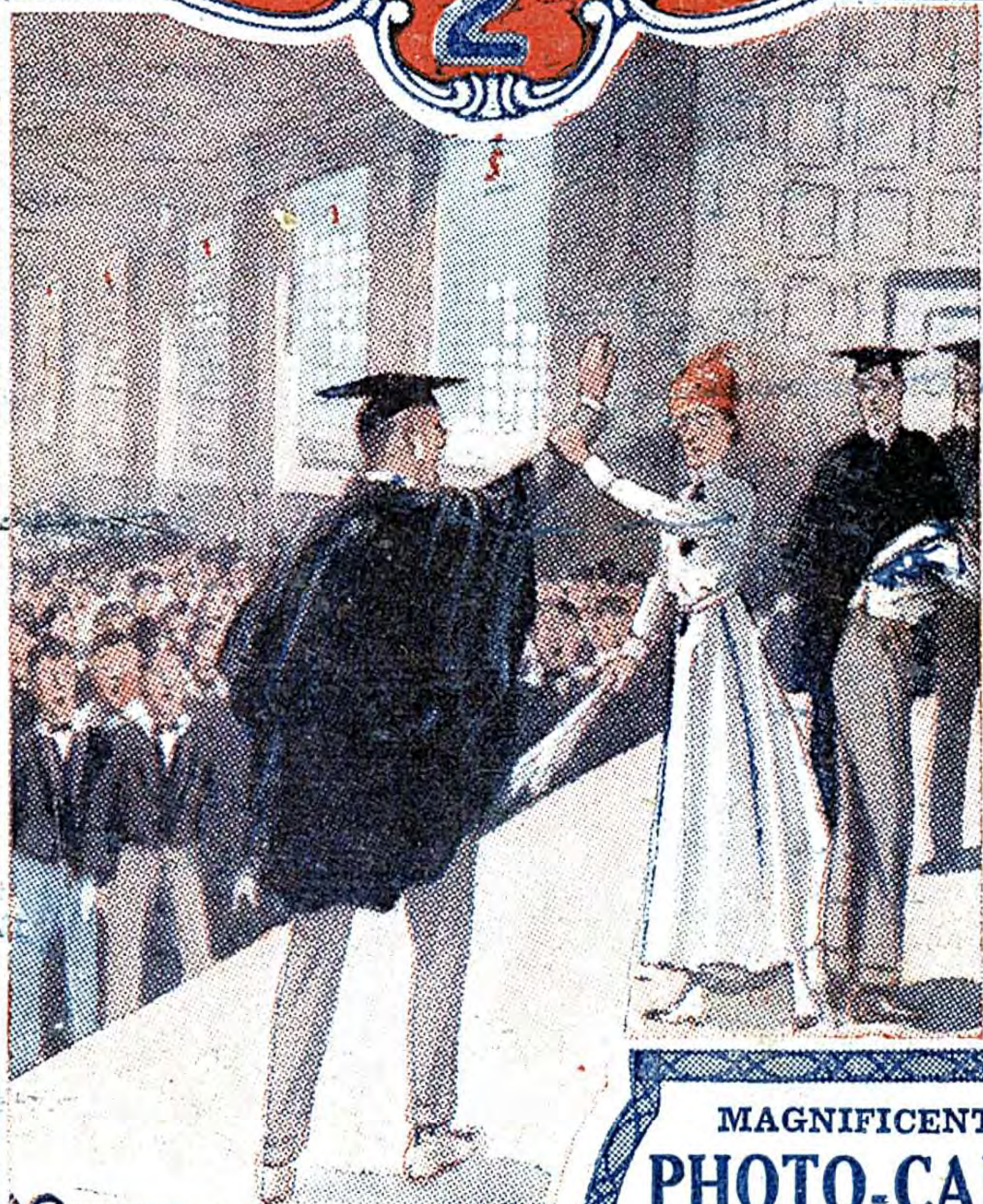


GRAND NEW "BARRING-OUT" SERIES STARTS THIS WEEK!

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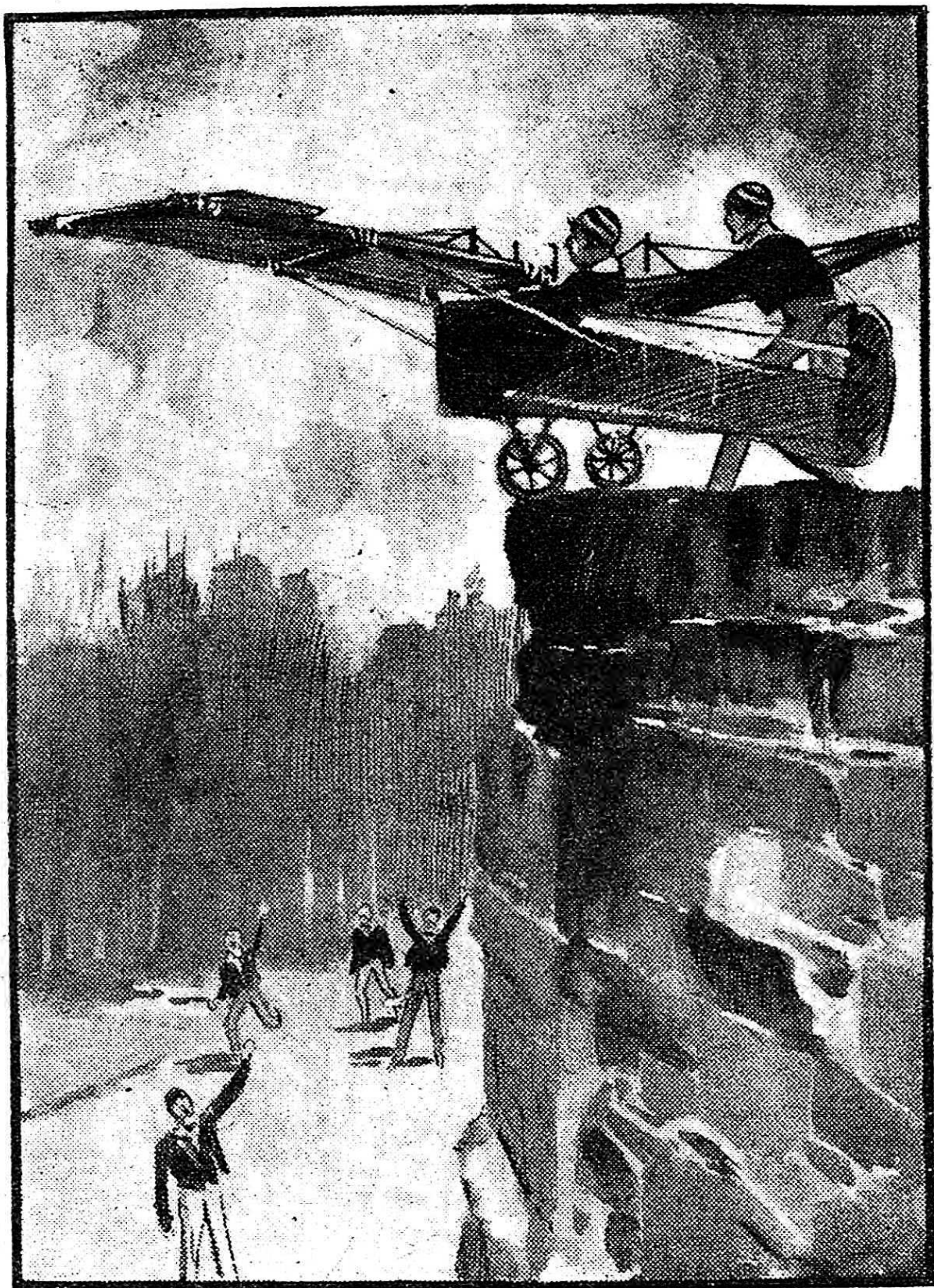
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"If you dare touch that boy again, I will have you removed from your responsible position!" shouted Miss Trumble.

MAGNIFICENT
PHOTO-CARD
OF
NORTH BRITISH RAILWAY
EXPRESS ENGINE
GIVEN AWAY

With This
Number.



"Stop!" roared Willy, dashing forward. "You mustn't do it, Hobbs! You'll break your neck! Wait until I get up there——"

The Brand of the Brute!



The following story is the first of a grand new "Bar-ring-out" series. Quite different from anything we have had before, or from anything that has yet been attempted

in school stories, this series will prove of exceptional interest, not only because of its novelty, but because in these days it is not altogether outside the bounds of possibility.

Some sensation was caused a little while ago, when the first woman became a Member of Parliament. It is still less remarkable to find a lady among the governing body of a public boys' school, and if that lady be a dominant personality with decided opinions, we may wake up to find the school entirely run by ladies. This is exactly what happens at St. Frank's, and, as the reader can imagine, had

these good ladies realised the nature of their task, they would have preferred to have taken in hand a colony of young elephants.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE GLIDING ENTHUSIASTS!

DICKY JONES, of the Third Form at St. Frank's, peeped cautiously round the corner of the gymnasium. The Triangle was practically deserted, and the fag turned round and grinned.

"All clear!" he said cheerfully. "Come on, my son!"

He dodged across the Triangle in the direction of the old monastery ruins, closely followed by Hobbs—another inky member of the Third Form. Hobbs was not one of

the leading lights of the fag division. Neither, for that matter, was Dicky Jones.

But they had been pals since the beginning of the term. During the whole of the previous term Jones and Hobbs had hated one another like poison, but that was a mere detail. In the Third Form, friendships were made in no time, and dissolved just as quickly.

Hobbs, too, was a bit of a character in his way. For one so extremely youthful, he had an extraordinary assortment of ideas. He was always making something. If it

wasn't a rabbit hutch, it was a scooter. If it wasn't a new inkstand, it was a bird-cage.

Hobbs was a mechanical maniac. He was never contented unless he was manufacturing something, and his enthusiasm nearly always waned before he had completed any special task.

But on this occasion he was fired by ambition.

It was a half holiday—cold and clear. Members of the Remove were engaged in a House match on Little Side. The seniors were playing, too. It was just one of those wintry afternoons when outdoor sports were attractive.

The only possible drawback, so far as football was concerned, was that a fairly high wind was blowing. But Hobbs, of the Third, regarded this with full and entire approval.

He had been waiting for a wind for days.

He and his confederate slipped into the monastery ruins, and made their way to a quiet corner which was sheltered from wind and weather. And there, in the corner, lay some peculiar looking object, covered over with pieces of sacking. Hobbs proceeded to remove the sacking with reverent care.

"There she is!" he said breathlessly. "My hat! What a beauty!"

But Dicky Jones was dubious.

"Doesn't look much to me!" he said bluntly. "You'll be a silly ass if you risk your giddy life in a contraption of that sort. Don't forget that gliding is a science."

"Fathead!" interrupted Hobbs, with a sniff. "Haven't I studied it? Haven't I made model gliders and model aeroplanes? What about that one that flew right over the school, and came down in the middle of Farmer Holt's ten-acre field? What about that?"

"Well, I'll admit it was a pretty good model," said Jones reluctantly. "But, after all, you designed it from plans that you pinched out of an instruction book—and there was a gale blowing at the time—"

"You horrible fibber!" said Hobbs indignantly. "It was my own design—every blessed bit of it! But there's no sense in arguing. This glider is a full-sized one, and I've made up my mind to beat all the gliding records! If I don't keep up in the air for about four or five hours, my name isn't Hobbs! This machine is absolutely perfect!"

"You can't judge by appearances," said Dicky Jones, gazing at the glider without much enthusiasm. "It looks like a wreck to me!"

Hobbs didn't say much. He was quite accustomed to receiving scorn and contempt. Hardly anybody gave him credit for his wonderful inventions. But he was convinced that the glider was a perfect model, and he didn't care a snap for the opinion of others.

Gliding was his latest craze. He had been fired by the reports in the newspapers of

late—descriptions of gliding contests on the Sussex Downs, in France, and in Germany.

And as gliders are cheaply made, Hobbs of the Third saw no reason why he shouldn't go in for gliding, too. Very wisely, he had kept quiet about it, taking nobody into his confidence but his own chum.

For Hobbs didn't want a thing like that to get about. Masters are a most unreasonable crowd—they never allow anybody to progress. And if they got to hear of the scheme, they would put their foot down. After the first glide had come off successfully, it wouldn't matter.

And at last, after a whole week of feverish preparation, the thing was ready.

Hobbs and Jones had worked like thieves in the night. They had crept away by themselves. They had borrowed all sorts of things which didn't belong to them—pieces of wood, nails, screws, and any amount of material. The Head's gardener, for example, was wondering what on earth had become of a waterproof sheet that he had left in the potting shed.

Cuttle, the porter, was missing some strips of canvas that he had placed in the woodshed for safety. All these things were now embodied in the remarkable Hobbs glider.

Considering the material he had to work with, Hobbs had done extremely well. The glider was not very big, but he considered it was quite large enough to carry a small weight like his. Hobbs was a thin, weedy junior, and about the last one would suspect of undertaking any hazardous enterprise.

Perhaps he didn't think it was hazardous. He had such supreme confidence in his own contrivances that he would have trusted his life to them at any time. But this glider was the first thing he had made that really promised to put an end to his youthful career.

It was built on standard lines—a kind of monoplane with a small cage-like cockpit for the pilot, with a stabiliser and a rudder at the rear. Strings led from the rudder to the cockpit. Cotton reels had been employed as pulleys, and other contrivances of a like nature.

Any real gliding expert would have condemned the whole thing at the first glance. But to Hobbs it seemed that nothing so absolutely perfect had ever been designed before. In his opinion it was the last word in engineless aircraft.

"Come on—lend me a hand!" he said briskly.

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

"I'm off for a glide!"

"But—but you don't really mean it?" said Jones, staring. "Weren't you spoofing when you said that you wanted me to push you off from the top of the ruins?"

"Spoofing! Of course I wasn't spoofing!" replied Hobbs indignantly.

"But you'll kill yourself!"

"Rot!" said Hobbs. "This glider's as

safe as a kid's scooter! I've built it so that it maintains perfect stability, in spite of any adverse currents or wind eddies."

"I'll bet you saw those words in a book!" said Jones.

"Oh, I can't expect you to understand the technical terms!" said Hobbs witheringly. "You've helped me pretty decently this last week—you've been a pal. So keep it up, and then see my triumph!"

"Oh, all right!" said Dicky. "Don't blame me if you break your silly neck! I suppose this thing has got to be carried up—"

"Don't maul it about like that, you dummy!" yelled Hobbs.

It was apparent that the glider had to be handled very gingerly. It was constructed in four sections. These, according to Hobbs, had to be carried to the top of the ruins, and then fixed together with wire. He had a coil in readiness.

So, one by one, the portions of the glider were laboriously carried up the crumbling stairs to the very top of the old tower. This was the highest point of the ruins.

There was a kind of battlement up there, with a wide ledge. Here the glider was to be put together. And the two fags proceeded to perform the work. It was not so easy, after all. For the wind kept coming in gusts, and the glider was rather awkward to manage.

However, at last, the thing was done.

By means of much wire and energy, the various portions of the weird looking contraption were fixed together. It was bigger than Dicky Jones had imagined—and, indeed, quite large enough to maintain a weight like that of Hobbs. The one problem was whether the thing would work.

"Wouldn't it be better to put a chunk of stone in it?" asked Dicky. "Then you'd be able to judge what happened. If the glider came down all right, you'd feel safe in getting in it—"

"It only shows what a mess your brains are in!" snapped Hobbs. "How's the glider going to work without anybody in it to wangle the controls? I shall be ready in two minutes. I've only got to fix that second cotton reel, and wind some string round the elevator!"

Dicky Jones watched, with growing interest. The fact that Hobbs might dash himself to bits did not seem to worry Dicky in the slightest now. After all, it was his own look out. He wanted to do it—he wasn't being pressed. And Jones was genuinely curious to see what would happen.

"Buck up!" he said. "You get inside, and I'll shove you off!"

"Don't forget I've got to go against the wind," said Hobbs. "By doing that, I shall soar straight up. I expect I shall climb to about a thousand feet, and then glide down in one swoop. See the idea?"

"Yes—if it works all right."

"Oh, it's bound to work," said Hobbs. "Then I shall turn against the wind again,

and soar up once more. I shall keep on doing that. My hat! Won't the fellows be surprised to see me hovering over the giddy school!"

The prospect of failure did not seem to enter into the fag's calculations. There is nothing like the perfect optimism of extreme youth.

Hobbs made his necessary adjustments, and then climbed into the pilot's seat. The glider was on the extreme edge of the ruins, with a yawning chasm of space immediately in front. And it required all the efforts of the two fags to keep the thing steady in the wind.

It was at this point that a yell came from below.

Three small youths had come into sight, and they were staring up at the ruins in astonishment and wonder. The three small youths were Handforth minor, Owen minor, and Chubby Heath—all of the Third.

"Hi!" roared Handforth minor. "What the dickens are you idiots doing up there? If you ain't careful, you'll fall down and crack your silly nuts! And what's that kite?"

Hobbs thrilled with indignation.

"Kite!" he howled. "This is my new glider!"

Willy Handforth stared.

"Oh, so that's what you've been up to this last week, is it?" he said grimly. "You young fathead! You're not going to trust your life to a rotten thing like that, are you?"

"No!" shouted Hobbs.

"I should think not—"

"It's not a rotten thing—it's the latest thing in motorless aeroplanes!" went on Hobbs. "And there's no question about risking my life. I'm just off for a glide. In two minutes you'll see me soaring a thousand feet over the school! Gimme a push, Dicky!"

"Right!" said Jones promptly.

"Stop!" roared Willy, dashing forward. "You mustn't do it, Hobbs! You'll break your neck! Wait until I get up there—"

"Oh!" gasped Heath and Owen minor.

They watched, fascinated, and Willy Handforth caught his breath in, and turned pale. He was probably the most brainy junior in the Third, and he knew well enough that it was an act of sheer madness to attempt any glide in such a wretchedly constructed vehicle. If he had known of this before, he would have smashed the thing up with his own hands.

But now it was too late!

Even as Willy pulled up short, Dicky Jones gave Hobbs a tremendous push forward. And Hobbs, on the glider, was precipitated into space. The horrified fags below expected to see him dashed to death on the spot.

But he wasn't. In some extraordinary way, the glider swooped upwards, behaving like any self-respecting flying machine should. The wind was strong and steady.

Up went the glider, soaring perfectly, with Hobbs sitting there with supreme confidence, and thrilling in every fibre with enthusiastic triumph. Then something seemed to go wrong.

The left wing of the glider wobbled a bit, sagged sideways, and then crumpled up altogether. At the same moment a big gust of wind swooped down. Hobbs was whirled away to the left, like a leaf in an autumn gale.

"That's done it!" gasped Willy.

What happened next was over in a flash.

The glider did not actually fall sheer, but came down in a long, diagonal swoop. The fact that the trees were in the way saved the life of Hobbs. If he had struck the ground at that speed and force he would have been dashed to bits.

But the glider fell into the tree-top, paused, smashed up with a crackling of wood and twigs, and then came tumbling down to the ground. It struck with a crash, and there was a terrible, ominous silence.

Willy Handforth and his chums dashed up to the spot like mad, their faces blanched, their hearts beating rapidly. They arrived at the wreckage, and stared down upon it.

Hobbs lay there, in the midst of the debris—still and silent.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHOSEN ONE.



"H E'S — he's dead!" gasped Chubby Heath. "Oh, my goodness! I knew something like this would happen—I knew it!"

"It won't do any good to get into a panic!" exclaimed Willy sharply. "Quick! Don't stand there staring! Help me to get him out! There may still be life in the poor kid!"

But just at that moment a big, athletic figure came hurrying round the shrubbery at the double. It was Mr. Clifford, the sports master. He was looking anxious and alarmed.

"What has happened?" he asked quickly.

"It was Hobbs, sir. We told him not to do it!" wailed Owen minor. "He made that rotten glider, and went up in it! And now he's killed himself! Oh! It's too awful——"

"We'll soon see what the damage is!" said Mr. Clifford briskly.

