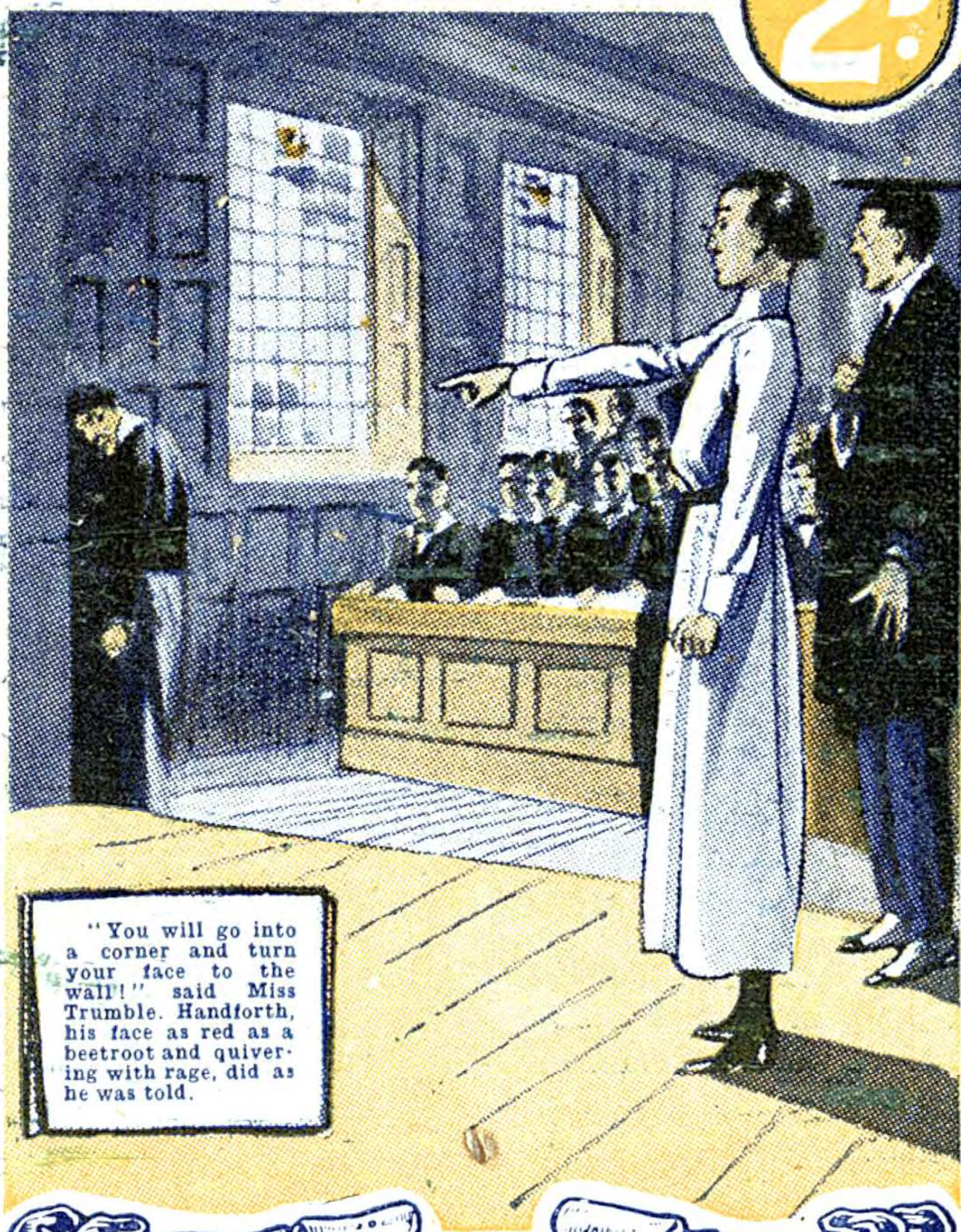


SPLENDID PHOTO-CARD OF EXPRESS ENGINE GIVEN AWAY!

Nelson Lee

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"You will go into a corner and turn your face to the wall!" said Miss Trumble. Handforth, his face as red as a beetroot and quivering with rage, did as he was told.

