolutely brainy!"

"No, sir—merely a precaution," said Phipps. "Luckily, I got into communication with one of the sub-editors of the journal, and made inquiries concerning the report in the stop-press column. As I suspected from the start, the report was false in many aspects."

"False!" said Archie. "I mean to say, that's rot, don't you know! Why, dear old Clarence admitted the thing!"

"The whole thing was an unfortunate error, sir," said Phipps. "As far as I can gather, what actually happened was this: Mr. Clarence was out shooting rabbits, and he took aim at one animal which was sitting close to a hedge."

"Absolutely."

"As the report of the gun rang out, however, Mr. Clarence was startled to hear a cry from the other side of the hedge. Hurrying through a gap, he was staggered to find a man lying there. The unfortunate person was apparently dead, and covered with blood. Mr. Clarence assumed that he had shot this man."

"Well, dash it all, rather natural, what?"

The mistake was certainly one that many persons might have fallen into, sir," said Phipps. "Mr. Clarence at once ran away, and was afraid to return home. He assumed that he had killed the man, and was greatly frightened."

"Absolutely."

"The man, however, was not touched by the bullet——"

"Hang on, Phipps! I mean to say, pull up!" interrupted Archie. "What about the old rag? It distinctly says that the chappie, with his dying breath, warbled out something to the effect that a cove had shot at him."

"That, I think, is correct, sir," said Phipps. "The sub-editor was able to inform me that the first report was handed in by a young reporter who possessed more zeal than common-sense. Upon hearing the first rumour, he set it down as fact, and it thus got into print. The later editions of the newspaper, however, contained the correct account of the matter."

"All this is frightfully involved——"



Clarence simply dived into the first doorway, and found himself within Study D.

"Not at all, sir," interrupted Phipps. "It is, in fact, perfectly clear. The injured man was a labourer, and it seems that he had a severe quarrel with a companion of his own station in life. The cause of the quarrel, I think, sir, was not unconnected with a certain young lady who serves behind the bar in the King's Head, a local inn."

"A lover's quarrel, what?"

"Exactly, sir," said Phipps. "The two young men met by chance, apparently, on the footpath, and the result was a brutal fight. The victor, I understand, was a much bigger man and a deliberate bully. He knocked his opponent about dreadfully, and left him lying nearly senseless upon the ground, bruised and battered."

"In other words, the chappie was fairly mangled, what?"

"Badly hurt, sir," said Phipps. "And then, unfortunately, Mr. Clarence appeared

upon the scene—but on the other side of the hedge. He shot at the rabbit, and the injured man cried out with alarm——

"Although he wasn't hit?"

"He probably believed, sir, that his late assailant was shooting him," said Phipps. "It was for this reason he made the statement which you read in the early report. Upon being examined, however, no sign of a bullet wound was found, and the whole truth was revealed. The man is not severely injured, as was at first thought, sir. The matter, indeed, is quite trivial."

"Well, I'm dashed if this isn't queer!" said Archie. "I mean to say, a bally fuss over nothing, what?"

"Exactly, sir."

"A storm in the jolly old teacup, and all that?"

"A very apt expression, sir."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I'm pretty good at that sort of thing, Phipps. I dare say you've noticed it, what? Sometimes the old brain works swiftly, don't you know. Well, what about it? I mean to say, how do we stand?"

"I'm afraid matters are somewhat complicated by Mr. Clarence running away——"

"But, you know, Phipps, you didn't explain!" said Archie. "Why didn't you trot out the glad news earlier? That is, as it were, what was the reason for the pretty solid silence?"

"I thought it as well to give Mr. Clarence a lesson, sir."

"A lesson!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, somewhat nervy, and all that! Dash it all, Phipps, hardly your place, what?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, I considered it my duty," said Phipps respectfully. "It is most reckless—indeed, blameworthy—for a young gentleman of Mr. Clarence's age and temperament to roam about with a rifle. Firearms are exceedingly dangerous, unless in the hands of an expert shot. Although Mr. Clarence actually did no harm, he might easily have performed the act that he imagined he had done."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "I see the point, Phipps. I grasp the old idea. Absolutely! Brainy lad! So you wanted to give old Clarence a lesson, as it were? That, I might say, was precisely the stuff!"

"So I thought, sir!" said Phipps. "I accordingly left him in ignorance as to the true state of affairs, sir, but took the precaution to telephone to Sir Cyril FitzGibbon."

"Ah! A priceless scheme, Phipps!"

"So I thought, sir," said Phipps. "I informed Sir Cyril as to the true position, and requested him to come over to St. Frank's to take Mr. Clarence away. I considered that a few hours of anxiety would do Mr. Clarence good. It is really to be regretted that the young gentleman has run off."

(Continued on page 33)

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(Continued from page 32.)

Archie took a deep breath.