Pushing the fags aside, he pressed into the bushes, and was soon bending over the still form of Hobbs. The inventor of the Third was gently lifted out, and a moment later he was placed on the ground.

To the intense delight of the fags, Hobbs opened his eyes.

"It's all right—only just a little sideslip!" he muttered. "I'll soon correct that—it needs a new stabiliser——"

"Feeling better, young un?" asked Mr. Clifford.

Hobbs, who was a sorry picture, endeavoured to sit up. He certainly wasn't dead—or anything near it. It is really wonderful what youngsters can go through without coming to any serious harm.

"There's nothing much wrong with me, sir," said Hobbs. "I shall be able to try another flight—— Ow! Ooooh!"

He broke off, and his face twisted in agony as he moved his right leg.

"I—I think my ankle's broken, sir!" he gasped.

Mr. Clifford made a quick examination. Then the sportsmaster smiled, and look very much relieved.

"You can think yourself very lucky, young man!" he exclaimed. "You might easily have done yourself a serious hurt. As it is, you are merely suffering from a sprained ankle, a nastily-grazed arm, and a large number of bruises. Under the circumstances, you have got off lightly."

"Isn't he hurt more than that, sir?" asked Willy.

"Don't you think that's enough?"

"Why, he ought to have been killed on the spot!" said Handforth minor. "The way he came down was terrific! It was that tree that saved him. What are you going to do with him, sir?"

"Take him indoors, and put him straight into the Sanatorium," replied Mr. Clifford. "And you boys will please understand that any further ridiculous experiments with gliders must not be performed."

"You can bet we won't try the game, sir!" said Chubby Heath.

"Hobbs was insane to imagine for a moment that he could glide successfully," went on the sportsmaster. "You youngsters need looking after every moment! Heaven only knows what you'll be up to next!"

Hobbs vainly protested that his glider was a perfect model, and that the accident had only happened because he wasn't quite accustomed to the controls. However, he was silenced by Mr. Clifford.

The latter gathered him in his arms, and carried him straight indoors. Certainly, Hobbs was extremely lucky to have escaped with only comparatively slight injuries.

He would be in the "Sauny" for about three days, and then would resume his place in the Third. Upon the whole, Hobbs was inclined to be pleased. He had had a thrilling experience, and would now dwell in luxury for three days without any lessons.

He little realised what his accident was to lead to.

Neither did the other fags. But, curiously enough, that incident with the glider was destined to cause a remarkable amount of trouble—indirectly, but none the less sure.

For Hobbs was Kenmore's fag. And Kenmore, of the Sixth, was one of the most unpopular fellows in the whole school. He was a bully, a prefect, and very difficult to get on with.

Hobbs had pleased Kenmore fairly well—for Hobbs was a meek youngster when it

came to fagging, who never jibbed at the tasks which Kenmore set him. In fact, the bully of the Sixth had never had such a fag before.

Kenmore had left instructions with Hobbs to have a bright fire going, and the kettle boiling. And Kenmore had always found that Hobbs obeyed instructions implicitly. That was why he was so useful.

On this particular afternoon Kenmore had gone out with Grayson of the Fifth—a kindred spirit. As a matter of fact, they had run into Bannington to indulge in a little game of billiards at the Wheatsheaf.

And they returned cold and hungry. They had bought something special in for tea, and the prospect of a cheery fire and a hot cup of tea was very alluring.

The two seniors strode briskly into the Ancient House, quite unaware of the accident to Hobbs. Having been out all the afternoon, they had naturally heard nothing of the glider incident.

"After tea we'll get some of the other fellows in, and have a little game," said Kenmore, as he opened his study door. "I know that Parker and Shaw— Why, what the—"

Kenmore broke off, and his brow grew black.

He stood just inside the study, staring round. The apartment was untidy, cheerless, and icily cold. The fire was out, and the fender littered with a mass of cold cinders.

"By gad!" exclaimed Kenmore savagely. "Look at this! Not a thing done! No fire—no kettle boiling—nothing! I'll absolutely skin that kid! What's the good of me giving him orders?"

Grayson nodded.

"The only way to treat fags is to tan 'em," he agreed. "When I get in the Sixth, I'll keep mine in order—"

"Oh, it's easy enough to talk!" snapped Kenmore. "These infernal brats need keeping in order, I can tell you! It's five o'clock to the minute, and I told young Hobbs to clear up, get the fire going, and to be all ready for tea at five! And this is the result!"

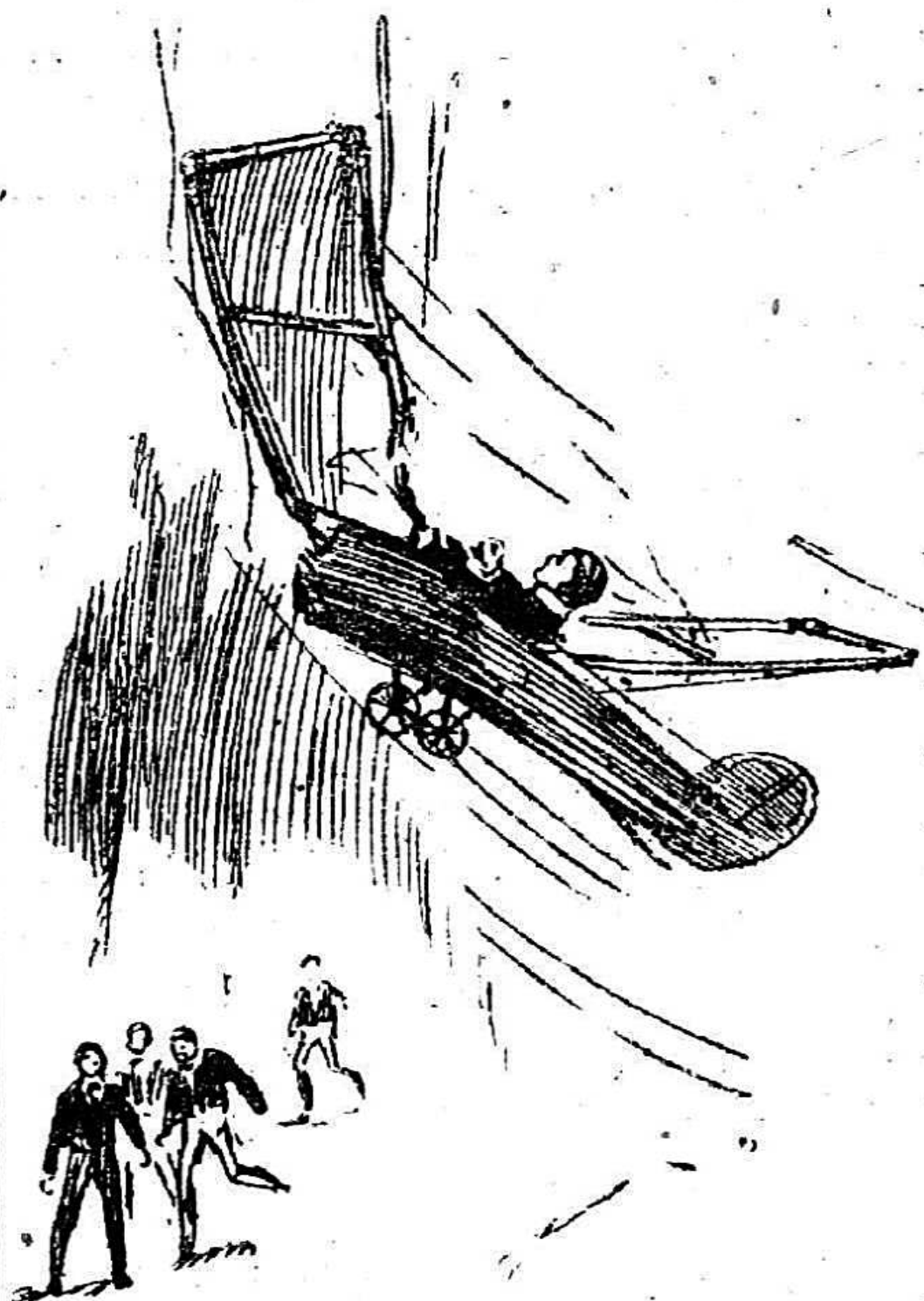
"You'd better do something drastic," suggested Grayson. "Anyhow, we can't have tea here. How about going to my study—"

"No—I'm going to see this through!" interrupted Kenmore. "You needn't think I shall allow my fag to ignore my instructions in this way! He's been pretty good, too! Unless he can give a good reason for neglecting his duty, I'll make him smart."

And Kenmore strode out, still frowning furiously, and made his way towards the Third Form quarters. He thought a great deal of himself, and for a mere fag to defy him was like a crime.

In the Remove passage Kenmore ran into Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and one or two others. They greeted him with cheery smiles.

"What's bitten you, Kenny?" inquired



The left wing of the glider wobbled a bit, sagged sideways, and then crumpled up altogether. At the same moment a big gust of wind swooped down. Hobbs was whirled away to the left, like a leaf in a storm.

Pitt. "You look as though you've backed the wrong geegee!"

Kenmore scowled.

"I don't want any of your sauce!" he snapped. "Who's seen young Hobbs?"

"Hobbs of the Third?" said Tommy Watson. "He's in the Sanny."

"Where?"

"In the Sanatorium."

"Don't talk rot!" said Kenmore curtly. "There's nothing wrong with Hobbs—"

"Well, you know best, I suppose," interrupted Watson. "Haven't you heard about the accident?"

"What accident?" said Kenmore sharply.

"Oh, that young ass tried to make a glider," grinned Pitt. "He was dotty enough to start off from the top of the monastery ruins. Of course, he came a cropper, and smashed himself up a bit. He's in the Sanny now, and he's booked there for about a week, I should think."

Simon Kenmore clenched his fists.

"Is this true?" he demanded harshly.

"Of course it's true."

"The young fool!" snapped the prefect. "Just when he was getting into my way, nicely he's got to go and half kill himself!"

This means that I've got to find another fag."

"I pity the chap you pick on!" said Pitt. "Hobbs is rather lucky, now I come to think of it. He will have a bit of peace in the Sunny, anyhow. It must be hard work to fag for you, Kenny!"

Kenmore scowled, and strode away. It wasn't long before he received verification of the story from several quarters. Under the circumstances, he couldn't very well tan Hobbs, as he had threatened. But he certainly meant to obtain a substitute.

So he invaded the Third Form quarters. Strictly speaking, the fags were not allowed to have studies, but Willy Handforth had converted a number of little boxrooms—which had long been empty—into cosy dens. So the Third was lucky in this respect.

Kenmore entered two or three of the rooms, and found them empty. At the fourth attempt he was lucky, and he found Willy and Co. busily preparing tea. They were, in fact, frying kippers in a tin lid, and the little study was thick with smoke.

"Pah!" snapped Kenmore, as he entered. "What filthy stuff are you kids cooking?"

"Kippers," said Willy briefly.

"Well, I want one of you now—at once," said Kenmore. "Hobbs was my fag, and I hear that he's hurt himself. One of you must come along at once. I don't care which—you're all pretty worthless."

"In that case, what's the good of coming?" asked Willy.

"If you answer me back, you'll get a clout!" said Kenmore. "Chuck this up, and —"

"Look here, Kenmore, I can't come!" said Chubby Heata indignantly. "I'm just going to snatch something to eat, and then I've got to go along to Morrow's study—I'm his fag, you know."

"And I'm Wilson's fag," put in Owen minor.

Kenmore paused. He couldn't very well take another senior's fag—such a thing was considered to be very bad form.

"What about you?" he asked, glaring at Willy.

"I'm exempt!" said Handforth minor.

"What do you mean—exempt?"

"Well, you see, I'm the leader of the Third, and that gives me a kind of standing," replied Willy calmly. "It wouldn't be dignified for me to fag for anybody. Sorry, Kenmore, it can't be done."

The prefect snorted.

"Can't it?" he growled. "We'll see about that! Exempt, eh? You'll come along to my study at once, kid! If you don't turn up within three minutes, I'll come back with a cane."

He turned on his heel, and strode out. The three fags looked at one another significantly.

"I thought it would come, sooner or later," said Chubby. "Hard lines, old son. Fagging for Kenmore is worse than eating

arsenic! He's a terror! Your life won't be worth living!"

"I'm not going!" said Willy stoutly.

His chums looked at him, aghast. "But—but you can't defy Kenmore!" shouted Owen minor. "He'll skin you alive! Besides, Third Formers are bound to do fagging duty—it's an unwritten law! You've been lucky to escape it so far, but it was bound to come."

Willy breathed hard.

"I wouldn't mind anybody else but Kenmore," he said gruffly. "I suppose I'd better go. Rats! This means that I shall have to wait an hour before I have my tea! If Kenmore starts any of his rot with me, I shall show him something! I'm not Hobbs! He'd better go easy."

"I shouldn't advise you to cheek him," said Chubby. "He's a prefect, and he can make your life a misery. It's always best to get in with the prefects. You'll be doing lines from morning till night—you'll be caned, and goodness knows what else! I've always found that the only thing is to stick it and say nothing."

Willy looked grim.

"That's the general rule," he said. "But I'm going to be the exception!"

CHAPTER III.

JIBBING AT THE JOB.



KENMORE smiled with sour satisfaction when Willy entered the study two or three minutes later.

"It's just as well you came, my lad!" said Kenmore.

"See that fireplace? Clear it up, take the cinders away, and then light the fire. That'll do to begin with. If you don't do it properly—"

"Hadn't you better wait until I make a mess of it?" put in Willy. "There's no need to threaten me in advance. I know how to light a fire all right."

Kenmore stared.

"You've got too much to say!" he said. "And you'd better understand at once that I don't allow any talk from fags. You're here to do what you're told, without question, and without objection."

"A kind of slave, eh?" asked Willy.

"You cheeky young hound—"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth minor. "I can't say a giddy word without you jumping down my throat! Look here, Kenmore, I'm your fag, and we've got to be together a good bit. Wouldn't it be better if we came to a clear understanding to start with?"

"What do you mean, confound you?"

"I'm just putting things clearly," said Willy. "I may be a fag, but I'm a human being, and I'm not going to be treated like a serf! As long as you remember that we shall get on all right. You say you want

the fire made? Right-ho! I'll get busy on it."

And Willy strode briskly to the fireplace, whistling cheerfully. He set to work in a business-like way, for he never believed in wasting time. He didn't like this work, but he didn't see why he should be miserable about it. Willy generally took things as they came, and made the best of them.

And Kenmore looked at him curiously.

In all his experience he had never had a fag speak to him like that before. There was something different about Handforth minor. He showed as plainly as possible that he wasn't afraid of Kenmore in the slightest degree. Other fags positively wilted under the prefect's frown. But Willy was made of different stuff. Nothing could make him wilt.

Kenmore was quite nonplussed for a moment. Then he decided that this sort of thing wouldn't do. He certainly wasn't going to be dictated to by his own fag.

"Stop that whistling!" he ordered sharply.

Willy looked round.

"Anything the matter with it?" he asked.

"I wasn't flat, was I?"

"You've got a confounded lot too much to say!" retorted Kenmore. "I don't allow whistling in this study—and I don't allow back answers, either. If I tell you to stop whistling, you've got to stop."

"Yes, my lord!" said Willy gravely.

"You—you infernal little sweep!" said Kenmore, exasperated. "If you talk like that again——"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "What shall I do then? I thought you had an idea that you were somebody important. Shall I say 'Your Majesty' next time?"

Kenmore strode across the study, and gave Willy a hard clout on the side of the face, from the rear, so that the junior had no chance of dodging. Willy jumped round, red as a beetroot.

"What's that for?" he shouted hotly.

"For being impudent!" snapped Kenmore.

"I'm going to squash that independent spirit of yours, young man! If you think you can come here and cheek me, you've made a mistake! Now get on with this work; I'll be back in ten minutes, and if you haven't finished, you'll smart!"

Kenmore walked out, feeling that he had driven fear into Willy's heart. As a matter of fact, it was a toss-up whether the fire was lit or not. For a few moments Willy half decided that he would clear out, and risk the consequences. But he didn't.

On second thoughts, he decided to stick it. Kenmore had made up his mind to quell him. Well, Willy would see about that. He had half an idea that he might be able to quell Kenmore!

He was absolutely unafraid of the prefect. He would do his duty, but nothing more. If Kenmore tried any of his bullying tricks, Willy would be ready. In fact, Handforth minor was rather curious to find out how things would develop.

So he built the fire, and lit it.

When Kenmore returned fifteen minutes later, accompanied by Grayson, he was somewhat staggered. The change in the study was extraordinary. He had certainly expected to find the fire going. But, apparently, Willy had been working like a Trojan.

That was Handforth minor's character all over. If he did a thing, he did it thoroughly, even if the work was distasteful. And he had performed wonders in the prefect's study.

The fireplace was as clean as a new pin, the kettle was singing, the floor was looking bright and clean, and all the articles on the mantelpiece were neatly arranged. The bookcase had been tidied up, and a litter of stuff which had adorned one corner for weeks was all piled neatly up in quite a sightly manner. There were other improvements, too.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Kenmore. "Did you do this yourself?"

"Of course I did," said Willy. "You don't think anybody would help me, I suppose? Anything wrong? Better look round carefully, in case I've forgotten something. And as soon as you've done with me, I should like to go and have a bit of tea."

Kenmore felt rather helpless in the presence of this supremely self-confident fag. There was something in Willy's manner—something in his half-contemptuous look—which made Kenmore's gore rise.

"You'll go when I've finished with you, and not before!" he said curtly. "You haven't done so bad, considering, but you needn't think I'm satisfied."

"I didn't think you would be," said Willy. "Some chaps want a lot of pleasing."

"Are you asking for another clout?" growled the prefect.

"My hat!" groaned Willy. "What have I done now?"

"Keep quiet, and hold your tongue until I speak to you!" said Kenmore. "Sit down, Grayson, old man. We'll have the tea on the go in a minute. By the way, how are you off for cigarettes?"

"I've nearly run out," said Grayson. "I was going to borrow some from you."

"You can't; I've only got one left," said Kenmore. "Look here, kid," he added, turning to Willy. "I want you to pop to the village."

"Now?" asked Handforth minor.

"Yes, now," said Kenmore. "Go to the back door of the White Harp, and give a note to the landlord. I'll write it in a minute. He'll give you a little parcel, and you've got to bring it straight back here. Understand?"

"Of course," said Willy. "I'm not dense."

"Then wait a minute; I'll get the note ready."

"Hold on!" said Willy, as Kenmore took out a fountain-pen. "What's the idea of

sending me to the back-door of a pub? Am I going there to get some cigarettes?"

"Yes; and you'd better be careful with them," replied Kenmore. "Don't tell anybody else, or I'll slaughter you."

"Sorry," said Willy. "I'm not going."

"What?"

"Buying cigarettes isn't included in a fag's duty," said Willy calmly. "It's all very well to make Hobbs do duties of that kind, but it won't work with me. I'm your fag, and I'll obey all orders. But when it comes to going to public houses to get cigarettes, there's nothing doing."

"Cheeky young brat!" said Grayson hotly.

Kenmore was absolutely red with fury.

"You've asked for it, and you'll get it!" he snarled. "I've never heard such sauce in all my life! You'll go for those cigarettes, and you'll bring them straight back here——"

"I won't!" interrupted Handforth minor.

"And you can't make me!"

"By thunder!" shouted Kenmore thickly.

He lunged forward, but reckoned without his host. For, like a flash of lightning, Willy was outside the door, and he streaked down the passage. He was no coward, but he thought it far better to get away.

He believed that Kenmore would consider it beneath his dignity to give chase. But Kenmore was so enraged that he forgot all about his dignity. He rushed down the passage after the fag, and overtook him in the lobby.

"Now, you little worm, I've got you!" he panted.