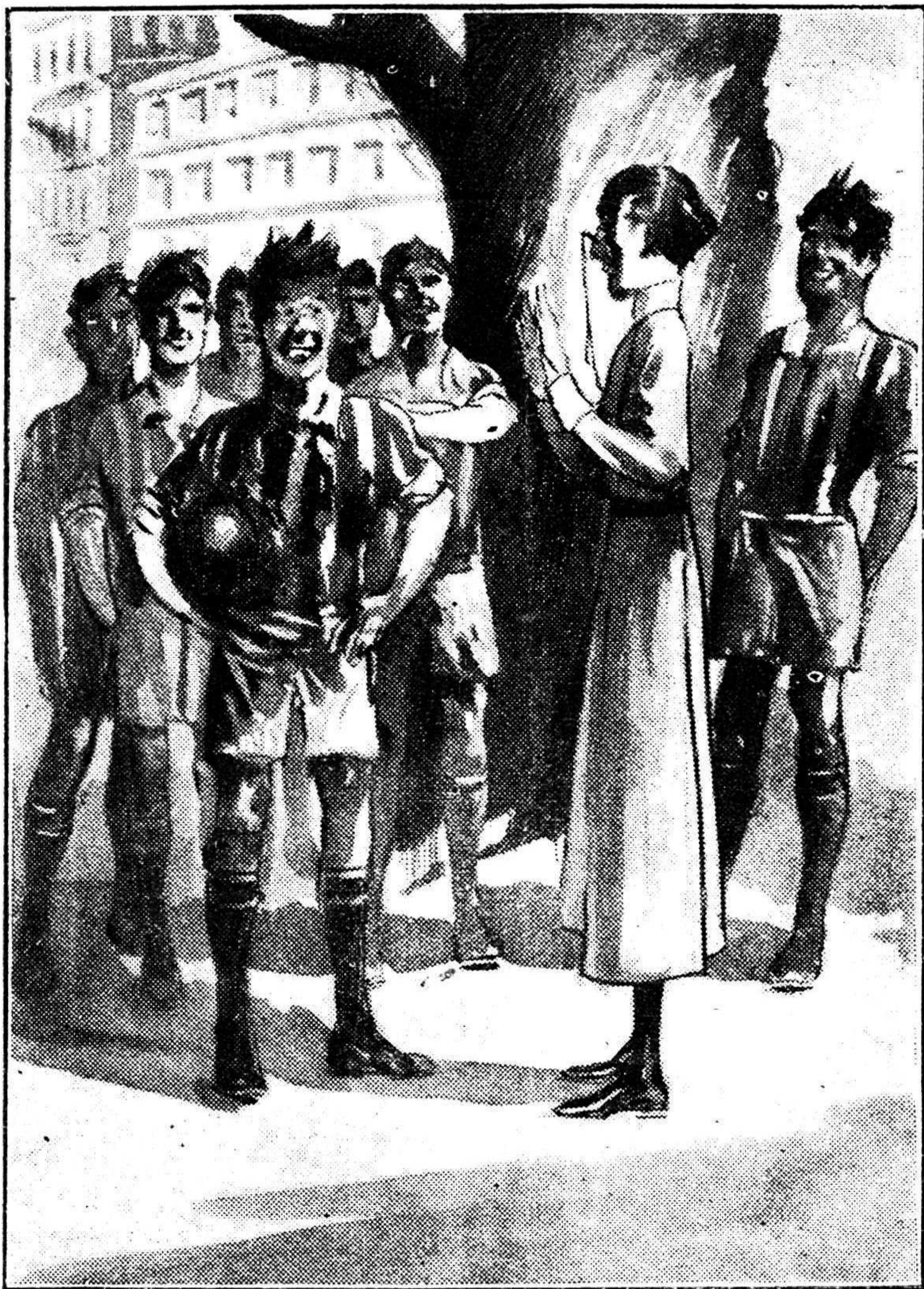
THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS!