"So that's why Sir Cyril flowed in!" he remarked. "That's why the old boy rolled up, what? The fact is, Phipps, you're too bally deep! Brainy, if you know what I mean! You've bally well arranged the whole business, and I've messed it up. What? I mean to say, I've placed the lid firmly upon the old game."

"In a way, yes, sir."

"I'm most deucedly sorry, Phipps," said Archie humbly. "I thought I was displaying the old cleverness, but there you are! I fairly put my foot into the mire, and so forth! Sorrow, Phipps—sorrow in large quantities!"

"Don't mention it, sir!"

"But what about Clarence?" The old lad has legged it, don't you know."

"I have no doubt that Mr. Clarence can easily be found, sir," said Phipps. At the moment I think it would be most expedient for me to hasten upstairs and bring down a suit of clothes, sir. If I may say so, you scarcely seem presentable as you stand, sir."

"I feel horrible, Phipps—quite ghastly!" said Archie. "Bring down the old heather mixture. Just the thing, what?"

"I would suggest the grey pinhead, sir," said Phipps respectfully.

"Oh, any old thing—please yourself, Phipps!" said Archie. "Dash it all, I've let you down, and I must do something to make amends, what? We'll say the grey pinhead. Trot it down, Phipps, and we'll live once more!"

CHAPTER IX.

ALL SERENE!



CLARENCE FITZGIBBON in the meantime was not having a particularly happy time. Archie's great brain wave, in fact, did not pan out in precisely the manner that he had hoped for.

Clarence, attired in Archie's beautiful lounge suit, looked more like himself. The suit was somewhat too large, it is true, but not conspicuously so. And, by pulling his shoulders straight, he was able to make himself believe that he looked very much like the one and only Archie.

And he held a handkerchief to his face, in the pretence of blowing his nose, to add to the disguise. Furthermore, he pulled his soft velour hat well over his eyes.

And thus he ventured forth.

By a sheer piece of luck he managed to get down the Remove passage, without meeting anybody. And in the triangle he strode across towards the gates in an elegant manner which hinted of no hurry.

Clarence, in fact, did exceedingly well.

Two or three juniors were standing in a group near by, and they looked at Clarence curiously. They immediately took him to be Archie—but, somehow, Archie seemed different. He looked more weedy, and smaller. But before the

Removites could make any inquiries, Clarence had reached the gates.

He could hardly realise it.

He was outside—he had escaped!

And the police inspector was still in the school—searching for him, no doubt, and waiting to arrest him. Clarence did not even realise how lucky he had been to get out without being challenged.

However, getting out was one thing—and getting completely away was another.

He was just congratulating himself that everything was all serene, and that there was nothing further to worry about, when he noticed that four or five juniors were coming up the lane from the village.

They were, indeed, within fifty yards.

Clarence stared at them, halted, and shook in his shoes.

Here was a situation which demanded clear thought and prompt action. And Clarence was not capable of it.

He simply stood there, limply, and stared.

And Handforth & Co., who were with Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey, regarded the stationary figure with considerable interest. The juniors were just coming up from the village, having been down to make a few purchases at the various little shops.

"Archie's taking the air!" observed Pitt.

"But what's the matter with the chap? He doesn't seem to be the same as usual."

"I want to have a talk with Archie," said Handforth darkly. "I believe he knows something about that blessed pageboy—"

"Oh, give the pageboy a rest!" said Church.

"I'll give him a good hiding when I see him!" declared Handforth. "The cheeky bounder! I'll teach him not to get under study table—Why, that chap isn't Archie at all! He can't be!"

"It's—it's the buttons!" ejaculated Pitt.

"That pageboy!" roared Handforth. "By George! You're right!"

"In Archie's clobber!" grinned Pitt. "This looks rather interesting, my sons. What's the ass doing—Look out! He's trying to bunk off! Tally-ho, you chaps! On the ball! After him!"

Clarence had suddenly come to himself. The main thing, he knew, was to get away—to avoid close contact with these juniors. So, with a sudden determination, he spun round and dashed off up the lane.

He fairly panted with terror as he heard the juniors rushing after him at full speed.

"Hi, stop!" roared Handforth. "If you don't stop, you fathead, we'll jolly well skin you!"

The chase was a short one.

Clarence was no runner, and he was overtaken swiftly by the athletic juniors. They surrounded him, and Clarence came to a halt, gasping. He looked at the Remove fellows in an agony of dismay.

"I say, let me go, you know!" he panted.

"I—I'm Archie!"

"Archie!"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Clarence. "I'm Archie Glenthorne!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you potty ass!" said Handforth. "You lopsided fathead! Do you think we don't know the difference between a born idiot and Archie? He's not particularly brilliant, but he can manage to look sane at times!"

"Really!" persisted Clarence feebly. "I'm Archie, you know! Can't you see my clothes, and all that?"