"All right; I know it!" said Willy. "I sha'n't struggle, Kenny. But you needn't think I'm going for those cigarettes——"

"You infernal young beast!" hissed Kenmore. "Don't talk about them here! I'm going to make you smart for defying me! I'm going to break your spirit!"

Willy laughed.

"You're an optimist!" he replied calmly.

His very coolness enraged Kenmore all the more. And in that moment the prefect went off into one of his well-nigh uncontrollable fits of temper. It was Kenmore's greatest weakness—he had a vile temper when he was roused. It was so violent that he was ready to perform outrageous things.

He got hold of Willy's arm, and twisted it fiercely.

"Oh! Oh—ooh!" gasped Handforth minor faintly. "You—you brute! You'll break my arm! Stop! Stop, I tell you——"

"Are you going to be cheeky any more?" demanded Kenmore savagely.

"I haven't been cheeky at all yet!"

Willy's arm received another twist.

"Are you going to do what I tell you?" said Kenmore.

"Oh!" panted Willy. "Oh, you cad!"

"Will you go to the village?"

"No, I won't!" said the fag, rebelliously.

"I won't! Do you hear? You can go and get your own cigarettes! And you can do your rotten worst! I'm not afraid of you!"

"By gad!" hissed Kenmore harshly.

Again he twisted Willy's arm, and although the fag tried to keep the sound back, an involuntary cry was forced out of him. The pain was excruciating.

And just at that moment Edward Oswald Handforth appeared from the Remove passage. Willy's elder brother was alone, and he paused and stared as he saw the pair in the middle of the lobby. That agonised cry of Willy's could not be mistaken.

"By George!" roared Handforth. "Stop that, you brute!"

Kenmore twirled round, releasing Willy in a flash. He scowled at Handforth with a brow as black as thunder.

"Who told you to interfere?" he shouted thickly.

"I didn't need any telling!" replied Handforth, striding up. "Look here, you may be a prefect, but if I catch you torturing my minor again, I'll knock you down!"

Kenmore swallowed hard.

"Take a hundred lines for insolence!" he snapped.

And, without another word, he strode away—probably feeling that the matter had gone far enough. There was something in Edward Oswald's appearance that did not quite appeal to the bully of the Sixth.

Handforth cooled down a bit.

"Did he hurt you much, kid?" he asked.

"It was decent of you to butt in, but it was quite unnecessary," said Willy calmly. "The next time, old son, I should advise you not to interfere!"

"What?" said Handforth faintly.

"I don't want to appear ungrateful, but I can deal with Kenmore," went on Willy. "He had the advantage of me that time, but he won't catch me on the hop again. He's a beast, and I'm going to cure him!"

Edward Oswald stared.

"Why, you young rotter——"

"Oh, don't go off, Ted!" said Willy, with a sigh. "You see, Kenmore's made me his fag, and the position's pretty rotten. But I can look after him all right, and you can bet your boots I'll lead him a dance."

"His fag, eh?" said Handforth. "Take my advice, young'un, and don't——"

"Thanks all the same, but I don't need any advice," interrupted Willy cheerfully.

"So long Ted? See you later."

And the hero of the third pushed his hands into his pockets, and walked away, whistling shrilly.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOCK FOR ST. FRANK'S.



REGINALD PITT whistled.

"My only sainted aunt!" he ejaculated.

"Impossible! It can't be true! It must be some fatheaded mistake!"

"Eh? What's that?"

asked Jack Grey.

The chums of Study E were having a

warm before the fire before morning lessons. It was the following day, and outside everything was freezing. It was real January weather.

"Haven't you seen this?" asked Pitt.

"Seen what?"

"This newspaper," said Reggie. "I thought you brought it in here——"

"So I did, but I haven't looked at it," put in Jack.

"Are you aware that the governing board of this school is now ruled by a woman?"

Jack Grey stared.

"By a what?" he gasped.

"A woman—a maiden lady!" said Pitt impressively.

"You—you ass!" exclaimed Jack. "If you think you can spoof me like that, you've got hold of the wrong passenger! I'm not quite a duffer, old man."

"All right—look here!"

Reggie planked the paper down on the table in front of his chum. And Jack commenced reading an item of news which was displayed at some considerable length, and with big headlines.

"Great Scott!" said Jack faintly.

There it was—in clear, big type, without any question or query. It was printed in one of the most important London daily papers, so there could be little doubt as to its truth.

And Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey were staggered.

The paragraph was a report of a meeting of the St. Frank's Governing Board. There was a great deal of stuff which did not interest the boys at all. But what did attract them was a definite statement to the effect that Miss Jane Trumble, the elderly maiden sister of a recently deceased governor, had been elected Chairman of the Board.

It was absolutely astounding.

"But—but it can't be true!" said Jack. "I mean, how the dickens can a lady be a chairman, anyhow?"

"That's only a way of putting it," said Pitt. "They can't say 'Chairwoman'—it sounds too clumsy. There are lots of big companies with women at their head. There's nothing in that. And nowadays, what with women in Parliament, and on the Borough Councils, I'm not particularly surprised. But for St. Frank's to have a woman at the head of the governors—good-night!"

The two juniors stared at one another.

"Of course, I don't suppose it'll make much difference to us, if any," remarked Jack. "It's only once in a blue moon the governors come down here. But when a woman gets into power, you never know what she might get up to! What madness made the governors elect her?"

"Goodness knows!" said Reggie. "Perhaps they wanted to shift the responsibility. You know what these maiden ladies are. She may be one of those forceful persons who absolutely mean to have their own way. She's the sister of old Sir Roderick Trumble, who died about six months ago."

"He was a big pot, wasn't he?"

"I don't know for certain, but I think he was about the biggest chap on the Board—Although he didn't appear publicly," replied Pitt. "Let's hope his sister's the same. But I don't like it!"

"Neither do I," agreed Jack. "I mean, it's—it's—— Well, without being ungallant, it doesn't seem quite the thing for a lady to be in such a position. This is a boys' school!"

"Exactly!" said Pitt. "I wonder if the other fellows have heard about it? It'll be rather interesting to know what they've got to say. Suppose we go and see?"

"Good wheeze!"

They passed out of the study, and went along into the lobby, with the intention of going to the Common Room—where a certain number of fellows were bound to be congregated.

But it wasn't necessary to go as far as that. The lobby contained a crowd of fellows, including Handforth and Co. and myself. Even Archie Glenthorne was there.

Pitt and Grey could see at once that the news was out.

"I say, heard the latest?" called De Valerie, as they came up.

"Rather!" said Reggie. "I think it's a bit thick, don't you? I mean, a woman being chairman——"

"Dash it all, the thing's absolutely frightful!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, laddies, the jolly old tissues positively rebel at the idea. They shrink at the thought of a woman being at the fountain head, so to speak. Rather beyond the old limit, what?"

"We won't stand it!" shouted Handforth.

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie stoutly.

"Or, I should say, how can we do anything? I've asked Phipps, and he's positively helpless. He shuddered at the thing, but when it came to a matter of schemes, he was somewhat devoid. I mean to say, it makes a chappie in a flutter."

"Oh, dry up, Archie, and let somebody speak!" snapped Handforth. "I'm putting it to you chaps plainly. Are we going to stand this or not? Are we going to allow a woman to be chairman of the Governing Board?"

I grinned.

"And suppose we don't allow it?" I asked.

"Why, we can jolly soon say what we think!" said Handforth. "It won't take us long to do that."

"But can we say what we think?" I asked.

"That's the whole question, Handy. It's rather a delicate position, you know. We want to be gentlemanly, don't we? And it won't look very polite if we kicked up a big fuss because a woman——"

"Oh, that doesn't count in a case like this," put in Handforth. "This is a boys' school, and we're not going to be bossed by an old maiden lady—especially with a name like Trumble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In any case, there's no need to make a fuss yet," I said. "It's more than likely that Miss Trumble will remain in obscurity. She'll probably never come to the school, and there won't be any difference. It was rather a pity they put it in the paper."

"Perhaps it's only a yarn," suggested Tommy Watson.

"It might be—but that's not likely," said Pitt. "We'll ask Mr. Crowell—Hullo! There goes the bell for lessons."

The juniors hurried into the Form Room with unusual alacrity. As a general rule they did not show any particular desire to commence work for the day. But on this occasion they were in the Form Room in record time.

Mr. Crowell came in, looking astonished.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed drily. "It seems that miracles can still happen! What has made you boys so energetic this morning? Not a single absentee! Quite remarkable!"

"We've heard about that alteration in the Governing Board, sir," exclaimed Handforth. "Is it true that Miss Trumble has been elected Chairman?"

Mr. Crowell's smile vanished.

"Ahem! Well, yes, I believe so," he replied. "So this is the reason for this unusual alertness? You must not let it worry you, boys. It will make no difference to us."

"But it's not right that a woman—"

"That will be enough!" broke in the Form Master. "It is not for you, boys, to pass criticisms—at all events, it is not for me to listen to them. So we will get on with our work."

"But it does seem a bit off-side, sir," went on Handforth. "I'm feeling pretty sore about it. It's not the thing for a woman to butt into a business of this kind. She doesn't understand how to run a boys' school, does she? It's not the thing—"

"I've already told you, Handforth, that discussion on the subject is not desirable," said Mr. Crowell curtly. "To settle the question, once and for all, I will tell you that there is very little possibility of a change having any actual effect upon the course of events here. Time will show, of course, but you certainly need not worry."

Mr. Crowell plainly showed, however, that his own disapproval was as strong as that of the Remove. And when morning lessons were in full swing, most of the fellows kept whispering to one another. And for once in a way, Mr. Crowell did not pull them up with his usual sharpness. He seemed to appreciate the fact that the case was a special one.

And, in the meantime, Dr. Stafford was pacing up and down his own study, looking very concerned and worried. Nelson Lee was there, too. They were both grave.

"I had no intimation of it until to-day, Mr. Lee," the Head was saying. "As a matter of fact, I had a letter from Sir

John Brent this morning. I can assure you that I was astounded."

"Undoubtedly, doctor," agreed Lee. "At the same time, there is no reason to fear that Miss Trumble will make any serious alterations—"

"I don't know—I don't know!" interrupted Dr. Stafford. "My dear Lee, Trumble himself was always talking about his sister before he died. Poor fellow! One of the best, Mr. Lee, but very self-willed. And I sometimes suspect that it was his sister's will that influenced him, and not his own. What will she do now—in such a position of responsibility?"

"Well, of course, it is early as yet," said Lee. "I can hardly think that Miss Trumble will bring about any drastic change."

"She is coming down to St. Frank's, Mr. Lee," groaned the Head.

"Indeed!"

"Not knowing all the facts, it does," said Nelson Lee. "I can only conclude that Miss Trumble holds the biggest interest in the school. You must remember that she inherited her brother's entire fortune. Possibly she caused such a commotion that the other governors gave way to her for the sake of peace."

"And we are to suffer!" said the Head dolefully. "Whatever the reason, Mr. Lee, we have no consolation—and no remedy. According to what Sir John Brent has written, the lady has already decided to suggest certain changes in the school curriculum."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Perhaps you are concerning yourself unduly, doctor," he exclaimed. "No doubt Miss Trumble will leave everything entirely in your hands. After all, you are the headmaster, and you wield absolute authority."

"Under ordinary circumstances, yes," agreed the Head. "But one cannot deal with a woman as one can with a man. And I know for a fact, Mr. Lee, that Miss Trumble is a truly terrible person."

"Yes—to-day!"

"Dear me!" smiled Lee. "The lady does not mean to lose much time, evidently."

"That is just the trouble!" said Dr. Stafford, removing his glasses, and polishing them. "Think of it, Mr. Lee—imagine it! Practically her first action is to come down to the school."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It is certainly significant," he said. "And I must agree that there is every reason to fear that Miss Trumble will assert herself in an uncomfortable manner."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Lee, I am nervous," said the Head, sitting down. "I am quite perturbed! I have a strong fear that Miss Trumble will interfere—and such a thing will be disastrous."

"It will be extremely unfortunate, I confess."

"Heaven knows I don't want to be ungallant to the fair sex," continued the Head. "But, at the same time, I cannot possibly

imagine what possessed the governors to make this woman their chairman. It seems so utterly preposterous."

"In what way?"

"Good gracious me! In every way!" said Dr. Stafford, with a worried frown. "She is not only exceedingly forceful and self-willed, but she has an idea that her word is law. Honestly, Mr. Lee, if that woman attempts to order me about, I shall—I shall— Upon my soul! I haven't the faintest idea what I shall do! The position is dreadful!"

And Dr. Stafford sat down at his desk, and drummed upon it with his finger-tips. Nelson Lee advised him to cease worrying—for that, after all, would do no good. But Dr. Stafford did worry—and perhaps he had a good reason!

CHAPTER V.

THE BRUTE.



WILLY HANDFORTH walked into Kenmore's study with all

the confidence in the world. Morning lessons were just over, and Willy thought he

would pop in to see if he was required for anything.

It was one of the duties of a fag to look after his "master" in every possible way. And Willy was determined to perform his duties thoroughly. He didn't like fagging, but that made no difference.

Kenmore was there, sitting in front of the fire.

"Oh, here you are!" he said grimly.

"As large as life!" replied Willy. "Want anything?"

Kenmore rose to his feet. As a matter of fact, he had been waiting for Willy all the morning. The prefect had not seen his fag since that little incident in the lobby the previous evening.

And, ever since then, Kenmore had been making up his mind what he should do with Willy. He had come to a firm decision. He was going to show the fag that he would not put up with any nonsense.

He would show him firmly—and teach him a lesson once and for all.

Kenmore had come to the conclusion that there was no sense in taking half measures with a junior like Willy Handforth. Just an ordinary clout on the head wouldn't be sufficient. The imposition of lines would be equally inadequate. It required something far more drastic to smash such a bold spirit.

And Kenmore, with these things rankling in his mind, had worked himself up to a pitch of cold, inward fury. Willy could see it at once. He knew very well that Kenmore was in a dangerous mood.

"I've been waiting for you," said Kenmore.

"Good!" replied Willy. "Then you



Hobbs lay there, in the midst of the debris, still and silent.

haven't waited in vain. Here I am. And, what's more, I'm ready to do any little odd jobs that are going. Say the word, and I'll get busy."

"Before I tell you what I want doing, I'm going to have a little chat with you!" exclaimed Kenmore. "Just a little chat, my lad."

Willy nodded.

"A kind of heart-to-heart talk?" he suggested.

"I didn't tell you to answer me back!" snapped Kenmore. "Confound you! You little whelp!" he burst out furiously. "What do you mean by sitting on the corner of that table?"

Willy didn't move.

"I'm not hurting it, am I?" he asked. "My hat! What a touchy chap you are, Kenmore! No wonder the other fags can't get on with you! If you only knew what a good-tempered fellow I was, we'd get on famously. There's no need to be so beastly snappy."

Kenmore nearly choked.

No matter how he tried to awe this junior, it made no difference. Every word that Willy uttered only served to enrage the prefect more and more. There was something about Willy that absolutely made Kenmore lose control of himself. It was only by an effort that he kept his hands down.

"Look here, I've had enough of this!" he snapped. "Last night you refused to go down to the village for me. I gave you certain orders, and you defied me. You ran away—"

"I did run away!" agreed Willy. "It's not my usual habit to bunk, but I felt like it just then. And it may interest you to know that I can't use my arm this morning. That's the result of your bullying."

"What!" shouted Kenmore.

"Your bullying!" repeated Willy deliberately.

"You—you——"

Kenmore gulped, and clenched his fists.

"That's right!" said Willy. "Never lose control of yourself!"

"You confounded imp!" snarled Kenmore. "I can easily understand that you're Handforth's brother! You've got just the same rotten character! But I'm going to tame you!"

"Wouldn't it be better to tame yourself first?" suggested Willy. "You're a bit wild, you know. No offence, Kenny. But the simple fact is that I'm not afraid of you. Not a bit. Why should I be? You're only a prefect, and you can't jolly well eat me! Just treat me in a decent way, and everything will be all serene. Dash it all, why not chuck all this rot, and start properly?"

"Stop that!" panted Kenmore. "I haven't done yet!"

He was more infuriated because he knew that Willy's words were absolutely sensible. This fag was so utterly unlike every other fag that Kenmore hardly knew what to do.

"You refused to get my cigarettes last night——"

"Oh, haven't we finished with that yet?" asked Willy, with a sigh.

"No, we haven't!" snapped Kenmore. "I'll give you one more chance—and only one more. If you do as I tell you, I won't touch you. But if you refuse, I'll take the skin off your back!"

"Well, what's the wheeze?" asked Willy.

"Last night you jibbed—to-day you won't jib!"

"I might!" said Willy calmly. "It all depends what you want me to do. You needn't think that I take any notice of your threats——"

"Wait a minute!" snarled Kenmore. "You've got to take that note. Do you understand? You've got to bring back a parcel of cigarettes!"

Kenmore reached out a hand, and grasped a length of rope.

"I'll give you one more chance!" he choked. "Are you going?"

"No, I'm not!"

"Is that final?"

"Absolutely!" said Willy. "And now I'll say so-long!"

Like an eel he dodged round the table, and made for the door. He could have got out easily, for the he was as nippy as a fox. Kenmore would have no chance of catching him.

But when he got to the door he paused, and turned back.

"No, I'm not going to bunk!" he said. "I'm not afraid of you, Kenmore, so why should I flee? Don't you think it would be just as well if we came to a proper understanding? I'll do what you want in the way of fagging, but not the other kind of fagging. That's a joke, if you can find it!"

"You—you—you——"

Kenmore simply couldn't get the words out. His present attitude was sufficient to awe any other fag in the school. And yet Willy actually had the audacity to make jokes!

Kenmore saw red.

His one desire, at that moment, was to get hold of the junior and to torture him. He stamped round the table, and grasped the fag by the shoulders. Then he hauled him over on to the hearthrug.

"Now, you little beast, I'm going to teach you a lesson!" he said hoarsely. "I'm going to make you obey my orders! I'm going to make you so tame that if I tell you to eat cinders you'll do it!"

"Go hon!" said Willy.

Inwardly he was greatly alarmed. But never for a moment would he show it. Under no circumstances would he reveal the white feather. And Kenmore, after all, couldn't do so very much.

But for once Willy's calculations were wrong.

It was very seldom that the bully of the Sixth had been in his present mood. Before the fag could realise his intentions Kenmore had passed a rope round both of Willy's wrists.

These ropes were drawn tight—so tight, in fact, that the junior was in pain. He wondered what Kenmore meant to do.

He didn't wonder for long.

There were two big hooks on one wall of the study. Kenmore dragged Willy over to this wall, and fastened the ends of the ropes to the two hooks—which were about six feet from the floor, and four feet apart.

Willy was tied up in such a manner that he was on tip-toe, and quite helpless. Kenmore had performed a very significant operation before tying his victim up. He had stripped the coat and waistcoat from Willy's back.

But still Handforth minor did not accept defeat.

"This looks like being exciting," he observed. "Reminds me of something I saw at the Bannington Palladium. Don't you think—it's a bit too melodramatic, Kenny? I shouldn't be so silly——"

"Stop!" snarled Kenmore. "Better still, I'll gag you! Then you won't be able to howl!"

Before Willy could make another remark a scarf was put over his head and drawn tightly over his mouth. And then, for the first time, Willy began to get really scared.

It came into his head that Kenmore had gone mad. For there was something so grim and inhuman about the prefect's action that Willy felt almost sick at heart. But Kenmore was not insane. It was merely all the worst in his brutal nature coming to the fore. He was in a red-hot rage.

And he was calm, too—it was the calmness of utter fury. He walked over to the door, turned the key in the lock, and then went

to a corner. He took from it a thin walking cane.

It was not a schoolmaster's cane of the ordinary kind, but a wicked-looking thing, with an irregular edge. He swished it through the air suggestively once or twice, and the noise was music to his ears.

"Now, my beauty, I'm going to break your spirit!" he said, in a whisper. "Would you like to know what my plan is? I'm going to flog you until you agree to fetch those cigarettes from the White Harp!"