This Week's Rousing Story of the Great
"BARRING-OUT" Series at St. Frank's

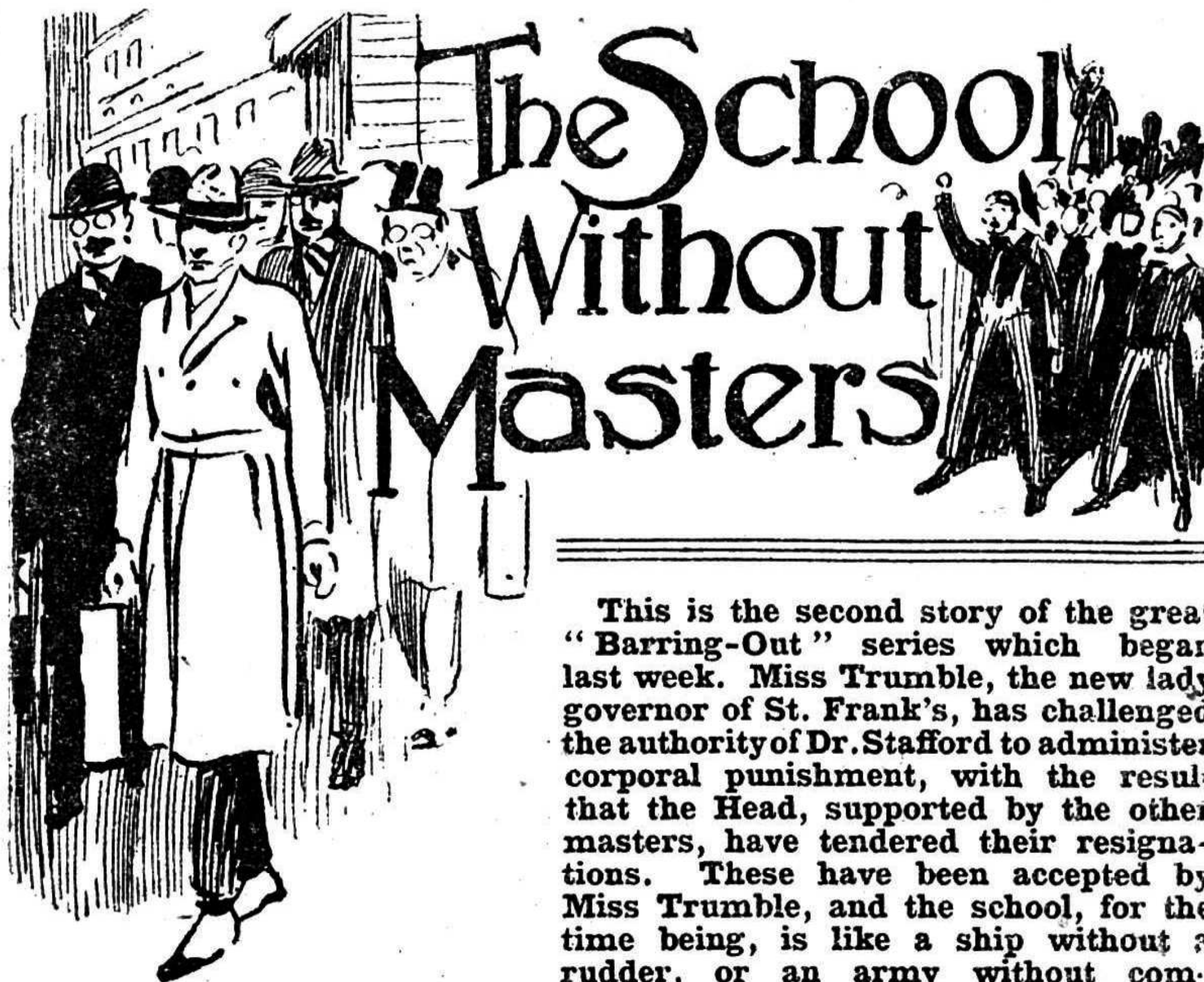
No.
399

Jan. 27,
1923

RECORD YOUR VOTES! COMPETITION CLOSING THIS WEEK!



"Boys—my dear children!" she exclaimed frantically. "Whatever have you been doing? Have you met with some accident?"



The School Without Masters

This is the second story of the great "Barring-Out" series which began last week. Miss Trumble, the new lady governor of St. Frank's, has challenged the authority of Dr. Stafford to administer corporal punishment, with the result that the Head, supported by the other masters, have tendered their resignations. These have been accepted by Miss Trumble, and the school, for the time being, is like a ship without a rudder, or an army without com-

manders; for the masters, deprived of their authority, are unable to maintain order, and have only one course to follow, and that is to leave the school to look after itself. But much worse is to come. Miss Trumble, unable to find masters to run the school according to her plans, has decided to install mistresses. The prospects of St. Frank's being run by petticoats is more than any boy in the school would tolerate. One can therefore predict some startling developments at St. Frank's in the course of the next few weeks.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH MEANS BUSINESS.

ST. FRANK'S seethed in general, and Study D, in the Remove passage of the Ancient House, seethed in particular. Edward Oswald Handforth, the leader of that famous apartment, was in his element.

It was a Tuesday.

And this day, as a rule, was a most uneventful one at St. Frank's. The week had only just started, and there was no time for any special excitement. Tuesday was a sort of hum-drum day.

But this was an exception to the rule.

In the opinion of most fellows—indeed,

in the opinion of the whole school—this Tuesday was the most extraordinary day that St. Frank's had ever experienced. And, as yet, only half of it had elapsed. Dinner was just over, and there was an interval of half an hour before afternoon lessons.

But nobody thought of lessons.

"The thing's absolutely dotty," said Handforth grimly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Nothing's ever happened like it before—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And I don't see why we should stand it—"

"Hear, hear!"

Church and McClure, Handforth's chums, supported him loyally. But Handforth didn't seem to appreciate it.

"You—you silly parrots!" he snapped. "What's the idea of interrupting?"

"Hear, hear!" said Church and McClure mechanically.