"We can see that you're wearing Archie's clobber, if that's what you mean!" said Pitt. "But what's the idea? I thought you were the new page-boy!"

"Yes, rather!" said Clarence. "I am!"

"Then what does this mean?"

"Oh, I—I—well, I mean——" Clarence paused, realising that it was up to him to say something lucid. "I'm just out for a stroll."

"Oh, are you?" exclaimed Handforth. "After pinching Glenthorne's clothes, I suppose?"

"But Archie lent them to me!" said Clarence. "You see, I've got to escape. That is to say, the police—— I—I mean——"

"Escape!" said Pitt curiously. "What from?"

Clarence was too confused to reply.

"He says he's got to escape from the police," said Jack Grey. "I tell you, there's something rummy about this chap! I think we ought to take him in and haul him in front of Mr. Lee!"

"Before we do that, I'm going to punch his nose!" said Handforth. "It's not my way to be harsh, but this chap has gone past the limit. He came into my study and spied on me!"

"No; I assure you, it was quite an accident," said Clarence. "I—I didn't know it was your study, old chap. Quite a blunder, and all that. Frightfully sorry, don't you know!"

"The chap talks a bit like Archie himself," said Pitt. "I believe he's the same kind of bird—one of the family of knuts, I mean! Rather curious that he should come to St. Frank's as a page-boy!"

"But I didn't!" said Clarence. "Oh, I say! Be sports, don't you know! Don't keep me here; I simply must get away!"

Handforth sniffed.

"I won't touch the chap," he said generously. "After all, I'd be a bit of a bully if I sloshed into him, and I bar bullying! I don't mind whacking a chap who can stand up for himself, but this insect is rather too feeble for me! I'll content myself with investigating the mystery and getting at the truth!"

"Oh, let him go!" said Pitt. "He's all right. I've got half an idea that he's one of Archie's pals."

"Yes, rather!" said Clarence eagerly. "I—I mean, exactly! Be pals! Let me go! I'm—I'm in frightful trouble!"

"Committed a murder?" grinned Church.

"Yes, I——"

"What?"

"No; it—it was an accident!" gasped Clarence.

"An accident!" said Handforth. "So you have done something? By George, I've got it! I've hit upon the truth, you chaps!"

Do you remember old Jameson coming in just before we went out? I'll bet he came up to St. Frank's looking for this chap!"

"Rats!" said Pitt. "He's not afraid of the police!"

"Police!" panted Clarence wildly, looking round.

"That's settled it!" said Handforth. "He is afraid! We'll cart him in and take him straight to Mr. Lee. Come on!"

Clarence, in spite of his protests, was seized and hauled along. But just as the group of juniors got into the Triangle, Inspector Jameson came striding across from the Ancient House. Clarence gave a little yelp of dismay as he caught sight of the blue uniform.

"There you are!" said Handforth. "He's shivering like a jelly! Hold still, you fellows; we'll watch the arrest!"

Clarence nearly swooned off, and the juniors stood in a group while the police inspector came up.

"Oh, it's all up with me!" groaned Clarence. "I'm finished!"

Inspector Jameson marched by, nodded pleasantly, and walked out into the road. He strode off briskly towards the village, and the juniors stared after him and then stared at one another. Clarence gave a yelp of relief.

"He—he didn't notice me!" he whispered faintly.

"Rats!" grinned Pitt. "He saw you all right, my son, but he didn't want you. You've made some bloomer, I expect!"

"Blessed if I can understand all this!" growled Handforth. "A silly lot of mystery over nothing! First a chap says he's afraid of the police and he's going to be arrested, and then old Jameson walks by!"

"What price your theory?" grinned Pitt. "The mighty creator of Trackett Grim is flummoxed! Fairly flattened!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling fatheads!" howled Handforth.

"Peace, my child—peace!" said Pitt. "A stranger draweth near! We must be on our best behaviour!"

They were just inside the Triangle, and Sir Cyril FitzGibbon had appeared with Nelson Lee. Phipps, Archie's man, was coming respectfully in the rear. Clarence gave a little gasp of dismay.

"Oh, the pater!" he murmured.

"The what?"

"Why, that's Sir Cyril FitzGibbon from Helmford!" said Church. "I heard it from one of the fellows about an hour ago. He can't be this fathead's pater, surely?"

And then Phipps came hurrying up.

"Begging your pardon, young gentlemen, but will you kindly allow me to take Master FitzGibbon away?" he asked. "He is wanted by his father."

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

Clarence, in a kind of trance, was led by Phipps across to his father. Archie had strolled up now, resplendent in the grey pin-head suit. He nodded genially to Clarence.

"It's all serene, laddie!" he exclaimed. "In fact, everything is perfectly priceless and topping! The bally clouds have rolled away, and all that sort of stuff! The sun shines, and what not!"