"As soon as you nod your head I'll stop!" went on Kenmore. "When you nod, I shall know that you mean to go. Now, look out for yourself. Before I've finished with you you'll be sorry that you ever defied me."

Kenmore was probably acting in this way because he had never been defied before. He had always had his own way with fags—they had always feared him. To find one who despised him as Willy did was so galling that Kenmore's self-control went to the winds.

Without any adequate reason, he was preparing to treat this fag as he had never treated any other.

"The last chance!" said Kenmore. "Will you go?"

Willy shook his head.

He knew what was coming, but he didn't flinch. If he gave in now, he would never respect himself again. And he was too strong in character to promise to go just for the sake of getting free.

"All right!" snarled Kenmore. "You'll change your tone in a minute!"

Slash!

The cane descended with cruel, stinging force across Willy's shoulders—bare except for his shirt and undervest. It was a terrible swipe, and it felt to Willy as though a red-hot poker had been placed on his flesh. He shook in every limb, and tears came out of his eyes with the sudden agony.

At the same time his wrists pained him, too. The ropes were pulling cruelly, and it felt as though the skin was being torn from his arms. It seemed to him that it was all some ghastly nightmare. Could it be possible that a senior schoolboy was such a brute?

Slash!

The second blow came—as forceful as the first, and Willy moaned inwardly. He had never suffered such pain before. But this agony had just the opposite effect to what Kenmore had anticipated.

In any weak-willed junior, it might have caused him to surrender. But with a junior of Willy's calibre, it made him twenty times more obstinate. He didn't care—he would stick to his guns.

Slash!

Somehow, this blow didn't seem to hurt so much as the others, although it was struck with just as much force. Willy's back seemed to be numb. It was tingling all over.

And, somehow, he felt dreamy. The pain

was so great that he was dizzy with it. He almost ceased to care. And Kenmore, who was only goaded on by Handforth minor's utter silence, struck once more.

Slash!

"Now!" he panted thickly. "Will you go to the White Harp?"

Willy shook his head—deliberately and vigorously.

"You positively refuse?" snarled Kenmore.

Willy nodded.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

This time Kenmore seemed to go absolutely mad. He hit again and again, and when he paused he was white with uncontrollable temper. He could hardly get his breath to speak.

"Still obstinate?" he whispered hoarsely. "Will you go?"

Then he looked at his victim in a startled kind of way. His eyes bulged, and something seemed to snap in his head. For Handforth Minor's form was limp. His head was hanging back in a sagging kind of way.

And, what was ten times more startling, there was an ominous stain showing on Willy's shirt! Kenmore lost his rage in one flash. It dropped from him like a cloak. And he stood there, shivering in every limb.

Realisation had come—stark, horrible realisation!

What had he done? In his insane fury, what ghastly thing had he performed? He flung the cane down and took Willy by the shoulders. The fag was still limp, and apparently lifeless.

"What—what's the matter with you?" stammered Kenmore hoarsely. "Can't you speak, you little fool? Don't pretend like that!"

He whipped the scarf from Willy's head, and a long sigh escaped the fag. It was followed by a kind of moan. Kenmore turned round and whipped up a knife from the table.

He cut through the ropes—and as he did so he saw that Willy's wrists were red and grazed—terribly grazed, in fact. Kenmore lifted the fag and placed him in the easy chair. Willy was like a dead thing.

"Oh, the little idiot!" panted Kenmore. "Why didn't he scream out, or something? He must be as weak as a rat! I hardly touched him! Wake up, you young wretch! Don't keep pretending like this!"

But Willy remained absolutely still. Kenmore dashed to the cupboard and took out a syphon of soda water. He pointed the nozzle at Willy's face and pressed the lever for a second. One splash came out, dashing itself over the fag's pale face.

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Then Kenmore squirted some into a glass and forced the liquid down Willy's throat. His relief was intense when he saw the fag open his eyes. In less than a minute Willy was fully conscious. He sat forward in the chair and passed a hand over his wet face.

"Hallo!" he said dully. "What's happened? It's raining— Oh! I—I— So, it's you, Kenmore?"

He looked down at his wrists, and then a fierce gleam came into his eyes. He leaned back, but uttered a sharp cry of agony as his back touched the chair.

"You cad!" he whispered. "You brutal coward! Oh, I don't care—you can do it all over again! But I'm going to tell you what I think of you! You're worse than a savage!"

"I—I didn't hurt you much!" snapped Kenmore. "You've been putting it on, you little worm! You gave me a fright for a minute! I thought you were really hurt!"

"Oh, no!" said Willy feebly. "I was only spoofing!"

Even in a moment like that he could not refrain from being sarcastic, although he had only just recovered from something very like a faint. Kenmore pulled him out of the chair, and hustled his coat and waistcoat on.

Willy winced as he did so, for his back seemed to be raw.

"Now you can get out!" said Kenmore hoarsely. "I've given you a lesson, and I hope you'll take it to heart! And look here! If you dare to breathe a word about this I'll—I'll—"

"Well?" said Willy. "Can you do anything worse?"

"Get out!" hissed Kenmore.

He strode across the study and opened the door. Willy passed outside, and Kenmore closed the door again. He went across to a chair and sat down. He was feeling limp and shaky. Now that his temper had gone, he knew well enough that he had gone too far—and he feared what the result would be.

His only consolation was that Willy was not the kind of junior to sneak. He would suffer in silence. And, quite possibly, the flogging had done him good. He would be more reasonable in future.

In the meantime, Willy walked down the passage with uncertain steps. In spite of himself he couldn't maintain a regular gait. It was an extraordinary feeling. He seemed to be in a kind of drunken condition.

And then two youthful forms appeared. They were Chubby Heath and Owen minor.

They had been waiting for Willy, for they knew that he had gone to Kenmore's study. They ran towards him.

"Great Scott!" said Chubby. "What's the matter? You—you look awful! What's Kenmore been doing to you, Willy?"

"Don't—don't talk here!" muttered Willy. "Let's get to our quarters! Somebody might hear us!"

Owen minor caught sight of his leader's wrists.

"Why—you're bleeding!" he gasped. "Look at your wrists! They're absolutely raw! What—what—"

"Let's get to our own study!" said Willy, without his usual vim.

In fact, it was as much as he could do to stand straight. He was nearly exhausted, and it was only by an effort of will that he kept himself upright. With his two faithful chums he went to the Third Form quarters, and then entered his own study. They closed the door behind them.

"Kenmore's a beast!" said Willy grimly. "He's a cruel, awful brute!"

And, as he spoke, he swayed, fell against the table, and then his knees sagged. The agony had been too much for him. He nearly collapsed. It was only the efforts of Heath and Owen that saved him.

"Great pip!" panted Owen minor. "He's fainted!"

"I haven't fainted!" whispered Willy indignantly. "It—it's nothing— Ow! Oh—don't—don't— Oooooh!"

Chubby Heath had laid a hand upon Willy's back. They couldn't understand why he had cried out. But they did understand a few moments later. For, after seeing their leader's wrists, they pressed him with questions.

And Willy told them all. They were his chums, and there was no reason why he shouldn't take them into his confidence. He had to. Such a thing could never be kept secret.

"I say, he ought to be sacked!" exclaimed Owen minor, with a pale face. "I've never heard of such brutality, tying you to the wall and flogging you. Like—like those awful brutes in Russia!"

"I don't think he knew what he was doing," said Willy.

"Oh, yes he did!" snapped Chubby. "He's a beast—an absolute beast! Look here, we want to have a squint at your back! I'll bet the rotter's made some weals there! Anyway, we'll look!"

Willy protested, but not with very much strength. And when his chums had removed his coat and waistcoat, they pulled down his shirt and vest. And they stared at Willy's back with utter horror.

It was a dreadful sight.

Right across the unfortunate fag's shoulders there were a number of horrible, livid weals. And two or three of them had been bleeding, for the skin seemed to be broken.

ANSWERS
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(Continued on page 15.)

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THE SEVEN OF HEARTS

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the Scotland Yard men in running to earth
the gentleman crook, who preys upon
high society.

ALLINFORD rubbed the end of a penholder against the bald patch at the back of his head and played a heel-and-toe tattoo with his boot on the floor. For a second time he compared the paragraph in "Printed informations" with the written document in his hand.

"It's a nightmare," he declared aloud. "I shall wake up presently. You can't tell me that on the same day two people are going to lose two distinct diamond necklaces, each with the same number of stones set in the same way, of exactly the same description, and with the same value. It's ridiculous; it's beyond reason." And he reached for the telephone.

For ten minutes he held an animated conversation with the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. At last he replaced the receiver thoughtfully, folded the documents, and put them in the breast pocket of his morning-coat. Two minutes he spent with a velvet pad polishing his silk hat, which he finally adjusted on his head at the fashionable angle, picked up a pair of lavender-coloured gloves, and, with a glance at himself in the glass, went out into the sunlit morning.

As a divisional detective-inspector, in charge of an important district of the West End, he always made it a point to dress well. In the department he was known as

"Beau Allinford." His carefully kept grey moustache, his square shoulders and well-tailored clothes on his tall figure, gave him the appearance of a retired military officer.

His way led him to the Durbar Hotel, and the manager of that caravanserai greeted him with a handshake of relief. "Come into my private office," he invited. "Have you been able to make anything of it yet? I needn't tell you that the hotel will be grateful if it can be cleared up without any unnecessary publicity—though, of course, we're not strictly responsible, as Mr. Verndale kept the diamonds in his own rooms."

He was a rotund, little man. His bright, little eyes were fixed with some anxiety on the detective. A robbery at an hotel is apt to have serious results on its patronage.

"You don't expect me to touch a button and produce the thief and the gems, do you?" inquired Allinford irritably. "It's not an hour ago since I was here and first heard of the robbery."

"No, no; of course not," said the manager soothingly. "I'm quite sure you'll do your best."

The ruffled Allinford sat down. "Let me tell you my trouble, Mr. Lanton," he said. "Perhaps you can help. Here's Mr. Rex Verndale, a customer of your hotel—"

"Shall we say a client?" interrupted the little manager, with dignity.

"Very well, a client, if you prefer that. Between six o'clock last evening and nine o'clock this morning Mr. Verndale lost from his room a diamond necklace valued at five thousand pounds sterling. "Now,"—he took "Informations" from his pocket and tapped it with a white forefinger—"this morning it was reported to headquarters that a burglary was committed at Sir Rupert Helton's town house in Mount Street, and that the thieves got away with Lady Helton's jewel-case, which contained, among other things, a diamond necklace worth five thousand pounds sterling."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the manager, with astonishment. "What an extraordinary coincidence!"

"I believe you," said Allinford grimly. "What's more extraordinary is that the descriptions of the two necklaces tally, even to the weight of each individual diamond. Now I'm going up to see Mr. Verndale again, but I wanted to ask you what you know about him beforehand."

The manager thought he saw a subtle suggestion in the question. He made a gesture deprecatory of suspicion.

"He's undoubtedly a gentleman," he said, laying a slight stress on the second word. "He's stayed with us for three months or more in every year for more than five years now. He's travelled a great deal, I believe. He is very well known among some good people, and has a private income of his own. He's extremely well-off, I should judge. You don't believe"—with a recollection of a scheme of which he had heard—"that he's trying to work an insurance fraud?"

"That's one of the points," said Allinford. "The jewels were not insured. First time I've heard of any one with a valuable heirloom—which he says it was—which was not insured. You don't know where he gets his income? No? Well, it doesn't matter! I think I'll go up and see him now. I'll look in on you later."

Mr. Rex Verndale occupied a suite of rooms on the first floor of the by no means inexpensive Durbar Hotel, in itself a proof of ample means, if, as the manager, said, he had occupied them for long terms over a period of years.

His manner, as he received Allinford, was loftily austere and patronising. He was a young man of thirty or thereabouts, tow-headed, with a clean-shaven face, alert eyes, and an overpowering odour of scent. The detective detested a man who used scent.

He raised his eyebrows languidly as the official explained the coincidence that had arisen. "That's very extraordinary—very extraordinary, indeed!" he drawled. "How do you account for it?"

"I can't!" said Allinford bluntly. "Do you know Sir Rupert Helton or Lady Helton?"

"My good man!" Verndale stretched out

a well-fitting boot and rocked to and fro as he admired it—"I'm not sure whether I do or not. I may have met them—I can't say. One sees so many people."

"There's one other point—you'll forgive me for mentioning it. You told me those diamonds had been your mother's. Do you know where she got them?"

Verndale sighed wearily, as one patiently tolerating a bore. "They were given her by my father, on their wedding-day," he said. "My father was the second son of the eighth Earl of Mulchester. I don't believe he stole them."

Allinford stolidly ignored the sarcasm. "It isn't clear to me, either, why you had them here. Surely they'd have been safer in the bank."

"Perhaps they would," agreed Verndale, still as if talking to a persistent child. "That idea had occurred to me, Mr.—er—Allinford—thank you. In point of fact, they were in Chancery Lane Safe Deposit up to yesterday morning, when I took them out. I am suffering from—ah—a temporary financial stress, at the moment, and it was my intention—you understand?"

"Thank you. I think I do. Now, Mr. Verndale, you said you had a few friends in to bridge last evening. I should be obliged if you would let me have a list of their names."

Verndale sat up.

"But they are people quite above suspicion," he said stiffly. "I can't have them annoyed. I would rather drop the whole thing. Really, Mr.—ah—er—yes, Allinford." He shook his head reprovingly.

"I assure you they shall not be annoyed. It is necessary, or I would not ask you."

Verndale moved to an inlaid writing-desk. "Oh, well, in that case——" He scribbled a few minutes and handed the list to Allinford. "And now perhaps you will excuse me," he said.

As Allinford went out, he noticed something on the floor, half hidden under the curtain. He stooped to pick it up; it was a playing card—the seven of hearts.

There is always a certain sameness in the steps taken to investigate a crime. Indeed, a great part of the work of the investigator is usually done before the actual commission of crime—done by an organisation which compiles every ascertainable fact about a probable criminal, from his finger-prints to the state of his finances, his methods of working to his latest address.

For the time being, Allinford was too busy to devote much thought to the coincidence of the second robbery. It was his duty to find how Verndale's jewels had disappeared, and to that end it was an obvious step to find out which of the well-known jewel thieves could have committed the theft, and then to eliminate them, one by one, until the right person—if it really was a professional thief—was known.

He had twenty men under his immediate

command, and the case afforded work for all. To each man he indicated a line of inquiry, and then he caught a 'bus for Scotland Yard. He was wishful to find out exactly what had happened on the parallel inquiry of Lady Helton's necklace.

It was on the narrow stone flight of stairs, leading upwards from the back door of the Metropolitan Police Office—which is the official name for Scotland Yard—that he met the burly, familiar figure of Weir Menzies, one of the chief inspectors of the department.

Menzies grabbed him by the elbow.

"That you, Allinford? I've been expecting you this last hour. You're handling the Durbar Hotel jewel case, aren't you? I've got the Lady Helton end. What's the latest?"

"The latest, sir," said Allinford, slowly and deliberately, "is nothing. We've not got fairly started yet. I was hoping you'd be able to help."

"Come inside," said Menzies. He pushed his colleague into the chief inspector's room and dragged forward a chair. "I may help or I may mix things up. I've finished my job. That part of it was simple."

"Finished?" repeated Allinford.

"Yes, finished. Tell me—is your man—Verndale—a friend of the Heltons?"

"I asked him. He isn't even sure that he knows 'em."

Menzies looked meaningfully across at the other.

"Sure to say that. What I mean is, he didn't know the lady before her marriage—old flame, and that sort of thing?"

"I don't know," Allinford glanced at his watch. "I may be able to tell in three or four hours' time. I've got two men collecting all they can about him. How about the Helton case?"

"It didn't take long to burst that up. I got down to Mount Street early and saw the lady—a fine woman she is, too! You may have seen her picture in the society papers. She was in tears, and Sir Rupert was raving up and down, cursing burglars and police and servants indiscriminately. It seems he had asked her to wear the necklace at the ball he is giving to-night. She got it out of the bank yesterday, according to her story. One of the lower windows had been left open, and it was through that that the burglar entered. Her bedroom is on the first floor and adjoined by a dressing-room. She had left her jewel-case on the dressing-table. She woke up early this morning, heard a noise in the dressing-room, and raised an alarm. The thief got clear away—with the jewel-case. The household theory was that he'd gone through the open window.

"Sir Rupert fixed the time of the robbery. He had looked at his watch; it was ten past five. I, of course, went and had a talk with the constable on the beat. Now there was a curious thing. He had placed a private mark on the window when he went

on duty. He had gone by the house at five o'clock, and it was undisturbed. About thirty yards along he met his section sergeant, and they were there talking when the alarm was raised."

"Fake?" asked Allinford.

"Fake, all right! I didn't beat about the bush. I put it to Sir Rupert and Lady Helton. She denied it, of course; he took her side, and you can take my word for it he didn't gloss over any defects he could find in my character. I was ordered out of the house—he told me to go before I was kicked out—and he's going to get me hounded out of the service." Menzies grinned as though the prospect did not greatly daunt him.

"Then it comes to this," said Allinford thoughtfully, "the necklace that has been stolen from Verndale was originally Lady Helton's, and it must have passed out of her hands to him, directly or indirectly."

"That's how I make it!"

"She faked the robbery because she didn't want to tell her husband what she had done with the jewels. You're thinking of blackmail, Mr. Menzies, of course?"

Menzies nodded.

"That's the drift. How do you know he hasn't been bleeding her? I'd look into it from that point of view, if I were you—though, after all, it doesn't much matter how he came by the necklace if you can't prove anything. If it's blackmail, Lady Helton, who's the only possible witness, won't speak. No, take it all around, Allinford, I'd stick to safe lines. All that ought to worry you is—who stole the jewels from Verndale?"

"H'm—yes! About your own affair, sir—the necklace was insured?"

"Yes, I was talking to Lloyd's assessors just before you came in. No claim has been put in yet. If it is"—his jaw became grim—"there'll be trouble for Lady Helton. But it's not likely. She won't be such a fool."

Wherein Menzies, for once, showed himself no prophet, for by four o'clock that afternoon a representative of Lloyd's had informed him that a formal claim for the loss of the necklace had been put in.

Menzies had insisted that the coincidence of the two necklaces was a side-issue with which Allinford need not concern himself. If the robbery from Mount Street had been faked—and of this the detective had no doubt—the claim on the insurance companies was an attempt to obtain money by fraud. It might be possible to prove this on the facts known to Menzies. But to clinch the matter beyond doubt, it became necessary to show that Verndale's stolen necklace was actually identical with that which had belonged to Lady Helton.

Allinford heard of the claim by telephone. He sat back, took out the seven of hearts which he had picked up in Verndale's rooms, and examined it minutely. He could not rid his mind of the thought that the card held

the key to the mystery. It was pure intuition—and intuition is more likely to mislead than to guide in most investigations. Presently he shrugged his shoulders and pressed the bell. A broad-shouldered young man, whose face and bearing were those of a City clerk of athletic possibilities, answered.

"Ah, Swain," said the inspector, "I've got a little job for you. You had Verndale under observation till four o'clock, hadn't you? Ah, good! Tell me where he was when you were relieved."

"He was at 704, Granville Street, Piccadilly. Been there since twelve o'clock. Must have lunched there."

Allinford smashed his open hand down on his thigh, and his eyes narrowed.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "I'll be dashed if that isn't it." But he volunteered no explanation. "Look here, Swain," he went on, "I want you to go to the Durbar Hotel and see if you can get hold of a pack of cards out of Mr. Verndale's room. I'm relying on you not to do anything foolish. You needn't go to the manager—understand? I want this done quietly. Bring 'em to me as soon as you can."

The young man gave a business-like assent and disappeared. In half an hour he was back. He laid a pack of cards on the desk, and the inspector picked them up, with a word of thanks. He asked no questions.