"By George!" roared Handforth. "Here I'm doing my utmost to put the whole position in a nutshell, and all you can do is to mess things up!"

"In a nutshell!" groaned Church. "My hat! You've been jawing for about twenty minutes, and you've said the same thing about fifty times! I didn't know they grew nutshells as big as that!"

Edward Oswald glared.

"Oh, of course, I don't expect you fatheads to support me!" he said bitterly. "You're no good. You haven't got enough brains to fill a thimble. Why the dickens I let you stay in this study is a mystery. I might just as well have a couple of blackbeetles in here!"

Church and McClure went red. They were generally insulted by Handforth about fifty times a day. But to be likened to a couple of blackbeetles was rather worse than usual.

"Go easy, Handy!" said Church warmly. "There's no need to get personal. And as for this beastly business about the Head, we know the whole thing. So what's the idea of repeating it?"

"Yes, ring off, old man!" grinned McClure.

Handforth thumped the table.

"I don't care whether you know the facts or not!" he roared. "Something's got to be done. The other fellows can sit still if they like—but that's not my way. I'm determined to make a fuss!"

"Naturally!" said Church, with a sigh.

"A jolly big fuss!" went on Handforth. "In many ways the Head's a bit of a bounder—only three days ago he gave me a hundred lines for kicking a football into his face."

"You were lucky!" said McClure.

"Lucky!" snorted Handforth. "It wasn't my fault, I suppose? I just happened to kick the giddy ball into the cloisters, and the Head buzzed round the corner. He ought to have had more sense."

"Do you expect him to carry a whistle, and give a warning before he comes round a corner?" asked McClure.

Handforth glared.

"If you're going to start an argument, I'll punch your silly nose!" he snapped. "I tell you the Head's all right in the main. Look what happened to-day. He was going to flog me, and he let me off at the last minute—and swiped Kenmore instead. The Head's a brick! And I'm jolly well leaving the school if he goes away from St. Frank's!"

"Well, that would be some consolation!" murmured Church.

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Church hastily.

"If you're going to mutter things, I'll slaughter you!" said Handforth, clenching his fists. "And don't keep interrupting. I ask you—what happened to-day?"

"My hat!" groaned McClure. "Don't you know?"

"What happened to-day?" thundered Handforth. "I'll tell you! Miss Jane Trumble comes down, she insults the Head, and the Head resigns! But that's not the worst. This—this female gargoyle shoves herself in the Head's place, and announces that she's going to run the school."

"Yes, it's a bit thick!" said Church.

"It's—it's beyond endurance," declared Edward Oswald. "It's all very well to talk! We've got to get busy, and do something. I can't bear a fellow who jaws."

"Then you must hate yourself like poison," said McClure.

"You—you insulting bounder!" snorted Handforth. "If I wasn't so jolly good-natured I'd pulverise you for that. But there's no time now—there's something more important to do. I've thought it all out—I've got the whole thing cut and dried."

"Good!"

"We've got to beard this woman in her den!" said Handforth firmly.

"Eh?"

"Do which?"

"Face her—and put it to her straight from the shoulder!" said Handforth. "My idea is to get up a deputation. About ten of us will do, and then we'll go along to Miss Trumble, and let her have it where the chicken got the chopper. In other words, we'll tell her off."

Church nodded.

"Oh, yes!" he said sarcastically. "Miss Trumble is just the kind of gentle creature we could tell off—I don't think! Why, I'd rather face a gang of pickpockets. There's something about that woman which puts me all in a quiver. She's—she's a terror."

"That's no reason why we should be afraid of her!" said Handforth. "The only way to deal with people like that is to be firm. Anyhow, we're not going to see the Head kicked out by that horrible woman."

"He's not being kicked out—he resigned."

"It's just the same thing," retorted Handforth. "He had to resign—couldn't do anything else. Just think! There's the Head, giving Kenmore a public flogging, and in comes this woman, and orders him to stop. By George! She talked to him as though he were a kid. Could he do anything else but resign? He had to preserve his dignity."

Church and McClure nodded.

"Yes, it was a pretty rotten position for the Head," said Church thoughtfully. "This only shows what blithering idiots the school governors are. We've always thought so—but now we've got proof."

"Governors!" sneered Handforth. "They couldn't govern a clock! They're a lot of old fogeys with about three ounces of

sheeps' brains distributed among the whole crowd. Think of it! Electing a woman to be their chairman!"

"Mad!" said McClure. "It would be a different thing if this was a girls' school. But what the dickens does Miss Trumble know about boys? She'll soon learn a good bit, though!" he added grimly.

After all, the juniors were not waxing indignant without a good and sufficient reason. And this discussion in Study D was merely one of a hundred. For everybody in the school was full of the same subject.