"But—but I don't understand!" said Clarence.

"Oh, so here you are, my boy; here you are!" said Sir Cyril, peering forward at Clarence. "Young rascal! Infernal amount of trouble you've caused me, Clarence! Now, what's all this about shooting somebody, eh? Nonsense, my lad; you've made an absurd mistake!"

"It was Archie who explained the matter to Clarence, and the latter positively flushed with joy and relief. He hardly knew what to say, but one thing was certain. He wouldn't indulge in the dangerous practice of taking his pater's gun and shooting at rabbits.

Ten minutes later, he took his departure with Sir Cyril, and Archie smiled amiably at Phipps.

"Pretty ripping, what?" said Archie. "All's well that ends well, and all that! By the way, Phipps, did you touch?"

"Touch, sir?"

"I mean to say, the old doubloons, and so forth," said Archie. "You performed a service to Sir Cyril, and what not. I trust he ladled out a supply of the good old useful coin?"

Phipps coughed.

"Sir Cyril was most generous, sir," he said. "I consider that I have been well repaid for my trouble, sir. A five-pound note, sir, is always extremely acceptable!"

"Good lad!" said Archie. "So we're all happy, what?"

And they strolled indoors.

Archie Glenthorne, however, was not to be so happy a little later on. Even at that very minute certain plans were being concocted for the especial benefit of the one and only Archie.

In other words, it would be All Fools' Day at the end of the week!

THE END.

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TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

by HARCOURT BURRAGE

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School Story).

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Tom Tartar arrives at Mr. Wrasper's school, where discipline is maintained by moral force only. Tom makes several friends and a few enemies. He is initiated into the "Eagles"—a party opposed to the "Cuckoos"—or the rotters of the school. Foster Moore, formerly the school tutor, becomes the Head. Wrasper, having been deposed, fills the shoes of the ex-tutor. Moore is an unprincipled scoundrel, and Tom has more than once found him out. Fearing Tom, the ex-tutor plans to get rid of the boy.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XLI.

Wooden Jerry Catches It Hot!

JANE put the forks into her pocket and went about her work.

By and by she went into the kitchen, where she found Mrs. Wrasper and Wooden Jerry.

Mrs. Wrasper was cooking some bacon for Foster Moore's breakfast over a spirit lamp.

Being a very warm morning no fire had been lighted in the kitchen grate.

"I can't make it out," Jerry was saying. "Three on 'em short."

"What are short?" asked Jane shortly. "Forks," said Jerry, shorter still.

"Well, go and find them."

"They've been stolen."

"Nonsense!" said Jane.

"They must have been," said Jerry. "They were all right last night when I went to bed."

"Who should steal them?" asked Mrs. Wrasper.

"Well, I see young Tartar come out o'

my pantry a little after six this morning," replied Jerry.

"Don't tell falsehoods."

"It's true, mum. Let him deny it if he can!"

"I'll fetch Master Tartar here," put in Jane quickly.

She was away for some minutes, and when she returned Tom and two other boys accompanied her.

Tom had a short riding-whip in his hand, and his eyes glittered ominously.

Mrs. Wrasper had left the kitchen.

"What's this you are saying about some forks?" asked Tom.

"I ain't said nuthin'," replied Wooden Jerry, "except that there's three short."

"But you said I had taken them."

"No, I said you was in my pantry this morning. That's true, ain't it?"

"Yes," Tom admitted.

"You hear that?" said Jerry, addressing Jane. "Now who says I was tellin' lies?"

"Go on," said Jane to Tom.

"I didn't touch anything, of course," said Tom. "I just looked into the pantry and came out again."

"You was there," said Jerry, "and I can't say no more. But you can prove your innocence—easy, I should say."

"How?"

"By turnin' your box out."

"I shall do no such thing."

"There," said Jerry triumphantly, "what do that look like? Ask anyone what they thinks of it."

"You miserable cur," said Tom, as he dashed at him.

One, two, three cuts he gave Jerry with the whip.

With a howl of terror Jerry tried to make for the door.

But Tom hit out with his left, and, catching him squarely on the chin, sent him reeling backwards. Then once again Tom got to work with the whip until, half wild with pain and fright, Wooden Jerry looked about for some other way of escape.

There was only one way that he could see—and that was the wide kitchen chimney. It was a case of "any port in a storm."

and certainly the chimney, as a place of refuge, was better than nothing.

So Jerry made a plunge for the chimney, scrambling madly over the grate and upsetting the fire-irons, the huge copper kettle, and other utensils.

Yelling like a wild man he endeavoured to climb up the chimney, the while Tom, his anger not yet appeased, laid into him about the legs with his whip.

Quite half a dozen attempts did the hapless wretch make to ascend out of reach, but each time he came tumbling down, dislodging clouds of soot, and finally falling in a sitting posture into the empty grate.