For half an hour Allinford went through the cards with a steady scrutiny; then he carried them nearer to the window and examined them in pairs and threes, by what photographers call "transmitted light." A little chuckle broke from his lips.

"What a Dutchman I was not to think of it before. This begins to explain things."

The door pushed open, and Menzies entered. The usually smooth forehead of the chief was corrugated into a frown.

"What's the game?" he asked. "Are you taking up conjuring tricks?"

"Something of that sort, sir," smiled Allinford. He replaced the cards in their case, and put the case in his pocket. "If all goes well, as I think it will, we'll know where we are by to-night."

"That's all right! You got my telephone message?"

"About Lady Helton—yes. The woman must be mad!"

"It's not the woman so much; I imagine she would be pleased enough to let the whole thing drop. It's Sir Rupert. You see, technically, the necklace is his—it's insured in his name, and he's put in a claim. He's one of that honest, mutton-headed, obstinate, fiery kind of men and he's not going to be dictated to by any blessed common policeman—that's me!—from Scotland Yard. I thought I'd call in, as this was on my way back, and let you know how things are."

"What are you going to do?"

Menzies spread his hands out hopelessly.

"What can I do? Sir Rupert's honest enough. He believes in his wife. Of course, I might charge them both with an attempt to defraud, but it could never be brought home against him—and as it would have to be brought against both of them together, the charge against her would naturally fail, too. If it had been her own necklace, and she had put in the claim in her own name, it would have been different. The insurance company will have to fight, I expect; it's none of our funeral." He yawned and stood up. "Well, I thought you'd like to know how things are. I'm going on to the Yard, and then home. Good-night!"

Allinford sighed as he reflected that his own connection with the case gave no promise of immediate leisure. He had formulated an idea, but if that fell through it might be days or weeks before he would be able to settle things. He called Swain again, and gave that intelligent young man long and earnest instructions. Then he went out to a frugal meal of weak tea and dry toast. He was troubled with his digestion at times. He ate abstractedly. At last, with the air of an idle man who was not quite sure what to do with himself, he sauntered out and strolled towards Shaftesbury Avenue.

There is a famous theatrical outfitter in one of the side streets of that thoroughfare. And the urbane, frock-coated proprietor came forward, rubbing his hands.

"Good-evening, Mr. Allinford. Been a beautiful day, hasn't it? You're looking very fit."

"Yes, it's grand weather," admitted the detective, and with that concession to conversation he got to business. "Say, can you turn me out as a doctor in half an hour? That's all the time I can give you. I want something weather-proof and fool-proof—something that isn't obvious. I won't have a false beard. You know the kind of thing I mean."

The costumier measured him with a professional glance.

"I know," he said. "I can make you so that your own mother won't know you."

The art of disguise—especially facial disguise—is one that is very rarely used by officers attached to the Criminal Investigation Department. There is, indeed, a make-up room at Scotland Yard where men may transform themselves into anything from coal-heavers to guardsmen, but it is used only when the ordinary attire and manner of the detective would be so entirely out of keeping with his surroundings as to attract attention. A dirty muffler, unshaven face, and corduroys work a transformation more difficult of detection than the most cunning use of grease-paint and wigs.

It is only when an officer is to be brought into personal contact with someone who knows him, and by whom it is essential he should not be recognised, that he goes to the extreme and very risky length of altering his face.

Allinford was critical and exacting while

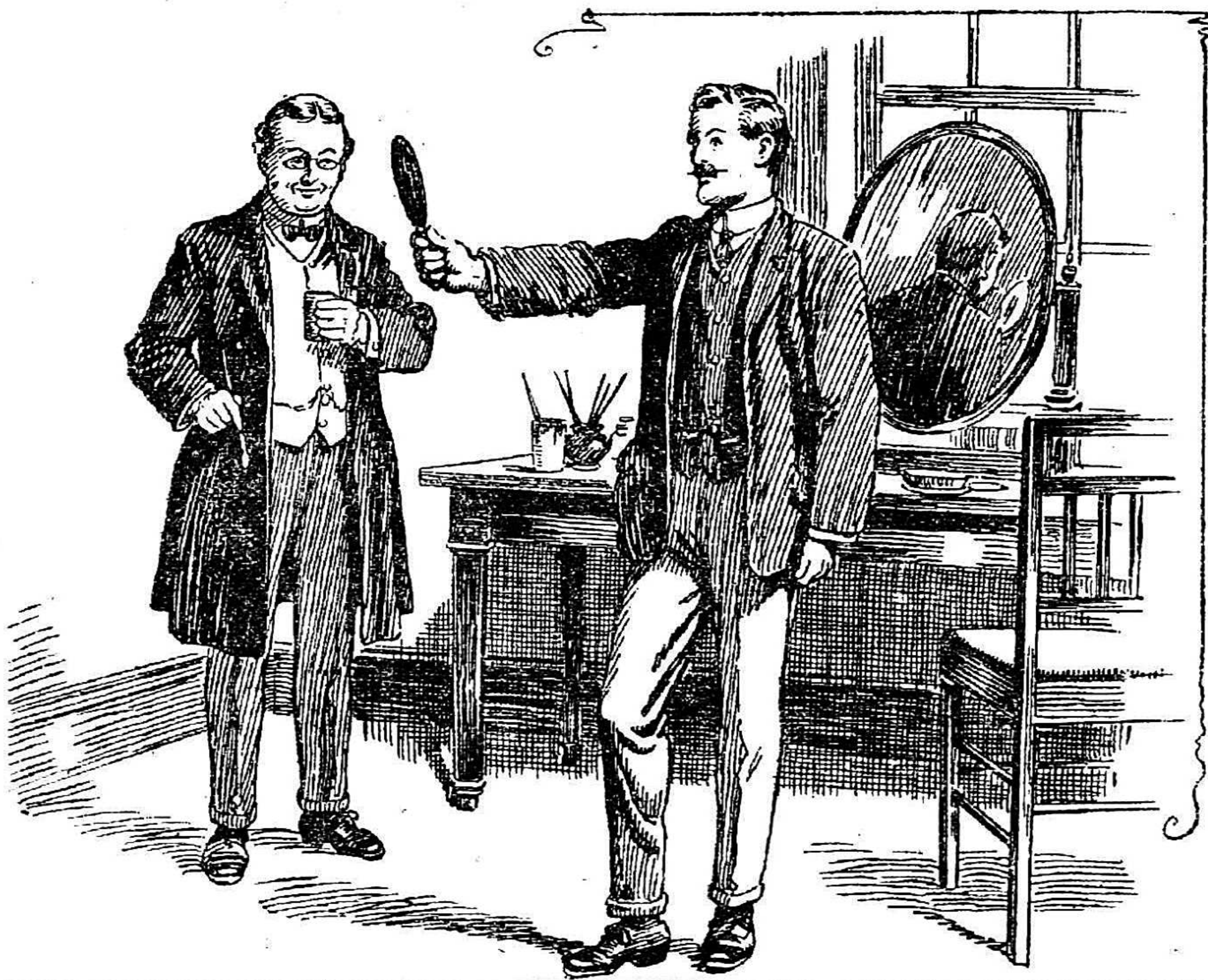
expert hands transformed him. When the disguise was complete, he examined himself with the mirror, and gave a grunt of approval. His grey, drooping moustache had become well waxed and auburn, with pointed ends. His scanty hair also had a tinge of the same colour, and had been brushed so that it appeared twice as luxuriant as it was in reality. A razor and dye had worked wonders with his eyebrows. He wore his own clothes, and was as neat as ever, but it would have needed keen eyes

motor-brougham had just driven away when Allinford walked briskly up the broad stone steps and pressed the bell. The door swung smoothly back, and a ponderous footman, in olive-green livery, confronted him.

The detective fingered a card.

"Will you take this to Mr. Glenston, please. Mr. Roberts, a friend of mine, suggested I might call."

Now Roberts is a fairly common name. That is why Allinford had used it. He knew that the house had many visitors, and it



Allinford was critical and exacting, while expert hands transformed him. When the disguise was complete he examined himself with the mirror, and gave a grunt of approval.

to detect any likeness to the man who had entered the establishment.

"Yes: I think it ought to do," he commented.

Unless a person was keenly observant or suspicious, he would be very unlikely to guess that the front door of 704, Granville Street, Piccadilly, had not been out of sight of officers of police for six or seven days.

It was a quiet house, solid-looking and respectable—a residence which would not have shamed a Cabinet Minister. A luxurious

was possible that a Roberts might be among them, or, alternatively, that the occupant might not feel certain that he had not a client named Roberts. On the card the footman read:

AUDREY LATIMER, M.D.,
Great Southern Hospital.

His eyes wandered from the card to its owner, in a measured scrutiny that might have seemed offensive had not Allinford been prepared for it. He met the look with bland arrogance.

"Very good, sir," said the man. "Will you walk upstairs—the first door on the right? It's rather early now. Most people drop in after dinner or during the afternoon."

"I expect I shall find something to amuse me," said Allinford, and while the man held open the door, he passed out and up the thickly carpeted stairway.

There were a dozen or more people in the room which the servant had indicated. It was a big apartment, and its furniture and fittings were rather those of a club than of a private house. Prominent at one end was a kind of bar partly shielded by curtains, and with two or three small tables in front of it.

A little group of men were clustered around one table, laughing and chatting. In the body of the room was a large roulette table at which the croupier sat idle in his high-backed chair. Nearer the window half a dozen men and women were seated round a chemin de fer table, watching the dealer.

He observed Verndale among the group at the bar, and moved towards them. Refreshments—even to the most costly of wines—were free. But he contented himself with a modest cup of tea. He wanted to keep his head clear.

"Yes," Verndale was saying, in his arrogant, dogmatic way, "baccarat's all very well to a point, but I'd nearly as soon play pitch-and-toss. It's a children's game. Give me poker—or auction bridge, for that matter—something with more life in it."

One of the group—a tall young man with a weak chin and a scrubby tooth-brush moustache—grinned feebly.

"There's life in your poker, Verndale."

"You ought to know," chuckled a second man. "For my part, I'd sooner buck against him at poker than auction. There's a little woman who's paid for her bridge lessons—eh, Verndale?"

Verndale frowned. The last hint seemed to have touched a sore point.

"That's enough, Devine!" he said curtly. Then, more amiably: "You can't afford to be chivalrous in a card game, you know; there's a difference between sportsmanship and quixotry. Most women are fools. If they had the sense to stick to a pure gamble—something where no skill is required—they would sometimes win. Talking about poker, I'm willing to sit in. But we can't play here. Suppose you people come up to my rooms? How many of us are there—four? Five would make a better game."

His gaze rested on Allinford only for a moment. The detective was quick to see the invitation.

"I should be happy to sit in, if you will allow me," he said. "My name is Latimer." He proffered a card.

Verndale bowed.

"Pleased to know you, Dr. Latimer. My name is Verndale. Let me introduce Lord

Tiverley, Sir Richard Hopville, Mr. Granger. Well, we might as well have some taxis."

"He thinks he's roped a new mug," meditated Allinford.

Verndale indeed seemed to have taken a fancy to the stranger. He insisted on the doctor's sharing his cab, while the other three took a second vehicle. By the time they reached the Durbar Hotel the two might have been, judging from their manner, the friends of a lifetime.

The game began slowly enough, but Allinford had fears that the ten pounds with which he had provided himself would not go far. He played cautiously. Hopville, the weak-chinned young man, was the plunger of the party. His futile attempts at bluff, at times, awoke the derision of the others. Verndale seemed to be feeling his feet. The detective judged him to be measuring the game of the others. He was winning a trifle.

As the game warmed up, Hopville's luck turned. He took risks; he broke every law of the safe game. Yet he won. He seemed able to do nothing wrong. The stack of chips in front of him mounted higher and higher, and he grinned inanely over his cards. Verndale, too, was losing. Allinford's small capital ebbed away until only a sovereign was left. He sat tense and watchful.

"Now, doctor," said Verndale, smiling as he picked up the cards, "I am going to give you a real royal flush. Just keep your eye on me." He dealt slowly.

As the last card fell from his fingers, Allinford suddenly rose, reached across the table, and wrenched away the pack.

"One moment, gentlemen!" he cried. "Hold your hands!"

Verndale's chair overturned with a crash, as he leapt to his feet.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded. His white hands were opening and shutting, and his face was flushed. "Are you making any suggestion against anyone present?"

"I am!" said the detective sharply. "Sit down!"

"You're a liar!" stormed Verndale. "Get out of my rooms or I'll have you thrown out."

"I think not," said Allinford quietly. "I should advise you to sit still till I have finished. Gentlemen, the cards are marked!"

Granger and Tiverley looked gravely from Allinford to Verndale. The latter was breathing heavily. He tried to laugh.

"You know me, Granger," he said; "so do you, Tiverley, and you, Hopville. I don't quite know what this man's idea is, but it looks like blackmail. If the cards are marked, he has managed to introduce them himself. Why"—he brought his fist down on the table to emphasise his remark—"I've lost money myself!"

"That's true!" said Hopville. "A pot!"

"Before we go any further," said Allinford, "I may explain that I am a police officer. That will dispose of any question of blackmail. Perhaps you will hold a card

to the light, Lord Tiverley. Thank you. You will notice a small spot near the top left-hand corner. Now put the card down. That spot has gone. It looks like an optical illusion, doesn't it? You could be told the cards were marked and search for a week, if you didn't know what to look for. You will find that spot in a different position on each card, according to the suit and value. The person who marked them had a full acquaintance with the virtues of aniline dye. An expert could read them as they were dealt as easily as though they were face upwards. He could do more than that, with a little experience. He could deal any hand he wished to any person at the table."

Tiverley towered over Verndale.

"I think I've heard enough," he said. "I ought to have been less simple. I am obliged to you, Mr.—er—er—"

"Allinford," said the detective.

"Thank you, Mr. Allinford. I assume—ah"—he paused, embarrassed—"I assume you are not acting in your professional capacity—that is, I shall not be required to give evidence."

"I hope not, my lord. Indeed, I may say I think it unlikely."

Verndale pushed out a detaining hand.

"You don't really believe this preposterous thing? It's so utterly ridiculous."

Lord Tiverley brushed by him, with head erect, and Granger followed. Hopville sprawled, with his arms over the card-table.

"Pon my soul," he ejaculated, "it's like a scene out of a melodrama. A stage detective and all!"

"Including the wicked baronet," retorted Allinford quickly. "You may drop your pose, if you please, Sir Richard. This is serious, and you will be wise to recognise it. Do you think your change of luck was not noticeable directly a new pack of cards was introduced?"

Hopville sat upright.

"So he's in it, too, is he?" sneered Verndale. "Look here, Mr. Detective, we've had quite enough. I don't suppose you're a rich man, but it will take every penny you've got when I commence an action for slander. You've wormed your way in here in disguise, and you've accused me of card-sharpping. Now go—if you've finished!"

Allinford moved to the door, turned the key, and thrust it in his pocket.

"I haven't quite," he said coolly. "Now listen to me." He pulled out his watch. "It's now ten minutes to nine. At nine o'clock a police raid will be made on 704 Granville Street, and certain people will be charged with assisting to run a gambling-house. Now, there's nothing on earth that can prevent you two being charged as proprietors. Don't trouble to deny it. There will be plenty of evidence. The place has been watched for days. I don't suppose a fine of a few hundreds—which is what it will probably amount to—will affect you much, but if you're wise you'll come off your pedestals and listen to plain sense. There's

another charge it may be in my power to prefer—receiving stolen goods."

"Go on!" laughed Verndale. "Accuse us of murder while you're at it."

"Oh, very well," said Allinford nonchalantly, "only you may as well know that the jewels you had from Lady Helton were not her property. They were stolen from her husband, and a bogus robbery arranged to account for their absence."

To casual observers, Verndale's appearance remained unchanged, but Allinford saw that his shot had told.

"You must remember you signed an exact description of the jewels," he said.

Hopville whistled a tune. Verndale laid his head on his hands and stared thoughtfully into space.

"You've got me in a corner," he admitted. "What is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to return the necklace," said Allinford. "No"—as Verndale would have spoken—"don't trouble to put up another bluff. It's easy enough to see what's happened. Lady Helton wanted the jewels returned so that she might wear them to-night. You refused, and, fearful that she would become a nuisance in the future, arranged that they should be apparently stolen. Unluckily for you, she had the same idea of a bogus robbery. Now—"

"If I give it up, will you promise me nothing further shall be done?"

"I can't promise. The gambling-house prosecution will go forward in any case. If the necklace is returned, however, I doubt if Sir Richard Helton will prosecute."

Verndale rose, crossed the room, and, unlocking the secretary, took out a red morocco case and gave it to the detective.

"Yes, sir"—Allinford was speaking to Menzies—"luck and bluff carried it through. When I heard that the Helton robbery was bogus, I began to get a glimmering, because I had picked up a marked card in Verndale's rooms. Then, when I heard he had gone to Granville Street, I began to be sure, more especially as Lady Helton had been seen there. The games in the gambling-house were straight enough—it wouldn't have paid to run anything crooked—but Hopville and Verndale used to pick up likely young fools there and carry them off to Verndale's rooms.

"I'll own Hopville had me guessing, at first. He looked a regular pigeon—instead of which he was a rook. Of course, it wouldn't have done for Verndale to have won heavily at his own place. But no one was likely to suppose him in with Hopville. As soon as I was sure, I shook them up with my exposure. After that I bluffed for all I was worth, and they fell into it."

"I see by the papers," said Menzies inconsequently, "that Sir Rupert and Lady Helton are going abroad for a protracted period."

"Exactly!" smiled Allinford.

THE END.



The CASE of the RETIRED OFFICER

The Strange and Remarkable EXPLOITS of CARFAX BAINES

AT eight o'clock on a warm, sunny September morning, Carfax Baines and Detective-sergeant Spink, the latter in plain clothes, like his companion, mounted a red 'bus that was starting from Charing Cross. Having the whole top to themselves, they chose a rear seat that they might converse without fear of being overheard by the driver.

"There's nothing I enjoy so much as a ride like this," said Spink, "and we'll be there about as soon as if we'd taken a stuffy train from Waterloo. We get a Barnes 'bus from Hammersmith Broadway, and that will put us down right at the edge of Mortlake. And then to find our man. I don't fancy that will be difficult, for he must be lodging in the neighbourhood. He has been seen at the White Hart two nights running."

"You are sure of your information?" asked Baines.

"Yes, that's all right. The man who saw him lodged in the same house in Bloomsbury with him a couple of months ago."

"He didn't make himself known?"

"No; he was too sharp for that. He reported to me at once, though he would have done better to wait and find out where Crockett was stopping. The fellow evidently can't suspect anything. Fear of arrest had nothing to do with his leaving town—he feels perfectly safe after all these years. But I don't see what could have taken him to Barnes."

"For change of air, perhaps."

"Well, he'll get another change shortly. And once caught, there's no escaping from the toils. We've got him tight, eh?"

"No doubt about that," replied Baines. "It seems a pity to hang him, though, after so many years of freedom."

Spink, who was as merciless as a bloodhound in his profession, dissented from this opinion. The subject of the foregoing conversation, Charles Parker, alias Crockett, had murdered his uncle, ten years before, in a quarrel over money matters. He managed to escape from the country, and was

sought for in vain. With one exception, nothing was heard of him until quite recently, when it came to the knowledge of Scotland Yard that Charles Parker was living in London, under the name of Crockett. Baines and Spink were put on the case. They watched the man, and made sure themselves of his identity; but just when they had succeeded in finding the witnesses necessary to convict him, Crockett disappeared from his lodgings in Glasshouse Street. That was four days ago, and now, if the information was to be relied upon, he had been rediscovered in the pretty riverside suburb of Barnes. It did not seem to be a case of flight, for in his room—which the detectives searched vainly for documentary evidence—he had left clothing and other personal property.