In fact, there was nothing else to be talked of. Just recently the Governing Board of St. Frank's had elected a lady chairman. She was a maiden lady of middle-age—the sister of Sir Roderick Trumble, now deceased, who had been one of the most influential members of the Board.

Nobody knew exactly why Miss Jane Trumble had been placed in such a responsible position. Possibly she had pitchforked herself into it, whether the other governors liked it or not.

Anyhow, the fact remained that she had exerted her authority in a most unwarrantable manner. She seemed to have an idea that Dr. Stafford was a kind of office-boy, and could be ordered about.

The Head, in fact, had been pulled up in the middle of a public flogging, and had been ordered to desist. He had been humiliated in front of the entire school. And the Head had taken the only possible course. He had resigned—and Miss Trumble had accepted his resignation.

And all this had happened only a short hour earlier—just before dinner. So it was hardly to be wondered at that the school was excited. And indignation ran high.

Handforth grew rather tired of talking to his two particular chums. He felt that he was worthy of a larger audience. So he marched out, and found quite a collection of fellows in the lobby.

"Good!" said Handforth briskly. "Look here, you chaps. I've got an idea!"

"Oh, here he is!" said Reggie Pitt. "I was just wondering what had happened to him! We can say good-bye to all peace now."

"Dry up, Handy!" said De Valerie.

"I haven't started yet!" howled Handforth.

"Then don't!"

"You—you rotters!" gasped Handforth.

"Of course, I know why you treat me like this. You're jealous—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jealous!" repeated Handforth. "You know I'm the only chap who gets decent ideas, and so you try to squash me. But I won't be squashed. I've got a scheme that'll bring this Miss Trumble to her knees. We'll have her on toast."

Handforth looked round for support, but nobody seemed to be particularly interested in him. This was one of Edward Oswald's greatest laments. Nobody would

ever accord him the attention he deserved. The fellows didn't seem to realise his importance.

"What we've got to do is to get up a deputation!" roared Handforth, determined to make himself heard. "A deputation! I'll lead it, and I'll do all the talking—"

"You generally do!" sighed De Valerie.

"I'll do all the talking—because I'm a tactful sort of chap," said Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors found something rather humorous in that statement.

"It's all very well to jeer, but I know what I'm jawing about," continued Handforth aggressively. "Listen to me a minute. The Head's been insulted—belittled in front of all of us! And I think this Miss Trumble person ought to be ticked off."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie, with enthusiasm.

"Don't you start, dummy!" said Handforth.

Archie Glenthorne adjusted his monocle.

"I mean to say, somewhat undeserved," he protested. "It's dashed thick when one chappie calls another chappie a dummy. The fact is, old tulip, I was absolutely agreeing. About the ticking off, and so on. But it's a frightfully diff. posish. Ticking off a lady requires vast consignments of nerve."

"Well, I've got it," said Handforth. "My idea is to go to the Head's study—which Miss Trumble has pinched—and talk to her like a Dutch uncle."

"She wouldn't understand!" said Pitt gravely.

"Why not?"

"You want to talk English—not Dutch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you funny lunatic!" hooted Handforth. "Who's talking about Dutch? I shall tell Miss Trumble what the whole school thinks of her attitude—and if you chaps had any backbone, you'd support me."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie, nodding.

"I mean to say backbone, what? That's pretty priceless, don't you know! The fact is, we bally well need to develop our backbones. I mean, as it were, we've got to get absolutely busy, and shove the old things to the front."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dash it all—"

"I'm afraid our backbones wouldn't be much good in front, Archie!" I grinned.

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "I didn't mean that, old darling! Absolutely not! What we've got to do, to put it as briefly as poss., is to brace ourselves up. Shove out the old chest, steady the nerves, and dash about a bit. I mean to say, this is just the time to do a fearful lot of dashing."

"I'll dash your silly head against the wall unless you dry up!" howled Handforth.

"This is my speech, and you keep talking twaddle! If any of you chaps want to support the Head, you've got to support me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, let's give him a fair hearing!" said Reggie Pitt. "After all, the situation is pretty serious, and Handforth appears to have the right idea. Go ahead, old son. We're all ears!"

"One moment!" interrupted Archie firmly. "Pray don't imagine for a second that I'm butting in. Absolutely not! But I'd just like to remark that I have about fifty-seven objections to having my head dashed against the wall! Moreover, it's a frightfully insulting thing to talk about a chap's ears—"

"Oh, smother him!" roared Handforth. "Take him away and drop him down a crack! I always do that with insects!"

Archie gave a bit of a gulp.

"Well, that, I mean to say, is somewhat foul," he protested warmly. "An insect, what? Dash it all! Kindly allow me to raise large objections! That is to say, objections with about ten different knobs! I'm a most peaceful cove, but when it comes to— What ho! What ho! I mean, desist! What is the idea of this pushing about business? I'm being ruffled! Dash it all! My dear chappies, you're making me all hot and bothered, and I can't think of a dashed thing!"