Naturally, the noise created by Jerry's performance attracted attention in various parts of the house. Boys came hurrying into the kitchen, until it was almost filled with them.

And then, suddenly, Foster Moore made his appearance.

He arrived just in time to see Jerry make his final descent from the chimney, and to see Tom, flushed with his exertions, cast the riding-whip to the floor.

Jane was standing by the dresser, quietly looking on.

"Tartar!" thundered Foster Moore. "What is the meaning of this disgraceful affair?"

"I think you'd better ask him, sir," replied Tom quietly. He pointed at Wooden Jerry, who, with his soot-grimed face, looked very much like a badly made-up nigger minstrel.

"I want justice!" howled Jerry. "He's pretty nigh killed me! Justice I mean to 'ave, Mister Moore!"

The schoolmaster regarded Tom with a scowl.

"Why have you been assaulting Wood?" he demanded.

"Because he said I was a thief—or as good as said it," answered Tom.

"Well, three forks is missin'!" roared Jerry. "I see Tartar come out o' my pantry early this mornin', so who but him could have took the forks?"

"Is it a fact, Tartar, that you were in the pantry this morning?" asked Foster Moore.

"Quite true," admitted Tom; "but I know nothing about the forks which Wood says are missing. Is it likely I should steal such things?"

"You've got 'em in your box, I'll bet!" snarled Jerry, as he wriggled out of the grate.

"Tartar," said Foster Moore, "this is a matter which must be cleared up. In view of Wood's assertions, I shall have to search your boxes."

"As you please," returned Tom, curbing his indignation with difficulty. "It's a nice thing to be suspected of this sort of thing merely on the word of—"

"Silence!" interrupted Moore. "Give me the keys of your boxes?"

"Here's the key of one of them," said Tom with a disdainful shrug. "The other box is locked."

Foster Moore took the proffered key and went away, leaving Tom and the crowd of boys in the kitchen with Wooden Jerry, who, confident now that he had Tom in an awkward position, grinned maliciously behind his mask of soot.

CHAPTER XLII.

Bowled Out by Jane!

IN something under five minutes Foster Moore returned.

"There were no forks in Tartar's box!" he announced.

"What!" yelled Wooden Jerry. "No forks there, ye say! Stuff an' nonsense! Why, I—I—"

"Put 'em there yourself!" exclaimed Jane, advancing suddenly. "I saw you do it, so I took 'em out again, and—here they are!"

As she spoke she whipped from beneath her apron the three plated forks, which she brandished in Wooden Jerry's grimy face. He sank back against the grate, and stared at Jane as if she had been a judge sentencing him to immediate execution.

The boys began to cheer for Tom.

"Silence!" cried Foster Moore. "Go out from here all of you, except Tartar, Jane, and Jerry."

The boys stopped cheering, and looking rather glum, went slowly out of the kitchen.

It was like being sent out of a theatre just before the curtain rose on the last act of a very interesting play.

As soon as they were gone Foster Moore closed the door, and faced about again.

"Jerry," he said, "you've been drinking."

"I ain't had much," said Jerry, "but I'm easily overcome, and when I am I don't know what I'm doin'."

The artful rascal saw at once the tack Foster Moore was going on, and took his cue accordingly.

Tom saw it, too, and he was not going to have it.

"Look here, sir," he said. "This matter oughtn't to drop so easily. That fellow deliberately tried to make me out a thief!"

"Oh, nonsense," said Foster Moore; "it would not have been so serious as that. Come, Tartar, nobody would have thought that it was on your part anything but a joke."

"Would you have considered it so?" asked Tom.

"Certainly."

"That is if I had taken them. Do you consider it a joke now?"

"I do."

"On Jerry's part?"

"Yes."

Tom smiled.

"Very well," he said. "I don't know that I shall go any further in it at present, but if any other joke of that sort is played on me I shall write to my father, who will know how to deal with it."

"I hope you will not talk about the affair, Tartar," said Foster Moore.

"No," said Tom; "but every boy in the school knows of it."

"I will admonish them to keep silence. Jane—you are discretion itself, and will not talk of it?"

"No, sir," replied Jane; "but for all that I should like to send Jerry Wood to prison for ten years!"

"He may get there soon," said Tom significantly.

"Well—well," said Foster Moore, "it is a foolish affair and you have certainly severely punished him. A more contemptible object than Jerry now presents would be hard to find. Go and wash yourself, you vagabond. It is about time breakfast was ready."

Jerry departed, and Foster Moore, after lingering as if he had something to say, followed him.

Tom stayed behind to heartily thank Jane, who said she would do as much for any boy, so he need not think too much of it.

"But I must do so," Tom said, "and one day I hope to repay you."

He shook hands with her and went away.