Baines and the Scotland Yard detective rode on through the West of London, by Piccadilly and Hyde Park Corner, Knightsbridge and Kensington, and the vast neighbourhood beyond, to Hammersmith Broadway. Here they took a white 'bus, and just as it mounted the approach to Hammersmith Bridge they observed, down to the right, a crowd gathered at the river's edge.

"They are lifting a body from the water," said Spink. "Suppose we get down."

Baines assented, and they left the 'bus, thinking it might be worth their while to investigate, though they had little doubt that it was the usual thing—a case of suicide. They forced between the crowd, and got close to the body as it was being carried to an adjacent boathouse. They saw a man of forty or so, well dressed, hatless, with thin brown hair and a thick moustache. One look was enough.

"It's Crockett!" whispered Baines.

"By heavens, it is!" assented Spink. "What does it mean?"

A constable who was present happened to know the Scotland Yard detective, and both he and Baines were readily accorded permission to enter the boathouse, the doors of which were tightly closed on the public. A few words of explanation won a further privilege—that of searching the corpse. At the first, a startling discovery was made.

Crockett had been murdered—shot through the heart. By whom, and for what motive? The answer, apparently, was there. In the dead man's pockets were found a watch and some loose silver, a letter, and a cheque. The latter was for fifty pounds, dater September 4, payable to bearer, and signed "Anson Harkness." The letter, dated September 3, had no envelope. It was as follows:

"So you have found me again, scoundrel! Are you not afraid that the worm will turn some day? But once more I will satisfy your greed. Come at any time to-morrow evening."

There was no signature to the letter, but it was written by the same hand that penned the cheque. Baines and Spink read it, and then—the three were alone in the boathouse—they took the constable into their confidence.

"The cheque was drawn last night, the letter written the day before," said Baines. "And last night, Crockett was shot and thrown into the river; he went up with the tide and came down with it. It is a case of blackmail and murder."

"Yes, a clear case," replied Spink. "And Anson Harkness is the guilty man. If we can find him——"

"If you mean Captain Anson Harkness," interrupted the constable, "why, I know something of him. He is a retired officer, and a fine gentleman. He lives at The Firs, an old house at Mortlake, facing the river. It's not in reason to believe that he could commit murder."

Spink laughed contemptuously as he put the letter and cheque into his pocket.

"I know the name myself," said Baines. "Captain Harkness was formerly in the service of the British East Africa Company, and when he came home three years ago, invalided, there was an ugly rumour whispered about him. He was subsequently retired on account of his health."

"Ah, I recall the circumstances," replied Spink. "It was said that he executed a white man out in Africa. Come, Baines, we have our work cut out for us."

Baines lingered for a moment, looking at an old scar on Crockett's forehead, which appeared to have been ploughed by a bullet.

"Where are you going?" he asked absently.

"Back to town," Spink answered.

"Ah, yes, of course. That is the first step."

They got out of the boathouse by a rear exit, to avoid the crowd, and after a brief visit to the Hammersmith police-station, where they arranged that a constable should be sent immediately to watch Captain Harkness' house, they walked to the Broadway and hailed a cab.

"What queer things do happen!" Spink said to his companion. "Crockett's death settles that case and leaves us on the threshold of a similar one. It looks ugly, too. I wonder how it will turn out? I wouldn't

give much for the man's chances of escaping the rope, unless he had some tremendous provocation."

"My dear fellow, you are going ahead a bit too fast," replied Baines. "As yet, there is only circumstantial evidence. Captain Harkness may be entirely innocent. But I admit there is little possibility of that. In fact, when I come to think of it, I recall a very suggestive link——"

He cut the sentence short, and leaning forward he stared at the tide of traffic rolling along King Street.

"Go on," Spink said curiously. "What do you mean?"

"I refer to something which you can hardly have forgotten. Do you remember the one occasion, between Parker's flight and his return to London, when the police heard of him?"

"Yes, he was seen and recognised at Zanzibar four years ago, and he was known there as Keysbury."

"That's right, Spink. And he was in company with a notoriously bad man—one suspected of dealings with the Arab slavers—who passed by the name of Wilkes. The two went into the interior together, before any steps could be taken to apprehend Keysbury. But do you know who this Wilkes was?"

"No!"

"I will tell you. He was the identical man whom Captain Harkness executed up in the territory of the British East Africa Company."

"By Jove, that's news to me!" exclaimed Spink. "It may contain the germ of the whole matter."

"It is, at least, significant," said Baines.

Neither had much to say during the remainder of the ride. The cab took them to Scotland Yard—this was before the days of the new edifice on the Embankment—and on the strength of their evidence they promptly received instructions to visit the residence of Captain Harkness, as well as a warrant for that gentleman's arrest, in case such an extreme step should be necessary. Then they drove over to Waterloo, where they had to wait but a few minutes for a Richmond train.

The Firs was a quiet, secluded place a mile or more above Barnes Bridge, and within easy reach of Mortlake station. It was separated from the river by a footpath and a sloping wall. The house was old-fashioned, and belonged to the Georgian period, but it was quite small. There was a deep garden full of trees, and shrubbery back and front, and a vacant lot on either side; there were no other houses close by. When Baines and Spink arrived, about one o'clock, they found the constable waiting for them at a good point of vantage.

"I haven't seen anyone," he said, "but I made a few inquiries of a postman I met, and it appears that Captain Harkness is living all alone at present. His one servant fell ill three days ago and went to hospital."

"It looks as if the bird had flown," muttered Spink. "I feared as much."

They posted the constable at the front of the house and went round to the back. The rear door was locked, and a sharp rap brought no response. They managed to open the scullery window, and Spink crawled through and let his companion in by the door. They advanced cautiously, and in a room adjoining the kitchen, which seemed to have been used at one time as a wash-room, they made an ominous discovery. There was a trap-door in the floor, and from this led a trail of little red drops. They followed the blood-stains through another room, along a passage, and then to the front hall, where there was evidence to show that the crime had been committed.

At that moment, to the surprise of the detectives—for they thought the house was empty—a man walked unsteadily from a doorway on the left. He looked older than he really was, and his face had the brownish-yellow hue of men who have the seeds of African fever in their veins. He was a ghastly sight. His hair was disordered, and a towel was bound across his forehead. There was a gash on one cheek, and dried blood on his hands and clothing.

"You are Captain Anson Harkness?" demanded Baines.

"Yes, I am Captain Harkness," was the reply. He swayed dizzily, clutched at the stair-rail, and sat down on the hall bench.

"I know what you want," he added. "I expected you would come. I am afraid I have acted foolishly."

"We are here to make inquiries about Charles Crockett, your visitor of last night," said Baines.

"I will tell you all, gentlemen. The scoundrel is dead, cut off in his sins. But the man who killed him——"

"I must warn you to say nothing that may incriminate you," interrupted Spink.

"I wish to tell the truth, sir. I did not kill Charles Crockett. He was a black-mailer, and I had long been in his power. He came here last night by appointment, and in yonder room I gave him money. He rose to go at ten o'clock, and a moment after he stepped into the hall I heard two pistol shots. I rushed out at once. Crockett lay on the floor, and a couple of yards from him was a strange man, evidently a burglar, who immediately attacked me savagely with a whip. I fell, and lay stunned for a time. When I partly recovered, the man had gone, and I was alone with the dead body of Crockett. I was injured and dazed, remember, and was in no condition to act with judgment. My first impulse, a foolish one, was to hide the body. I feared I might be accused of the murder. So I dragged it to the wash-room and let it down by the trap to a disused cellar. After that I vaguely recall locking the rear door of the house, which was open. Then I grew faint and sick, and I remember no more until I woke a short time ago on the couch in my library."

The detectives listened to this story, told disconnectedly and, at times, incoherently, with the incredulity that it deserved—or, at least, Spink did. He picked up a pistol that lay by the wall.

"It is not mine," declared Captain Harkness. "I never saw it."

The front door was opened, and the constable called in. He was put in charge of the prisoner, while the detectives went back to the wash-room to investigate.

"A lame explanation, that," said Spink.

"No jury would give it a moment's consideration," Baines replied.

When they lifted the trap-door a question that had puzzled them was instantly made clear. They saw the distorted reflections of their own faces; the cellar was full of water to within three feet of the top.

"There is a subterranean passage connecting with the river," said Baines. "I don't know the purpose of them, but you will find them under many waterside houses of the Georgian period. It was high tide about midnight last night, as it is now, and as the tide went down the body was washed out to the Thames."

Spink suddenly threw himself flat, and with his walking stick he fished up a bowler hat.

"Crockett's!" he exclaimed. "His name is inside. It's a clear case, Baines. The man carried his blackmailing too far, and paid for it with his life. A plea of provocation may save the captain's neck."

They returned to the hall, the warrant was produced, and Captain Harkness was formally arrested on the charge of murder. He was much calmer now, and his bearing was dignified.

"You are making a dreadful mistake," he said earnestly. "I am innocent—I have told you the whole truth. But I suppose you are only doing your duty. I am ready to accompany you, sirs."

The Crockett murder, and the arrest of Captain Harkness caused a great sensation. The coroner's inquest was dead against him, and, with a single exception, there was nobody who believed for a moment in his innocence. That exception was Carfax Baines. He was a keen judge of character, taught by long experience with criminals, and the prisoner's statement and demeanour had impressed him favourably; it did not seem to him to be the weak concoction of a guilty man. And the fact that the supposed burglar, after shooting Crockett with a revolver, should have attacked Harkness with a whip was worthy of serious consideration. A whip, of all things! That point exceeded the reasonable limits of invention. As for the prisoner's injuries, they might have been inflicted with either a whip-stock or the handle of a revolver.

It was a difficult task that Baines had set himself, but he went into it with his whole heart. He had an interview with Captain Harkness a few hours after his arrest,

though that gave him no assistance. He was at work the next morning, and within two days he had made three important steps. He learned that a well-dressed man, dark-bearded and sunburnt, had inquired at the Red Lion, at Mortlake, on the evening of the murder, where Captain Harkness lived. Between twelve and one o'clock that night, a man, answering to the same description, had been met on the river footpath, walking rapidly towards Kew. And in the back garden of The Firs, deep in a clump of

adjoining the bar. He was watched, and was seen to tear up a letter and throw it on the fire, which had just been lighted. The next instant, as another customer entered, the man left hurriedly. The potboy rescued the scraps of paper from the grate—the flames had not reached them—and the landlord pasted them together on a bit of cardboard.

The letter was given to Baines, and as soon as he read it he grasped the true story of Crockett's death—knew that to clear



When they lifted the trapdoor they saw the distorted reflections of their own faces. The cellar was full of water to within three feet of the top.

shrubbery, the detective found a short, heavy whip, with blood-stains on the butt.

The next step brought him near to success. The man he wanted had stopped at the Oxford and Cambridge public house, at Kew Bridge, early on the morning after the murder, before Crockett's body had been found. His manner was suspicious, and from the wisps of straw that adhered to his clothing he had probably been sleeping in some stable. He ordered a whisky and soda, and retired with it to the little sitting-room

Captain Harkness he must find a certain Tom Gridley. After a week's untiring labour, success was attained, and seven o'clock one rainy evening found Baines and Spink knocking at the door of a dingy house in Southampton Row. A servant admitted the two detectives, and after a few words of explanation she led them upstairs. Without making any noise they reached a door at the rear of the second floor, and Baines rapped on it gently. "Come in," answered a voice carelessly.

The next moment they were in the room, the door shut behind them. It was a small but comfortable apartment. A man of forty-five or so, brown-bearded and tanned, with a pipe in his mouth, sat writing in his shirt-sleeves at a table. He looked up with ghastly fear in his eyes, with a swift change of colour.

"Good-evening, Mr. Gridley," said Baines. "We have come on rather unpleasant business. I must take you into custody on a charge of shooting and killing Charles

"I know nothing of it," the man cried hoarsely. "You are mad!"

"Here is your brother's letter," replied Baines, producing it. "It was saved from the flames, and I think you will admit that it shows clearly why you went to Mortlake to horsewhip Captain Harkness."

For an instant Tom Gridley was speechless, shaking with fear. Then he sprang from his chair, dashed across the room, and thrust one hand into the pocket of a coat hanging on a closet door. But the detectives were upon him before he could get the desired weapon out. There was a brief and desperate struggle—the man was half-crazed for the time being—during which chairs and the table were upset. Then he went heavily down on his back, and in that position he was subdued and handcuffed.

"You have been too much for me," the prisoner said a little later, when he had been lifted to his feet, and the indignant landlady had been sent away from the door with an explanation of the noise. "I may as well make a clean breast of it, so here goes for the whole story. My brother Jim was a wrong one—I admit it—and he did Captain Harkness an injury in his younger days; but that was no excuse for his being murdered without a trial—hanged like a dog. We come of a good family, but Jim drifted to Africa years ago, went from bad to worse, got in with a band of Arab slavers, and was finally caught up in the British East Africa Company's territory by a detachment of the company's native troops. They were commanded by Captain Harkness, who recognised his old enemy under the name of Wilkes. He saw his chance of revenge, and made the most of it. Jim was sentenced to be hung, and hung he was at daybreak the next morning. But he managed to write a letter—he had paper and envelopes on him—telling me that he was dying unjustly, and because of the grudge Harkness held against him. He bribed one of the native soldiers to take the letter to the coast and post it—that's it you showed me—and the nigger kept his word. But I was in South America at the time, surveying a projected railway line along the Andes, and I never got the letter until my return to England a fortnight ago.

"I learned that Harkness had covered his tracks well, and I knew there was no law to touch him. But I wasn't going to let him off, all the same. I found out where he

lived, got a glimpse of him once or twice, and went there that fatal night with the intention of thrashing him. I got into the house by a back door that was left open, and as I reached the front hall I all but ran into a chap whom I knew at once wasn't Harkness. We naturally took each other for burglars. Out came his pistol—out came mine at sight of his, and we fired together. A bullet grazed my head; the other man dropped. Then Harkness came rushing out of a doorway, and that quickly I forgot everything but poor Jim. I dropped the pistol, and let him have it with the stock of my whip. I was mad for a time and when I came to my senses I was out in the darkness and tramping up the river road. I knew then it wasn't a burglar I had shot, and the only thing I thought about was escape. I destroyed the letter—or tried to—because I was afraid of its being found on me. I got to my lodgings the next morning, and here I've stopped since, after I saw by the papers that I was not suspected. I thought the danger had blown over. But luck was against me, and I must face the music. As to what I've told you, gentlemen, it's every word true. I intended leaving the country, and then writing a confession that would clear Harkness. I wasn't going to let him be hung."

There was no doubt that the story was true, and Baines was well satisfied with what he had accomplished. Tom Gridley was charged and locked up, and Captain Harkness was released several days later. At the request of Baines, to whom he owed so much, he made a statement that cleared up the whole matter.

After relating the capture and trial of Jim Gridley, it went on.

"As for Crockett, or Keysbury, as he was called, he was even a worse ruffian than Gridley. He belonged to the gang, and was captured on the same occasion. He broke loose, and was pursued into the forest by his guards, who declared that they had shot and killed him as he was swimming a stream. But the scoundrel survived his wound, found me after my return home, and threatened to reveal the identity of the man I had executed in Africa. I knew the public would believe the worst, and for the sake of relatives and friends I submitted to blackmail for months. I had eluded him for a time, when he discovered me at Mortlake, and came that night to receive more money. The rest I need not repeat; I have told you already. Ah, if I had only known that Crockett was Charles Palmer! How easily I could have turned the tables on him!"

A month later Captain Harkness was dead, killed by the inevitable exposure and the comments of the press, which brought on an attack of his old African fever. Tom Gridley was convicted of manslaughter and served a short term of imprisonment.

THE END.

(Continued from page 14.)

There was eloquent evidence here of Kenmore's terrible brutality.

Owen minor and Chubby Heath hardly knew what to do.

"It's—it's frightful!" muttered Chubby, white to the lips. "You—you ought to go into the sanny! I—I'll go and fetch a doctor—"

"No, you won't!" interrupted Willy. "I'm not going to make a song about this. I don't feel up to the mark just now, but you can take it from me that I shall get my own back on Kenmore. By jingo! I'll make him pay for this! I'll make him suffer!"

"That's all right!" said Owen minor, when Willy had put his jacket and vest on again. "We're going straight to the Head, Willy. It wouldn't be sneaking. The Head's got to know. He'll kick Kenmore out—sack him on the spot!"

Willy grasped Owen minor's arm.

"You're my pals, ain't you?" he asked quietly.

"Rather!" said the pair.

"Then promise me you won't tell the Head."

"But look here—"

And Chubby Heath and Owen minor had to promise. But they did not give their word that they would not tell anybody else!

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING HIS DESERTS!



STUDY D, in the Remove passage, was a scene of activity.

Edward Oswald Handforth, to be exact, was just giving Church and McClure a little exhibition of boxing. Church and McClure hadn't asked for it, and certainly didn't want it.

It was just one of the little penalties of life. And, at the moment, Church and McClure were doing their utmost to dodge round the table so that they could escape various lunges which Handforth particularly favoured.

"You—you babbling lunatics!" said Handforth. "All you can do is to argue and make me wild! You know jolly well that this woman will mess things up if she comes to the school."

"I only said that she might never come!" roared Church.

"And I say she will come!" retorted Handforth. "If you think you can defy me—"

The door opened, and Handforth turned round.

"Clear out!" he snapped. "My hat! Fags—Third Formers! Coming into this study! Buzz off, you young bounders!"

"Pax!" gasped Chubby Heath, as he came in. "It's—it's about your minor! He's been half-killed by Kenmore!"

Handforth cooled down in a second. He

could see the intensely serious expressions on the faces of the fags—they were, indeed, scared. All ructions in Study D were at an end. The fags came in, and closed the door. And Handforth faced them.

"Now, what's the trouble?" he asked.

They told him.

"What rot!" said Handforth. "You young fatheads! You're trying to spoof me! Even Kenmore wouldn't do a thing like that!"

"We want you to come with us!" said Chubby Heath. "Oh, Handy, you can't realise it! Your minor's absolutely weak! He can't walk straight! And he wouldn't let us go and get a doctor!"

"Doctor!" said Handforth, with a start. "By George!"

The very fact that these fags had considered the possibility of a doctor was enough for him. He tore out of the room, and dashed away to the Third Form quarters. It was still some little time to dinner. The passages were filled with fellows—who looked after Handforth in astonishment—particularly as he was followed by the two fags.

The leader of Study D arrived in his minor's little den, and burst upon Willy. The latter was sitting in an easy chair, bending forward. And he was drinking a cup of hot tea, having just made it. And he was feeling much better. He looked up, and started.

"Hallo, Ted!" he said uneasily. "What's the trouble?"

"Two of your pals have told me about what happened in Kenmore's study!" said Handforth. "I've come here to see what damage that brute did. Let's have a look at your wrists?"

"The young fatheads!" growled Willy. "They told me they wouldn't tell the Head. What an ass I was not to make 'em promise—"

"Show me your wrists!" insisted Handforth.

"Oh, don't bother."

But Handforth did bother. And when he saw his brother's wrists, his fury rose to fever heat. The grazes were now puffed and swollen, and the fag's wrists were a most unpleasant sight.

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "By George! I didn't think it was so bad—I couldn't believe it! And you haven't told the Head?"

"I'm not a sneak!" growled Willy.

"You have a look at his back, Handy!" said Owen minor quickly. "Don't let him stop you! Look at it!"

Willy vainly attempted to get out of it. But Handforth was firm. And at last Willy was compelled to consent. His coat and waistcoat were removed, and Handforth looked at the ugly weals.

The sight sent him into a rage. It was not a mad rage; but one of fierce resentment and indignation. And there came into

Handforth's eyes an expression of determined purpose.

"Leave this to me!" he said tensely. "Just leave it to me! That brute's had the nerve to knock you about, Willy! You're my young brother—and it's up to me to deal with Kenmore!"

"What—what are you going to do?" asked Willy.