Archie, in spite of his protests, was successfully bundled out of the lobby. And Handforth proceeded. As a matter of fact, he had been proceeding all the time, but nobody had taken much notice.

Fellows kept on talking in various groups. And all the time Handforth's voice went on monotonously. It was just like having a conversation with a gramophone going all the time. A gramophone may be playing an excellent record, but when you're talking to somebody it becomes a nuisance.

At last Handforth realised that he was being treated as a record.

Biff! Crash! Biff!

"Yow! Ow! Yaroooh!"

Church and McClure, who happened to be nearest, went flying. Handforth had no pity for them. After all, he had gained the attention of the throng, so he didn't mind.

And he seized his opportunity on the spot.

CHAPTER II.

JUST ABOUT THE LIMIT!



"LISTEN to me!" thundered Handforth. "If you fellows want to do the Head a good turn, back me up! My scheme is to get up a deputation at once—on the spot!"

"We'll march to Miss Trumble, and tell her exactly what St. Frank's thinks of her. Who's with me?"

"I am!" said Pitt promptly.

"Good!" declared Handforth. "Anybody else?"

"Yes—the whole crowd!" replied Pitt, turning, and eyeing the others. "We'll all come with you to the Head's study—we'll support you! If you're so jolly keen on

this deputation idea, there's no reason why we shouldn't give you some encouragement!"

At first the other fellows were rather inclined to disagree, but they soon came to Reggie's Pitt's support.

"After all, there's no harm in seeing Miss Trumble!" said De Valerie. "Handforth's going to do all the talking, isn't he?"

"Of course—as usual!" said Somerton.

"Yes, you needn't worry about that," said Handforth. "I'll do the jawing—I've got it all cut and dried. I simply want you chaps to support me—you've got to come along to the Head's study, and back me up."

"We'll come!" declared Pitt.

"Hear, hear!"

"All right—lead the way!"

"And we'd better buck up, too!" went on Reggie. "The bell will be going for afternoon lessons in about five minutes. No time to waste."

Handforth was more delighted than he could express. In a surprisingly short time he had got the fellows into his own way of thinking. And Handy believed in seizing his opportunities while they were hot.

He marched off in the direction of the Head's study—which had been commandeered by Miss Trumble, the newly constituted Head of St. Frank's. There were about a dozen of us altogether, for I had joined the deputation—not because I wanted to do any talking, but because I was rather curious to see how Handforth would fare. Apparently, there was something on.

When we drew near to Dr. Stafford's sacred apartment, we spoke only in whispers, and crept along quietly. Handforth was about the only fellow who didn't seem to care.

He reached the door a yard or two in advance of all the rest, and hammered upon the panels in an authoritative manner.

"Come in!" called out a shrill, feminine voice.

Handforth marched in, leaving the door wide open, so that the others could follow. One glance showed him that Miss Trumble was sitting at the Head's desk, looking over some papers.

He walked right up to the desk, and glared at her. He felt that he could do so with impunity, since he had a strong force with him. But he was by no means impressed by the cold, steady gaze which she returned.

Miss Trumble was not a gentle, attractive person. She possessed utterly no feminine charm. She was tall, angular, with bony face, and prominent teeth. And there was a look in her eyes which even made Handforth waver for a second or two.

Miss Trumble's age was uncertain—she might have been anything between forty and fifty-five. But there was no question whatever about her aggressiveness. She seemed to be one of those people who, once having taken up a stand, absolutely refuse to budge.

"Well, my child?" she asked, smiling.

Handforth suddenly felt bad. There was

something about that smile which made him shake at the knees. And the tone of her voice completely destroyed all his opening lines. He became confused. Somehow or other, he felt as though he were a kind of raw recruit in the presence of a general.

"Er—I mean—that is— Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

Miss Trumble looked at him severely.

"You should not use such an absurd expression, little man!" she exclaimed. "You must learn to talk nicely!"

Handforth gulped, and felt even shakier than before. But, by a supreme effort, he pulled himself together. He had a ghastly idea that the fellows in his rear were inwardly howling at him. And that would never do. It was up to him to show a bold front.

"Look here!" he shouted, so abruptly that Miss Trumble started back. "Look here! We've decided that the Headmaster's got to stay! It's not fair to treat him like this, Miss Trumble! So we've come along to give you the tip straight from the stable."

"Good gracious!" said the lady. "Whatever do you mean, boy? I think you must be mistaken! And your manners are very rude. I shall take care that your teacher pays more attention to you."