Of the other events that happened during the day one only need be mentioned.

Pubsey Wrasper was behind with his lessons in school, and Foster Moore, as usual, was very hard upon him.

"You will keep in the schoolroom until bedtime," he said.

"Why not put me in solitary?" boldly asked Pubsey.

All the boys were astonished at the audacity of the question.

They expected to see Foster Moore rise up in the full majesty of his wrath, but he sat quite still.

The colour forsook his face, and his lip visibly quivered as he replied:

"I shall put you in solitary in my own good time—perhaps before the day is over."

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Pubsey. "*You dare not do it!*"

A faint murmur arose from the boys.

What had come to Pubsey that he should be so daring?

As for his father, he sat at his desk, going on with his ordinary work as if nothing unusual was transpiring.

"Go on with your studies," commanded Foster Moore curtly, and the matter dropped.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Tom Visits Rosy Ralph.

IT was late in the afternoon when a message came from the doctor attending Rosy Ralph. The sick boy wanted to see Tom *at once*.

It was the doctor's servant who brought the message, and Tom asked him if Ralph had taken a turn for the worse.

"He's taken a turn of some sort," the man said, "but what it is I don't know, nor the doctor either, I reckon."

Tom obtained leave, and went over to the cottage at once.

Ralph was lying quietly on his bed, as if he had never stirred since they laid him there that

morning when he was discovered senseless in the backroom.

His eyes were shut, but he opened them as Tom sat down by the bedside.

The old nurse was there, and she asked him if she should raise him up.

"No," replied Ralph. "I am very comfortable and happy. Please go out; I want to say something to Master Tartar."

The old woman readily obeyed, and the two lads were left together.

"I hope you are getting better, Ralph," Tom said.

"I'm not in pain," replied the boy, "but I don't feel as if I want to get up."

"That's only lassitude, you will get over that," said Tom.

"I don't know what you mean," said Ralph, "ye've got words to use as I hev'n't, but it don't matter what it is. I want 'ee to tell me 'bout feyther."

"Perhaps you had better not talk about him," said Tom.

"Oh, yes, I maun do it, t'doctor says I may," returned Ralph. "Have—they—took him?"

"No," said Tom.

"But they will, I'm sure," said Ralph. "He can't be far away, and I want 'ee to find out where he is, and tell 'un I forgive him."

"And do you forgive me, Ralph?"

"For what? Ye ha' done nowt."

"For insisting on your giving him that message."

"Oh, if he beat me for that, it was nowt; he'd ha' beat me for summat that night, anyhow, for he were clean mad. He can't abear bein' indoors more'n I can, and you know he'd been shut in for days."

"Well, Ralph," said Tom, "I am glad you *can* forgive him, and me too."

"Ye may see 'un, p'r'aps," said Ralph wistfully.

"What put that into your head," asked Tom.

"I dreamt it," said the boy. "I see him and you, and the p'lice all a-strugglin' together, and he was got down and the chain cuffs put on him, and then I see him—*dead*."

"Ralph," said Tom, "there are many things I can do for you, but nothing for your father. What is the good of it? He's quite hopeless."

"You know where he be?" said Ralph.

Tom sat a moment before replying.

"I do, and I do not," he said. "I believe I know where he is, but I am not sure."

"And when will ye know for sure?"

"Perhaps to-night."

"And what'll ye do then?"

Tom was silent.

"Doan't give him up!" pleaded Ralph. "He be a bad 'un, but he be my feyther, and mother said he would be better some day, and I ha' hoped for it, and he *will be!*"

Tom shook his head.

"Not he," was the reply. "If he could get clear out of the country, and never come here again, I shouldn't mind. But he is dangerous, and unless he is put in prison he'll be murdering somebody one day."

"No, no, not that," said Ralph.

"He tried to murder *me*."

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(Continued from page 38)

"You!" cried Ralph, opening his eyes.
"Yes; he threw me into the lime-kiln," said Tom. "I was nearly burnt to death."

Ralph lay still for a time with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling. With a sigh he turned to Tom.

"If he did *that*," he said, "I'll say no more, but whatever's done don't tell me of it."

He lay back with a quiet look in his face that touched Tom's heart.

Sickness had refined the ragged lad, and the attentions bestowed upon him had further improved him.

The change was very great.

With commendable discretion Tom turned the conversation, talking of other matters likely to be interesting to him.

Ralph listened quietly, and occasionally said a word, but the interest he exhibited was of a languid nature.

Presently he asked after Noddy Berrill.

"He may come and see me now," he said. "They wouldn't let him do it afore."

"I will leave word at the cottage as I go by," Tom said. "He will be glad to come and see you."

Presently Tom took his leave after promising to come again on the morrow.

The old nurse was standing outside, and on Tom's appearance she signalled for him to draw a little apart with her.