"You'll see afterwards," replied his brother. "I don't suppose you'll be able to recognise Kenmore when I've done with him—because I'm going to smash him to bits! You needn't try to stop me——"

"I won't!" interrupted Willy. "Good luck, old man! Go in and wipe up the floor with him! I'd ten times rather you punished him than the Head! Because you'll do it thoroughly!"

Handforth said no more, but walked out.

It had pained him more than he could say to see his young brother in such a dreadful state. As a rule, Edward Oswald was full of wildcat ideas. But when it came to a really serious crisis, he was sensible enough. And his one thought, now, was to mete out the punishment that Kenmore deserved.

And Handforth was not the fellow to waste time.

With a grim face, and with clenched fists, he strode away, and went straight to Kenmore's study. He was only a junior, but he was convinced that he could give Kenmore a hiding. In his present mood, he felt that he could have licked Carpentier.

Of course, it was totally against all school regulations for a junior to lay hands on a prefect. But what were regulations at a time like this? There are occasions when such things are unimportant.

Handforth arrived at Kenmore's study, and burst in without ceremony. The bully of the Sixth was sitting near the fire, and he looked round with a start. And he jumped to his feet as Handforth entered.

"What—what do you want?" he demanded huskily.

"You cad!" said Handforth.

There was something in his tone that made Kenmore shiver. The bully was a mass of nerves. He sat down at the table, having a vague kind of idea that he ought to compose himself somehow. It was madness to be scared of a mere Removite. He looked up, and clenched his teeth.

"Get out of this study!" he exclaimed curtly.

Handforth came round the table, and delivered a slap across Kenmore's face that resounded throughout the room.

"Put up your hands, you beastly brute!" said Handforth thickly. "Put 'em up—quick! I'm going to fight you! If you give me a hiding—well and good—but I'm going to mark you pretty good first!"

Kenmore staggered up, his cheek flaming.

"You—you infernal young——" he began.

Crash!

Handforth's fist, with all the force of his

strength behind it, smashed into Kenmore's face. In spite of his temper, Handforth had given Kenmore a chance to put up his hands. But Kenmore hadn't taken advantage of the offer.

Handforth's blow caught him right in the middle of the face. He went over in a way that would be comical but for its seriousness. For, with the chair behind him, he staggered back and floundered headlong into the fender. But he was on his feet in a moment.

Blood was streaming from his nose, and he was not a pleasant sight.

He was frightened, too. It was one thing to bully a Third Former; but it was another to have this raging avenger in his study. And Handforth, just now, was possessed of double his usual strength.

"Come on, you savage!" he shouted. "If you don't put your hands up, I'll slaughter you on the spot! You're going to be licked!"

Kenmore partially recovered himself. He clenched his fists, and went for Handforth with a sudden access of fury. He was a hulking fellow, years older than Edward Oswald. But fighting was not much in his line, whereas Handy put in practice every day.

Biff! Crash! Biff!

Handforth's fists thudded home every time. And every one of Kenmore's feeble efforts merely whizzed through the air.

And the fight went on.

The table went flying with a clatter and a crash. Then the pair became locked together. They went round the study in a kind of staggering series of leaps. The bookcase left the wall, splintered to the floor, and in the midst of it, the door opened, and Wilson of the Sixth looked in.

"Good heavens!" said Wilson faintly.

He stood there, watching in a dazed way.

Handforth had not finished yet. He had no intention of finishing until he had knocked Kenmore cold. He was absolutely determined to deliver a knockout. Nothing else would satisfy him.

Crash! Biff!

By this time, Kenmore was an ugly picture. His face was smeared with blood, his eyes were blackened and closing, and both his ears were puffed up. He had received terrible punishment—but only about a quarter of what he deserved.

"Stop!" he panted faintly. "I—I give in!"

"Oh, do you!" gasped Handforth. "Well, I don't! You're going to fight me until one of us goes down! Take that—and that!"

Crash! Crash!

Kenmore took them, and staggered back drunkenly. And just then Wilson gave another startled gasp. Glancing back, he had seen a figure coming along the Sixth Form passage—a stately figure attired in a cap and flowing gown. Wilson nearly fell through the floor.

It was the Head.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford as he came up. "What is all this extraordinary commotion?"

"I—I just came along to see, sir!" gasped Wilson.

The Head entered the study, and then pulled up short. He had arrived just in time to see Handforth deliver the knockout. It was a beautifully timed blow, and it caught Kenmore under the chin, and sent him reeling half across the room. The bully of the Sixth collapsed into the middle of the bookcase and lay in the wreckage, moaning faintly.

"Good!" exclaimed Handforth. "I've licked you! Yes, by George, I've licked you!"

"Handforth!" shouted the Head, in blank amazement.

Edward Oswald looked round.

"It's all right, sir—it's over now!" he said. "Kenmore's whacked!"

The Head was rather startled by this announcement. And he was also startled by Handforth's appearance. For the junior was dishevelled, dusty, and smeared with traces of blood.

Dr. Stafford had never witnessed such an incident in all his career. Here, in a prefect's study, a member of the junior school was actually announcing that he had knocked out the Sixth Former!

And such a thing was an appalling crime. Indeed, it was almost punishable by expulsion. It was against all school rules for any boy to strike a prefect. And Handforth had gone further.

He had knocked Kenmore absolutely out.

"You—you wretched boy!" exclaimed the Head furiously. "You will come with me at once, Handforth—at once!"

Handforth was calm now; his mission was fulfilled.

"Very well, sir," he said quietly. "I'm ready!"

He was panting hard, and he knew well enough that he would have to take severe punishment. But he didn't care. The satisfaction within him was intense. For he had given Simon Kenmore his deserts.

Kenmore was just coming to himself.

"He—he attacked me without any provocation, sir!" he moaned. "Before I could get a chance to defend myself, he—"

"There is no need for you to speak, Kenmore!" interrupted the Head. "Wilson, help Kenmore at once. Handforth, come with me!"

"But, sir, I'd like to say—"

"Whatever you say, Handforth, will make no difference!" broke in Dr. Stafford curtly.

"I am shocked! I have never seen such a disgraceful scene as this before! You have had the unparalleled audacity to fight with a prefect, and for that there is no pardon. You need not tell me why you attacked Kenmore now. Come with me at once."

"Yes, sir," replied Handforth.

He followed the Head down the passage,

and then along to Dr. Stafford's own study. By the time they arrived, the Head was feeling slightly more composed. He had been worried enough without this business. The proposed visit of the new lady chairman had upset him.

But this fresh trouble had to be dealt with at once—without a moment's delay. It was for Dr. Stafford to assert his authority.

Once within the study, the Head closed the door, and then faced the junior.

"I can hardly believe, Handforth, that you attacked Kenmore without provocation," he said. "If you will tell me the exact truth of the matter, it is just possible that you may have some adequate excuse, although there is no pardon for striking a prefect. What have you got to say, Handforth?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing?"

"Not a word, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" snapped the Head. "Then you think that you have done right?"

"I know I've done right, sir," said Edward Oswald. "Kenmore deserved a hiding more than anything else in the world. I gave it to him—that's all. And there's nothing more to say."

"Very well!" exclaimed the Head curtly. "I have one course to adopt, Handforth. The school will be called together at once, and I shall flog you in public. I must make an example of this terrible defiance of regulations."

Handforth nodded.

"Very well, sir," he said. "Just as you like!"

CHAPTER VII.

WILLY TO THE RESCUE.



ARCHIE GLEN-
THORNE shook his head.

"The fact is, dear old lads, the old bean positively refuses to wobble!" he observed. "I mean to say, I can't grasp it. Absolutely not!"

"It wants a bit of believing, I know, Archie," said De Valerie. "But it's true enough, and Handforth's going to get it in the neck. At least, he'll get it somewhere!"

"A bit lower down than the neck!" remarked Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to laugh at!" growled Church. "Fancy! Handy being publicly flogged! And it's come so suddenly, too! What on earth made the idiot smash Kenmore up like that?"

"I think we know!" muttered McClure.

But, although Handforth's chums had an idea of the truth, nobody else had. They were all filled with astonishment. The news had got about the school like wildfire.

Handforth had gone into Kenmore's study, and he had licked the bully of the Sixth!

Of course, the senior school was indignant and humiliated. The Remove regarded Handforth in the light of a national hero. He, a junior, had whacked a Sixth Former until he was down!

And this Sixth Former had been Kenmore—the biggest bully in the school. There wasn't a fellow in the Remove who didn't believe that Kenmore deserved it. But they were all amazed that Handforth should have had such a nerve.

It can safely be said that the majority of sympathy was for Handforth, and not for Kenmore. And when it came to the public flogging, Handforth would have many silent sympathisers.

There was tremendous animation in the Third.

Willy was intensely proud of his major. He had been advised by Chubby Heath and Owen minor to go straight into the sanatorium. But Willy was not as soft as that. He decided to bear the pain.

His back felt raw, and his wrists were smarting horribly. He felt weak all over. But he was not going to show the white feather—he would stick it. What was more, he wouldn't let anybody else know what had happened.

At least, this had been his original intention.

But after he heard the news about Handforth being in for a public flogging, Willy was inclined to change his mind. He didn't say much, but he thought a great deal. At last he entered into earnest conversation with his two chums, and it seemed that the trio had got something up their sleeves.

Kenmore himself did not show up.

He had retired to his own bedroom, and one or two of his own pals were there, sympathising with him, and helping him to recover.

The public flogging was to take place at once—even before dinner. For the Head had decided the sooner it was over, the better.

"It's the strangest thing I've ever heard of!" declared Tommy Watson. "We all know that Handforth's an ass, but what in the world made him go into Kenmore's study and do that?"

"Perhaps we shall hear something in Big Hall?" suggested Pitt.

"I hope so, dear old boys!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "An' I hope that Handforth escapes—I do really. I can't believe that he was guilty."

"But, my dear chap, he smashed Kenmore to a pulp."

"I am admittin' that," he said. "But if Handforth was justified in smashin' Ken-

more to a pulp, he isn't guilty of doin' anythin' wrong. It's a frightful business, begad!"

"Well, anyway, Kenmore has got something at last!" I said. "He's deserved a sound thrashing for years. Handforth will be the most popular chap in the Remove for a long time to come. And think of it, too! A junior knocking Kenmore as flat as a pancake!"

"I didn't think Handy was capable of it," said Grey.

"Neither did I," I said. "He must have been in a pretty warm temper to get up such an amount of energy. Hallo! There goes the bell! It's time for us to be getting into Big Hall."

The juniors were all streaming along the passages. And when we entered Big Hall, there was a kind of lush. It was about five minutes before everybody was collected there. I noticed Handforth minor in the ranks of the Third. He was looking a bit pale and shaky, but otherwise himself.

And Kenmore was present, too.

He had been obliged to come down—by the Head's orders. And all eyes were fixed upon Kenmore.

He was a sorry sight.

His face was puffed and bloated. His nose was larger than usual, and both his eyes were, in the term used by the juniors, "banged up." Upon the whole, Kenmore showed signs of terrific punishment.

And this was all the more astounding, because Handforth was scarcely touched. When he came on the platform, accompanied by the Headmaster, it was seen that he was practically himself. There was not a mark on him. This, in itself, proved how much more adept Handy had been in the art of fighting.

"Good old Handy!"

"Buck up, old man! We're with you!"

"Rather!"

There was quite a big buzz among the juniors.

"Silence!" shouted the prefects and masters.

And the buzz died down.

The Headmaster came to the front of the raised platform, and gazed over the school, looking very grave.

"Boys, I have a most unpleasant duty to perform," he said. "It is necessary for me to administer a sound flogging to Handforth, of the Remove. He has acted in a manner which is totally contrary to the school regulations."

"Kenmore deserved it, sir!" shouted somebody.

"How dare you?" demanded the Head. "It is foolish of me to answer this interruption, but I feel indignant. There can be no justification for such an act of utter insubordination."

There was silence.

"At the same time, I do not intend to flog Handforth without giving him an opportunity to answer for his conduct," went

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on the Head. "He went into Kenmore's study, and attacked Kenmore. He did this without the slightest cause or justification."

"He must have had some good reason, sir!"

"Kenmore's a beast, sir!"

The Head waited until the interruptions died down.

"I am very sorry to see that Handforth has so many sympathisers!" he exclaimed gravely. "It does not indicate the right feeling of discipline. If it were not for Handforth's exemplary record, I should be compelled to expel him from the school. But Handforth has an excellent character, and, under the circumstances I feel that a flogging will meet the case."

The Head paused, and turned to Handforth.

"Now, my boy, I will give you one more opportunity," he exclaimed. "Will you tell me why you went into Kenmore's study, and attacked the prefect as you did?"

"I did it, sir, because Kenmore deserved it."

"Why did he deserve it?"

"I can't say any more, sir," said Handforth firmly.

"In other words, you refuse to give any explanation?"

"Yes, sir."

I was looking at Kenmore while this little conversation was going on. And I could see the bully of the Sixth heave a sigh of relief. He had been obviously afraid until that moment.

But Handforth had refused to sneak. I knew there was something behind all this, although, at the time, I was not in possession of the facts.

Preparations were at once begun for the flogging.

Handforth was marched forward, and Dr. Stafford grasped the heavy birch—a most wicked-looking instrument. It was capable of delivering a very severe flogging, and Handforth did not feel very happy.

But he was determined to go through with it. He felt that Kenmore had received his punishment. If Handforth told the truth, it would be the act of an informer—in his opinion.

So he kept mum.

And the flogging commenced.

At least, it was just about to commence—the Head had raised his arm for the first blow—when there was a big commotion in the ranks of the Third.

Willy Handforth burst out from the other fags, and ran up towards the platform.

"Stop!" he shouted. "It's not fair, sir."

Behind him came Chubby Heath and Owen minor. They were flushed with excitement—and nervous, too. Until Willy had made the break forward, his chums had not enough courage to act.

But now that their leader had acted, they were game enough.



Willy's elder brother was alone, and he paused and stared as he saw the pair in the middle of the lobby. That agonised cry of Willy's could not be mistaken.

"Stop!" they shouted. "We've got something to say, sir!"

The Headmaster lowered his hand, and he frowned with sudden anger. An interruption of this kind was well-nigh unprecedented. The rest of the school looked on with tremendous interest and excitement.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" demanded Dr. Stafford. "Boys! How dare you—"

"It's not right to flog Handforth, sir!" shouted Heath shrilly. "He only knocked Kenmore about because Kenmore half killed Willy—I—I mean Handforth minor."

"It's a lie!" shouted Kenmore thickly.

The Head looked round, amazed.

"This is astounding!" he exclaimed. "Heath—Owen—Handforth minor! Go back to your places at once."

"I won't, sir!" said Willy grimly. "I'm not going to stand here and see my major flogged just because he did something—"

"Upon my soul!" said the Head. "Boy, you have the audacity to argue with me?"

"Yes, sir; because I think you ought to know the facts," exclaimed Willy. "My brother licked Kenmore because Kenmore's a brute. And if you only get to know the truth, you'll pardon Ted on the spot!"

"Look here, sir!" shouted Owen minor.

He was excited, or he wouldn't have been so bold.

He dragged Willy forward, and held up one of his wrists for the Head's inspection. Dr. Stafford was standing on the raised platform, but he could easily see that the wrist was puffed and swollen and raw.

"Come up here, Handforth minor," he said quietly.

Willy mounted to the platform at once, followed by Heath and Owen minor, after the pair had hesitated for a moment. Kenmore, by this time, was frantic with alarm.

"It's all a trumped-up story, sir!" he shouted. "I didn't do it!"

The Head looked at him coldly.

"It is rather remarkable, Kenmore, that that you should deny a charge which has not yet been made!" he exclaimed. "I shall inquire very closely into this matter, for I think the facts are significant. You will be silent, sir."

"But—"

"That is enough, Kenmore."

The bully of the Sixth subsided, shivering visibly.

"Now, Handforth minor, what have you got to say?" asked the Head. "Unless I suspected some light to be thrown upon this affair, I should not pause to question you now. Show me your wrists."

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "What is the meaning of this, my boy? Why did you not go to the matron? Your wrists are in a terrible state! What have you been doing?"

"Kenmore did it, sir!" shouted Chubby Heath.

"Kenmore!" exclaimed the Head, aghast.

"Yes, sir!" shrilled Chubby. "I don't care if I'm called a sneak. I reckon I'm justified! We're not going to stand here and see Handforth flogged when he doesn't deserve it!"

Dr. Stafford was growing very grim.

"Handforth minor, is this statement correct?" he asked. "Did Kenmore cause these injuries to your wrists?"

"Yes, sir," said Willy quietly. "I think just the same as Heath. I shouldn't have spoken, only I don't want to see my major flogged and disgraced. He only gave Kenmore about a quarter what he deserved!"

"This—this is extraordinary!" said the Head. "How could Kenmore have injured your wrists in such a manner?"

Willy hesitated.

"I'll tell you, sir," put in Chubby. "Kenmore took Handforth minor and tied him up by the wrists to two hooks in the wall!"

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed the Head. "Is this true?"

"Yes, sir," said Willy.

"And that's not all, sir!" chimed in Owen minor. "Kenmore stripped him, and flogged him till his back was bleeding. Just look at this, sir!"

Willy protested, but his two chums were thoroughly excited now, and they would not allow him to have his own way.

Willy had had no intention of exposing his back. But Chubby Heath and Owen minor

tore off their leader's jacket and waistcoat. Then, in spite of his struggles, they pulled his shirt and vest down.

And the Headmaster looked on, filled with horror.

For the weals were now standing out in awful ridges on Willy's back—red, ugly, and appalling. No word was necessary. There, upon the fag's back, was an accusation which Kenmore would have difficulty in answering.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERRUPTION.



"O H!"

"Good heavens!"

"The kid's back is absolutely raw!"

"And Kenmore did it, the brute! He ought to be expelled!" From all corners

of the big Hall came shouts of indignation. For Willy had turned, so that all could see that dreadful brand. The poor youngster must have been in fearful agony.

As for Dr. Stafford, his brow clouded over like thunder. He was more horrified than he could explain. Never had he seen a boy so brutally ill-treated. It was staggering.

Kenmore was looking white to the lips. Instinctively, he knew that the tables were to be turned. He had never imagined that the truth would come out like this.

Nothing worse could have happened.

In front of the whole school he was being exposed. The prospect of immediate expulsion loomed before him like some terrible disaster. And Kenmore shook as he stood.

The Headmaster had become cold and grave.

"This, of course, alters the whole matter!" he exclaimed firmly. "Handforth, why did you not explain what had happened to your brother?"

"I didn't think it was necessary, sir," replied Edward Oswald. "I had given Kenmore a good hiding, and I thought that was enough. It wasn't up to me to say anything more."

The Head nodded.

"You probably thought that such a course would be opposed to your code of schoolboy honour," he exclaimed. "In that supposition, Handforth, you were quite wrong. I have nothing but praise for the courage of these Third Form boys in coming forward to tell the truth. They have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of."

"Hear, hear, sir!" shouted dozens of fellows.

"It wasn't sneaking at all, sir!"

Members of the Fifth and Sixth approved in just the same manner as the juniors. Kenmore was a senior, but this exposure of his brutality left him without a friend.

"I think, Handforth minor, you had better explain what took place," said the Head. "I am glad that the whole school is here, so that all the boys may listen to the story. They know so much already

that it is better that they should learn the full facts."

Kenmore started forward.

"It's all a put-up story, sir!" he shouted hoarsely. "I didn't touch Handforth minor—"

"You will be silent, Kenmore!" interrupted Dr. Stafford curtly. "I will give you an opportunity later of answering this charge. But at the moment you must keep silent. I will not allow you to interrupt."

Kenmore nearly choked, but he knew better than to speak again.

"Now, my boy!" exclaimed the Head.

"I was in Kenmore's study, sir, and I didn't do exactly as he ordered," said Willy. "I'm his fag, you see, sir. He got angry, and completely lost his temper."

And, as briefly as possible, without going into any harrowing details, Willy explained what had taken place. He did so frankly, firm in his belief that he was doing the right thing. He did not regard it as sneaking, and his plain statement met with the approval of the entire school.