"Teacher!" said Handforth faintly. "Oh, you mean Mr. Crowell? But never mind that now. There's more important business on hand. We've come here to tell you what we think! We insist——"

"One moment!" interrupted Miss Trumble. "Whom do you mean by 'we'?"

"The whole crowd of us, of course."

She opened her eyes rather wider.

"The whole crowd of you?" she repeated.

"Are you crazy, my little man? Why do you refer to yourself as a crowd?"

Handforth glared.

"It's all very well to be funny, but it won't work!" he said, feeling that his supporters demanded something emphatic. "You're up against the whole school, Miss Trumble. Understand? The whole school! We're all fully determined to chuck you out—— I mean, it's the Head's place to be the Head. All these chaps are with me!" he went on vigorously. "Ain't you, you fellows?"

He turned, appealing for support.

"We're all determined——"

Handforth broke off abruptly, and his lower jaw dropped. Just for a second he felt that he was in a kind of nightmare. Surely such an awful position as this couldn't actually be true? For, to his utter horror, he found that he was alone—and the door was closed!

"My only Sunday topper!" he gasped feebly.

He groped about, and found the desk. He clung to it desperately while he attempted to adjust his thoughts. And he had fearful knowledge that Miss Trumble was gazing at him with eyes that bored like a couple of gimlets. Faint and far



"The Head's a brick and the whole school stands by him," declared Handforth. "If he's given the boot we shall queer your pitch!" he continued.

away, the bell for afternoon lessons clanged out. Handforth felt horribly isolated.

And the truth dawned upon him, filling him with rage. Now he could understand why Pitt and the others had agreed so readily. They had promised to accompany him to the Head's study. And they had done so. But, having come so far, they had allowed him to enter the den, and had sneaked off—actually closing the door. With utter brutality, they had left him alone with the ogress.

"You are very impertinent, little boy!" said Miss Trumble, rising to her feet with a show of dignity. "How dare you? How dare you? I shall deal with you very severely for being so naughty!"

"Naughty!" said Handforth, in a faint whisper.

"Yes, naughty!" declared Miss Trumble. "I have long suspected that you boys have had too much rope. You have been treated in a wrong way. But I shall alter all that. I shall make very great changes. It is the result of harsh treatment and lax methods. I expect you are allowed to run almost wild during your playtime!"

"Our—our playtime!" breathed Handforth. "But—but this ain't an infant school! You see, I thought—I thought a lot of the other

chaps were with me. That's why I came here—"

"You should not refer to your play-mates as 'chaps'!" interrupted Miss Trumble, shaking her head reprovably. "You must strive to speak better, my child."

Handforth was gradually recovering himself. This was partly due to the fact that indignation was taking the place of consternation. Miss Trumble was making him boil up like an impatient kettle.

"I—I say, you know!" he protested. "I'm not a child! Besides, all the chaps say 'chaps'! I—I mean, it's quite usual for the fellows here to talk like that! In fact, if some of the rotters start any of their snobbish talk, we jolly soon dot them one! It's no good trying to think that we're priggish, Miss Trumble! We believe in saying a thing straight out. You can bet your giddy boots we don't stand any old buck!"

Miss Trumble sat back, horrified.

"This—this is dreadful!" she exclaimed, with terrible alarm. "I am shocked—inexpressibly shocked! You're talking in the language of the gutter!"

"Oh, am I?" snorted Handforth warmly. "I don't like to get my rag out, but unless you're jolly careful I shall let fly! And now, about the Head! All the chaps want him to stay on. The Head's a jolly fine old sport, and if he's kicked out, we'll raise Cain!"

"Good gracious! You'll do what?"

"We'll get up such a shindy that you'll think there's been an earthquake," said Handforth, waxing more confident. "Of course, you're a woman, and you don't understand these things. That's only to be expected. I don't want to be rude, but women ain't much good when it comes to dealing with a crowd of fellows. Take my advice, Miss Trumble, and buzz home! Scoot while you're safe! Take the first train, and bunk! If you stop here, you'll get the bird!"

Miss Trumble rose, her face set like marble.

"Stop!" she commanded in a terrible voice. "Enough! I am disgusted—I am absolutely amazed at such talk from a child! I do not believe that any boys belonging to such a famous school as St. Frank's could use such dreadful expressions."

"Steady on!" growled Handforth. "I haven't said much! Great pip! You ought to hear what some of the bounders say! I've just been telling you for your own good, don't forget. The Head's a brick, and the whole school stands by him! If he's given the boot, we shall jolly well queer your pitch! That's not a threat, but a friendly tip. If you don't like to take it, you'll be a juggins. You may think everything's all right now, but as soon as you know what the school thinks, you'll get the wind up properly!"

Miss Trumble was more horrified than ever.

"Enough!" she said coldly. "What class do you belong to, boy?"