"Well, what do you think of him?" she asked.

"He seems better—in some ways," said Tom.

"He's too quiet," declared the old nurse, shaking her head. "I'd sooner see him fretful and fidgety and out o' temper than like he is. Then I should think the poor lad was getting well. But as it is——" She stopped short and looked at Tom with a sorrowful face.

"As it is?" said Tom questioningly.

"Well, as it is, I don't think the poor laddie will live! And maybe," she added, "'tis the best thing that could happen to him, for he's got a bad father, whose end will be as bad as his life, I fear."

Pondering over the old nurse's words, Tom walked sorrowfully away. With Rosy Ralph he had little in common; still, he had taken a strong liking to the youngster because he was so pathetically faithful.

From Ralph himself to Ralph's ne'er-do-well parent was an easy transition of thought, and Tom found himself thinking of Posh Powner, who, he felt certain, was hidden somewhere in the School House.

The exact place of concealment he had only as yet guessed at; but on this night he meant to verify his suspicions, and if what he thought turned out to be true—well, then Posh Powner would be captured!

For his own safety, as well as that of other people, Tom was anxious for the scoundrelly poacher to be placed safely under lock and key.

In addition to that, he hoped that Powner's capture would lead to revelations concerning Foster Moore.

That there was very little to choose in the matter of villainy between the two men Tom was convinced. If there was any superiority in evil on either side, then in all probability Foster Moore possessed it.

All that evening Tom was busy writing home and to Sir Claude Freshley.

To his father he wrote about the strange reversal of the positions of Mr. Wrasper and his former assistant. The letter to the baronet concerned Posh Powner only.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The Hiding Place Revealed!

THERE was a school letter-bag which Wooden Jerry took to the post every night, but Tom did not trust his mis-sives to that on this occasion, for he knew that Foster Moore generally overhauled the contents of the bag, and no doubt Jerry also scrutinised the letters.

Tom got Willie Gray to slip down to the village letter-box with his epistles, and passed the rest of the evening until supper-time in talking to Sam Smith.

At nine o'clock all the boys went to bed, and at half-past Jonah Worrey, as monitor, turned out the lights in Tom's dormitory.

Tom had undressed and got into bed as usual, and so had Jonah Worrey.

But neither had any intention of remaining there long. Practically they were both bound on the same errand!

Jonah knew something of what was going on, but not sufficient to satisfy him. He had therefore determined to discover more, if possible.

Twenty minutes after the light had been extinguished, Jonah Worrey crept out of bed and began to dress.

Tom's quick ears heard the slight sound the other made, and then he heard Jonah creeping towards the door.

The next moment Tom was out of bed also, only troubling to slip on his socks and trousers, passed out of the dormitory as silently as a spectre.

There was sufficient light in the corridor to show Tom there was nobody there. Jonah Worrey had already gone downstairs. Tom at once followed suit and reached the hall.

Standing there and listening intently, he could hear Wooden Jerry in his room croaking out some fragments of a maudlin ditty. In the ordinary way there should have been a ray of light streaming through the keyhole, but no such ray was now visible.

Tom could see the light, however, shining through a crack at the top of the door, and instantly he guessed what was happening.

Somebody was peering through the keyhole!

"Jonah Worrey!" breathed Tom to himself, and glided noiselessly up behind his old foe.

Tom could dimly see the stooping Jonah, and for a moment was tempted to give the fellow a scare. But he thought better of it.

After all, Jonah was on the wrong trail, and if Tom revealed himself he might get on the right one. So Tom glided on unobserved to the lumber-room, the door of which usually stood open.

Now, however, it was shut, and softly turning the handle, Tom discovered that it was locked.

"Just as I thought!" he murmured exultingly. "Powner is hiding in one of the 'solitaires,' and Diggles in the other! I'm pretty sure of it!"

Tom, however, wanted to make absolutely certain before making an attempt to capture the enemy.

Almost opposite the lumber-room was a cupboard, where Jane kept brooms, dustpans, and other domestic utensils. It was a roomy place, and would have held half a dozen boys comfortably.

Into the cupboard Tom crept, leaving the door ajar, partly for the sake of fresh air, and partly to keep an eye on anything which might happen without.

A few minutes later he heard the voice of Foster Moore angrily demanding:

"What are you doing there, Worrey?"

It was obvious that Jonah had been discovered spying through the keyhole of Jerry Wood's room.

"I—I've only just come downstairs," began Worrey lamely.

"Then come up again this instant!" interrupted Moore. "I will accompany you, and lock you in, so that you can't do any more night-prowling!"

Tom chuckled to think how Jonah had been bowled out. All the same, though, the locking of the dormitory door might prove very inconvenient.

And perhaps Foster Moore would go round the room to see if all the other boys were in their beds!