For Willy was doing this to save his brother from a flogging and public disgrace.

"That's the whole truth, sir!" said Willy at length. "Kenmore acted like a brute—like a villain! I wasn't going to say anything, but my two chums went and told my major. He didn't sneak, either; he went straight to Kenmore, and gave him the hiding of his life!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handforth!"

"You did the right thing, Handy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good man!"

The Head waited, in no way angered at the perfect roar of cheering which went up. The fellows were shouting their approval of Handforth's action in thrashing Kenmore on the spot.

"I cannot tell you all how pleased I am that the truth of this affair has come to light!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "Kenmore, what have you to say now? You have an opportunity of answering this charge of dreadful brutality."

"It's not true, sir!" shouted Kenmore. "The whole thing's a lie! I never touched Handforth minor at all!"

"Was he in your study?"

"Yes, sir—but only just clearing a few things up," said Kenmore. "I didn't even speak to him. I can't imagine who knocked him about like that. You surely don't think I'd treat a junior in that way, sir?"

The Head looked grim.

"Am I to take it, then, that Handforth minor has deliberately lied in order to get you into trouble?"

"Yes, sir," said Kenmore. "He's a young demon. I believe he'd tell any amount of lies in order to hurt me. I'm a prefect, sir, and I always take good care to treat the juniors as kindly as possible—"

"Oh!"

"Liar!"

"Bully!"

A dozen shouts came from various parts of Big Hall.

"It does not seem, Kenmore, that it is your general habit to treat the juniors kindly," exclaimed the Head. "However, it would perhaps be unfair to accept Handforth minor's statement against your own without the support of some more solid evidence. But I think Mr. Lee will provide that."

"Mr. Lee, sir?" asked Kenmore, startled.

Nelson Lee had appeared on the platform from the rear door at that moment. And in his hand he carried several lengths of stout cord, and a thin, whippy walking cane.

Only a short time before I had noticed the Head having a few private words with the gov'nor, and Nelson Lee had taken his departure at once.

The Head watched Kenmore very closely as Nelson Lee came forward. And there was an expression of absolute consternation in the prefect's eyes. There could be no mistaking his attitude.

Nelson Lee confronted him.

"In your study, Kenmore, I have found full confirmation of Handforth minor's statement," said the gov'nor quietly. "There are two hooks in the wall, and it is quite obvious that they have been used within the last hour or so. Furthermore, there is this rope—with portions of it bearing traces of blood. This rope was bound round Handforth minor's wrists. Finally, here is the cane which you used. What have you to say?"

"I—I— Somebody must have put the rope in my study, sir," stammered Kenmore, his teeth chattering. "It's not fair, sir! I only gave the kid a few touches—I—I mean—"

He paused, utterly confused.

"I wish to hear no more, Kenmore!" said the Head curtly. "Your guilt is unquestionable. You are convicted of performing a most brutal and inhuman attack upon this junior boy. In doing so, you not only acted as no British boy should, but you absolutely disgraced your position as a prefect. Your punishment will be severe."

Kenmore winced, and said nothing.

Dr. Stafford turned.

"My boy," he said, taking Handforth's hand. "I exceedingly regret that I should have misjudged you as I did. You certainly broke the school regulations by attacking Kenmore. But there are always exceptions to the rule. And I am satisfied that you were fully justified in taking such an action. Your rage was quite understandable. Perhaps you acted in a hot-headed way by taking matters into your own hands. But I do not blame you. You may go to your companions. You are pardoned."

"Thank you, sir," said Handforth, with sudden excitement.

He waved to all the Remove fellows.

"There you are, you chaps!" he roared.

"Haven't I always told you that the Head's a brick?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

When silence was restored, the Head turned to Kenmore.

"Kenmore, there is only one course that I can adopt," he said solemnly. "After the manner in which you have acted I cannot consent to your remaining in this school. You will be expelled—"

"Expelled, sir!" gasped Kenmore wildly.

"Do you expect anything else?" demanded the Head stercally.

"But—but my father will be terribly upset, sir!" said Kenmore brokenly. "I shan't be able to go up to Oxford, or—or—"

bring disgrace on all his family—and that's not fair to them. Couldn't you manage to flog him instead, sir? We'd all love to see that!"

Dr. Stafford pursed his lips.

"You are too generous, my boy," he said. "Kenmore should leave the school. I will consider the matter."

He walked solemnly to the back of the platform, and consulted with Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale. In the meantime, everybody looked on with bated breath. Kenmore stood there, a figure of contempt and scorn.

He hung his head, and his anxiety was terrible.

And then the Headmaster turned, and we waited to hear his words.

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"This is no time for you to think of such things as that, Kenmore!" put in the Head. "Your crime is too serious for me to take any other course."

Willy Handforth pushed forward.

"Can't you let Kenmore stop, sir?" he asked quickly. "I don't think he meant to hurt me like that—he was in such a temper that he hardly knew what he was doing."

The Head looked at Willy in surprise.

"After the way Kenmore has treated you, are you actually attempting to shield him?" he asked.

"Not at all, sir," replied Willy. "But I shouldn't like to be the cause of ruining his whole career. If he was expelled, it would

Kenmore, you have only this unfortunate victim of yours to thank for my decision," he exclaimed gravely. "I will allow you to remain in the school."

"Oh!" said Kenmore, with a gasp of relief.

"Needless to say, you will no longer be a prefect," went on the Head. "You have clearly proved that you are not a fit and proper person for such responsibilities. Furthermore you will be flogged."

"Flogged, sir!" repeated Kenmore wildly.

"Yes—flogged!"

"But—but I'm in the Sixth, sir——"

"Stop!" thundered the Head. "Do you dare to query my decision—after you have been saved from expulsion? It is an unusual

course for me to flog a boy belonging to the Sixth Form. But the circumstances are so grave that there is no other course open to me. I intend to give you twenty strokes with the birch, Kenmore. You will submit quietly."

Kenmore swayed as he stood.

This disgrace was almost as bad as expulsion. To stand up there, on that platform, with the eyes of the whole school upon him! And they would see him birched and degraded!

It was indeed a fitting punishment.

"Handforth minor," said the Head, turning to the fag. "You will go at once to the sanatorium, and I will have the doctor sent for as quickly as possible. You are in need of medical attention."

"But I don't want to go in the sanny, sir!" declared Willy.

"You must do as I say," replied the Head. "Possibly it may not be necessary for you to remain long—but your back is in a dreadful condition."

"Must I go now, sir?" asked Willy blankly.

"Yes."

"But I want to see Kenmore go through it, sir."

"Under the circumstances I will allow you to remain until Kenmore has received his punishment," replied the Head quietly. "No doubt it will provide you with some little satisfaction."

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Willy.

He went down from the platform, and joined Chubby Heath and Owen minor, who were looking excited and pleased. Everything had turned out splendidly, in their opinion.

Indeed, the whole school thought so, too. Kenmore was to receive his deserts. He had been thrashed by Handforth, and now he was to be flogged by the Head. It could hardly be described as Kenmore's birthday. But he undoubtedly deserved everything.

If ever a birching met with general approval, this one did. And the Remove, in particular, was delighted. Kenmore was the most detested senior in the school, and the Remove had long hoped for such an event as this. Furthermore, it had the glorious satisfaction of knowing that Handforth had given Kenmore a good hiding, and had got away with it.

The degraded senior was white with dismay and fear. But there was no getting out of it. It was utterly impossible to defy the Headmaster. And, without any further delay, the birching commenced.

We all looked on with real joy. On most occasions it is not a pleasant sight to see a fellow undergo a flogging. But the whole school enjoyed every moment of this business.

And we were contemptuous, too. For at every stroke of the birch, Kenmore gasped and howled. He was a coward even now. He could not take his punishment without yelling.

And then, when ten strokes had been ad-

ministered, there came a most dramatic interruption—one that nobody had anticipated.

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the further great door—the door which led out into the Ancient House. Turning, I saw a lady had entered—a tall, angular lady of about fifty. She seemed to be all bones, and she wore spectacles perched upon her prominent nose.

I gave a gasp the very instant I saw her. Miss Jane Trumble had arrived!

CHAPTER IX.

ROUGH ON THE HEAD.



"STOP! Stop at once!" Miss Trumble shouted out the words in a high, shrill kind of scream. For one moment she had paused, regarding the scene on the

platform with fierce disapproval.

And now she came hastening down Big Hall, waving an umbrella in the air. Everybody turned, and regarded her in astonishment and consternation. There was no question that Miss Trumble was a forceful person.

The Headmaster paused, angered at this fresh interruption.

One glance round was sufficient for him. He started, and turned slightly pale. For the time being he had forgotten all about the new lady Chairman. But now he was reminded of her in a very definite way.

He had known that she was coming to the school to-day. It was exceedingly unfortunate that she should appear in the middle of this unhappy scene. Apparently, Miss Trumble was not inclined to be pleasant. But Dr. Stafford stood there, dignified and grave.

Miss Trumble rushed up to the platform, excited and red. She was attired in a costume which looked decidedly old-fashioned, and there was a kind of bonnet stuck on her head, with a veil hanging down. As Handforth afterwards said, this veil was very necessary—or she would have frightened everybody she met.

"Madam, please allow me to inform you that you are interrupting!" exclaimed the Head coldly. "If you will be good enough to accompany Mr. Crowell to my study, I will join you there within a few minutes."

Miss Trumble mounted the steps of the platform, and glared at the Head.

"You are Dr. Stafford?" she asked, in a high voice.

The Head bowed.

"What are you doing to this boy?" demanded Miss Trumble, pointing at Kenmore with her umbrella.

"The boy is receiving a flogging, and I must again remind you that your action in interrupting is hardly in good taste!" exclaimed the Head acidly. "I shall be obliged, Miss Trumble, if you will wait in my study."

"Indeed!" said Miss Trumble. "I shall do exactly as I please! I am the Chairman of the Board of Directors and I emphatically intend to see that no cruelty goes on in this school."

"Cruelty!" repeated the Head, controlling himself with difficulty.

"Yes, sir, cruelty!" said the lady. "It is perfectly disgraceful that a boy should be beaten about with a birch! Such a big boy, too! I demand to know what it means!"

Dr. Stafford took a deep breath.

"If you are so anxious for an explanation, madam, I shall doubtless be able to oblige you later on. For the moment, I must beg of you to retire. I cannot allow this interruption to continue."

"You cannot allow it?" shouted Miss Trumble.

The Head did not reply, but turned back to his task. Inwardly, he was boiling. He had known all along that Miss Trumble was a Tartar—a most dreadful person to get on with.

But he had never imagined that she would have the audacity to query his actions—particularly in front of the whole school. The Head had no intention of being humiliated—and by a woman.

He raised his birch, and went on with the flogging.

And then, to his intense dismay and amazement, Miss Trumble rushed forward, clutched at his arm and tore the birch away.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Poor old Head—he's in for it!"

The school looked on aghast. Here was something which nobody had looked for. To see this female tearing the birch out of the Head's hands was about the richest thing the fellows could imagine.

Dr. Stafford turned, hardly able to credit his senses.

"How—how dare you?" he panted. "Do you realise, madam, that this is most outrageous?"

"I will not see this boy ill-treated," shouted Miss Trumble shrilly. "It is perfectly disgraceful. Do you hear me, sir? Disgraceful! I have long suspected that these orgies of cruelty went on in the school, and now I have seen with my own eyes."

"You do not understand, madam——"

"I understand perfectly!" interrupted the lady Chairman. "I came to the school to-day in order to make inquiries—as I intend to institute various new rules."

"Indeed!" said Dr. Stafford hotly.

"Yes, sir!" shouted Miss Trumble. "And what do I find? I arrive just in time to discover you striking this poor youth in a manner which can only be described as inhuman!"

The whole school felt rather faint.

"I won't allow it!" went on the lady. "Do you understand me? I order you to

cease this brutality at once! The birch is a relic of savagery, and has no place in a modern public school!"

The Headmaster stood quite still. He had gone pale with humiliation. Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale and the other masters stood looking on, rather aghast. They did not interfere. They felt it would be safer not to do so.

Dr. Stafford found his voice at last.

"Madam," he said with quiet dignity, "you are forgetting yourself!"

"How dare you?" shrilled Miss Trumble.

"I am the Headmaster of this school, and I must insist upon absolute authority!" continued the Head. "Under no circumstances can I submit to interference. You will please retire at once, and I will grant you an interview later. For the moment this flogging must be completed."

Miss Trumble raised her umbrella, and shook it in the Head's face.

"This is outrageous!" she exclaimed hotly. "Do you think you can talk to me in that way, sir? You impudent old man!"

"Good heavens!" gasped the Head.

The senior school and the junior school waited, feeling that the heavens were about to fall. For the Rev. Head of St. Frank's to be called "an impudent old man," was utterly startling.

Something had to happen—something terrible.

It did.

"If you dare to touch this boy again, I will place the entire matter before my colleagues, and see that you are removed from your responsible position!" shouted Miss Trumble. "Under no circumstances will I allow cruelty in this school! Do you understand, sir?"

The Headmaster placed the birch on the table.

"Since you are a lady, I cannot address you as I would desire," he exclaimed, with suppressed anger. "I take it, madam, that you have forbidden me to complete the punishment of this errant boy?"

"Yes, I certainly have," retorted Miss Trumble.

"Under those circumstances, it is no longer possible for me to retain my position of authority," said Dr. Stafford quietly.

"Madam, you have humiliated me in front of my boys as I have never been humiliated before. You are the Chairman of the Board of Governors?"

"I am!" said the lady, with a toss of her head.

"Then you will be kind enough to accept my resignation!" said the Head.

"Oh!"

The school was electrified.

"Don't go, sir!" shouted a hundred voices.

"We need you here, sir!"

"Three cheers for Dr. Stafford!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll back you up, sir!"

The Head came to the front of the platform, and raised his hand

"Please—please!" he exclaimed, gazing at the excited fellows with saddened eyes. "I am gratified, boys, that you should reveal to me your sympathy and loyalty. But you will cause me greater satisfaction if you remain quiet in this most unfortunate scene."

A pin might have been heard to drop in Big Hall. All the juniors and seniors understood at once, and kept still and quiet.

Miss Trumble was looking rather taken aback.

"This is absurd!" she said sharply. "There is absolutely no necessity for you to act so drastically, Dr. Stafford! I have not asked for your resignation, sir——"

"Nevertheless, madam, I must tender it!" put in Dr. Stafford. "From this moment I cease to have any authority. You have chosen to take command out of my hands, and I have only one course. I resign."

And Dr. Stafford, with a firm stride, walked across the platform, and disappeared through the doorway at the rear. Only for a moment did Miss Trumble seem non-plussed.

It had come upon her as a great surprise that the Head had resented her interference. She did not seem to know that she acted in a way which was utterly foreign to all the traditions of the school.

She gave a high-pitched laugh, and stared over the school.

"Very well!" she exclaimed. "Very well! Since your Headmaster has deserted you, I shall take command!"

"What!" yelled a dozen voices.

"I intend to remain here, and to adopt my own ideas!" went on Miss Trumble, with growing confidence. "I will show how a school of this kind should be conducted!"

"Oh!"

"The Headmaster will leave St. Frank's at once—but I shall remain!" declared Miss Trumble firmly. "And you, my dear boys, will receive better treatment than you have ever had before. For the present, you can all run away, and go to your playthings!"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"This is about the limit!"

Nelson Lee stepped forward to the edge of the platform.

"I think you had better quietly dismiss, boys," he said. "For the moment this matter must be left as it stands. You will all go straight into the dining hall for dinner—it is past the usual hour already. That is all. You may dismiss."

Miss Trumble looked at Nelson Lee angrily for a moment, then she shrugged her shoulders, and passed through the doorway.

The school dismissed.

And never had such excitement been abroad.

There was only one subject to be discussed—the resignation of the Head, and Miss Trumble's amazing announcement.

The affair of Handforth minor and Kenmore faded away into insignificance. It was practically forgotten. This new sensation



The cane descended with cruel, stinging force across Willy's shoulders—bare, except for his shirt and undervest. He shook in every limb, and tears came out of his eyes with the sudden agony.

was one which thrilled St. Frank's to the very core.

"But—but it's terrific!" gasped Reggie Pitt, as he stood with a group of others in the lobby. "Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Never!"

"Oh, blow that now!" said Fatty Little. "Dinner's ready!"

"Who cares about dinner at a time like this?" asked De Valerie indignantly. "The great question is, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to allow the Head to resign in that way?"

"Never!"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "I mean to say, the Head's a bally decent old cove, as it were. A perfectly priceless chappie. It would be rather ghastly if he staggered away into the offing, and didn't blow up again! I mean, how frightfully frightful!"

"But the Head's resigned—and that means he's going!" said Grey. "We can't stand that, you know! Besides, just think of it! That—that Charley's Aunt person is going to take the Head's place!"

"It's—it's too awful to think of," said Pitt, in a hollow voice.

"Oh, rather!"

"And we'll never put up with it!" roared Handforth. "We've had tyrants here before now—like old Hunter—but I'm blessed if we'll stand a woman! This isn't an infants' school!"

"A woman!" said Bob Christine. "You can't call Miss Trumble a woman!"

"Anyhow, we won't submit to any of her rot!" declared Handforth warmly. "Just fancy! Coming here and insulting the Head like that!"

"It was terrible!" I said. "You know, I felt tremendously sorry for the poor old boy. It was a fearful predicament for him. He had to be polite, and resignation was about his only course. He simply couldn't stand treatment of that sort."

"It was too awful for words," declared

Tommy Watson. "I'm not convinced, yet, that the Head will resign—"

"But he's done it, you ass!"

"Oh, yes, but I expect this woman will apologise when she's calmed down," said Tommy. "After all, a thing like that is impossible. No woman could become the Head of St. Frank's."

"Of course not!"

But the fellows didn't know Miss Jane Trumble!

Developments were shortly to occur—developments of a most exciting and dramatic character. During the last hour, St. Frank's had been shaken to its foundations.

It was to be shaken again—and much more violently—in the very near future!

Big things were coming!

THE END.

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My dear Readers,—Since the conclusion of the last Holiday Adventure series some months ago, our St. Frank's stories have had little or no connection with each other, each week's adventures being a separate and isolated story. My main object in this was to provide an opportunity of reintroducing some of your old favourite characters at the school in a leading rôle. With such a large assortment of star characters who have appeared from time to time in these stories, it is exceedingly difficult to do justice to them all.

THE NEW "BARRING-OUT" SERIES.

When I announced a few weeks ago the grand new "BARRING-OUT" series which begins in this number, I was glad to find from the letters that subsequently followed that everyone welcomes wholeheartedly the return to the series of stories, each of which, though complete in itself, develops from what happened in the preceeding story. The series just begun is not only original but promises to be one of the most popular we have ever had. As a result of Miss Trumble's interference with the Head's just punishment

of Kenmore, all the masters send in their resignations and next week's story, "THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS!" will present a series of many exciting events before any semblance of order is restored.

WHY EVERYONE SHOULD VOTE.

Intending competitors in the Story Voting Competition should note that the Voting Coupon, on which they will register their votes will appear in next week's number of "The Nelson Lee Library." I hope as many as possible will enter for the competition, not only because of the excellent prize that is being offered, but on account of the great value to me of knowing which stories of the list you like best.

THE DETECTIVE STORY SECTION.

In the Detective Story Section next week, there will be another thrilling Scotland Yard story, entitled, "THE GOAT!" and the further adventures of Carfax Baines in a mystery story "THE CASE OF THE EL TORO MINING SYNDICATE!"

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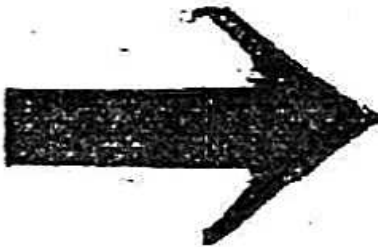
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