But fortunately he did not do so. In a few minutes he was back again, and Tom saw him approaching the lumber-room with a lighted candle in his hand. There was something uncanny in the man's appearance and demeanour. Being, as he thought, unobserved, he made no attempt to conceal the emotions that were torturing him.

He was on the brink of a precipice and knew it, without having the power to turn back. Utter weariness was expressed in his eyes. He looked like a man tired of his very existence.

Tom watched him half fascinated. He dare not draw the door close lest it should creak. He must take his chance of being discovered.

Foster Moore stood by the lumber-room door for a few moments, as if in doubt what to do. Then, with a sudden movement, he drew out a key and thrust it into the lock.

Before turning it, however, he glanced over his shoulder and listened. The look—the whole attitude of the man made up a picture of secrecy and fear which Tom never forgot.

All the house was quiet. The ticking of the old upright clock could be heard distinctly.

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

Foster Moore turned the key and went into the lumber-room. Instantly Tom came out of his hiding-place, and tip-toed to the door, which Foster Moore had left open.

In the doorway Tom stood watching the movements of the schoolmaster. Moore placed his candle down on an empty box, and drew another key from his pocket.

Then stepping across to one of the places used for the solitary confinement of refractory pupils, he inserted the key in the door and turned it sharply.

At the open doorway appeared Posh Powner! He would have stepped into the lumber-room but Foster Moore pushed him back.

"You can't come out yet," he said. "It's too early. I only want to talk to you for a moment or two."

At this moment a knocking was heard proceeding from the other "solitary." Diggles, too, evidently wanted to come out!

Foster Moore unlocked the door, and as Diggles started to emerge Foster Moore seized him by the throat.

"You dare to make a disturbance here!" he hissed threateningly. "What's the matter with you, man? What do you want?"

"I'm stifled in this place!" answered Diggles sulkily. "I'm about fed up with it! I'd sooner be in prison!"

"Don't talk like a fool, man!" said Moore. Then, with a sudden change to a conciliating manner, he went on: "Sit down, Diggles. I want to talk to you and Powner. Wait a moment and I'll fetch you something to drink."

Tom waited no longer. He vanished ere Foster Moore could turn round.

The boy had made absolutely sure now! With a well-spread net, a great haul of villainy could be made!

"I'll go to Sir Craude Freshley to-morrow," he muttered, as he slipped back upstairs. "He will know best what's best to be done. By Jove! the chaps have been wondering why, none of us have been put in solitary lately. Won't they be surprised when they learn the reason!"

(To be continued.)

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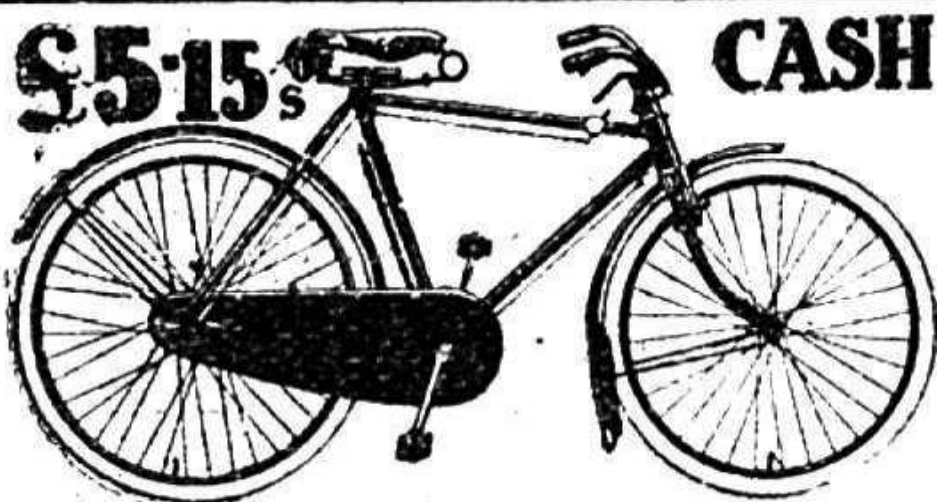
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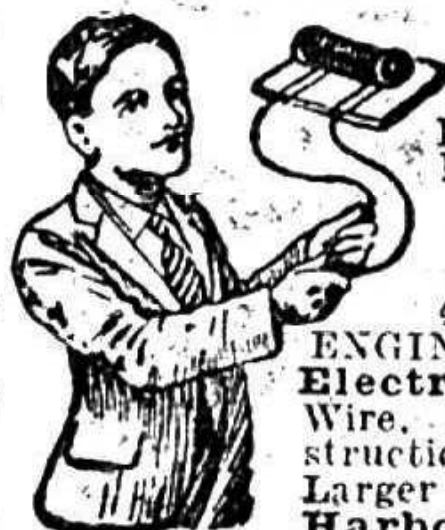
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