"The Remove, ma'am."

"The Remove?"

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know!" said Handforth. "Under the circumstances, you're new to all the ins and outs. The Remove is really the Fourth Form—the most important Form in the school!"

"And who is your teacher?"

"The master of the Remove is Mr. Crowell," replied Handforth tartly.

"Then you will lead me at once to your lesson room," said Miss Trumble firmly. "I intend to have a few words with your teacher. I shall reprimand him severely for allowing you to talk so badly. I hardly expected to find the language of Limehouse at St. Frank's!"

"Limehouse!" snorted Handforth.

"What the dickens—"

"Come with me!" interrupted Miss Trumble curtly.

She passed round the desk, and took hold of Edward Oswald's hand. Then she led him towards the door as though he had been a tiny infant. The humiliation was fearful.

And Handforth didn't know what to do. He knew his manners, and it was quite impossible to snatch his hand away. Besides, Miss Trumble was clutching him very tightly, and it wouldn't be the thing to have a struggle with a woman.

"I say, there's no need to—"

"Be quiet!" said Miss Trumble. "Little boys should be seen, and not heard!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Handforth miserably.

He was filled with terrible alarm. For they were out in the passage now, and the thought of any of the other fellows seeing him in this plight made Handforth feel sick and giddy.

But his ordeal had only just commenced.

For Miss Trumble took him straight into the Remove Form-room. In vain he tried to lead her elsewhere. But she was determined, and the leader of Study D felt that sudden death would be welcome.

Hand in hand with Miss Trumble, he entered the Form-room. The whole Remove looked up and suddenly felt that life was worth living. Here was something good.

The members of the deputation had been wondering what had happened to Handforth—but they didn't wonder any longer. They were intensely curious to see what he had been brought here for. It was only with great difficulty that the juniors kept their faces straight.

"You are Mr. Growl?" asked Miss Trumble, gazing at the Form-master.

"Ahem! Pardon me, madam, but my name is Mr. Crowell," he replied, turning slightly red. "May I remind you that lessons have already commenced, and any interruption is liable to put the boys off

their work? Handforth, you will go to your place at once."

"One moment, please!" said the lady Head. "This little boy has been very naughty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove howled. For the past minute it had been trying to look solemn. But to hear that Handforth had been naughty was too funny for words. The whole Form let itself go.

"Boys—boys!" shouted Mr. Crowell, frowning. "Silence! How dare you?"

The fellows ceased laughing abruptly.

"I am extremely sorry if Handforth has been—er—naughty!" said Mr. Crowell, with quiet sarcasm. "I am afraid he is rather tactless—"

"The boy has been using the most dreadful slang!" interrupted Miss Trumble.

"He has actually made use of such expressions as 'chaps' and 'rotten' and 'buzz off,' and many others too terrible to mention! I am shocked that any boys belonging to this school should even have knowledge of such words."

The Remove shook, but valiantly kept quiet.

"Oh, hold me!" moaned Reggie Pitt, leaning back. "This is too much, my sons! Poor old Handy has been telling her to 'buzz off'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling fatheads!" burst out Handforth, unable to stand it any longer. "You babbling lunatics! I suppose you think it's funny to sit there and snigger? I'll jolly well biff every one of you in about two shakes! Just you wait until afterwards!"

"Stop—stop!" shouted Miss Trumble. "This—this is far worse than I feared! I feel that some punishment is necessary—some drastic punishment that the boy will remember!"

"I will deal with him, madam," said Mr. Crowell. "If you will kindly leave the matter in my hands—"

"Certainly not!" interrupted the lady shrilly. "You, I am sure, would use the cane—and punishment of that kind is worse than useless—it only brutalises the boys and turns them into hooligans! You see an example before you now!"

Handforth looked round dazedly.

"Me!" he gasped. "Are you calling me a hooligan?"

"I will have no further dealings with you, child!" snapped Miss Trumble. "You will go into the corner at once, and turn with your face to the wall! Perhaps that will make you remember that I am to be obeyed! You will remain in that position for one hour! Go!"

Handforth looked bewildered.

"I—I've got to go in the corner?" he yelled. "Rather not! I'll jolly well die first! It's likely I'm going to be treated

"Handforth, do as you are told!" interrupted Mr. Crowell curtly.

"What!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "Do—do you mean that I've got to do it, sir?"

"Yes, I do!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "Go at once!"

There was absolutely no mistaking the Form-master's tone. And Edward Oswald, with his face as red as a beetroot, went to a corner of the Form-room, and turned his back. All the other fellows could see that he was fairly quivering with rage and indignation. His shoulders heaved.

Miss Trumble smiled sourly.

"I am pleased to see that you realise the wisdom of my methods!" she exclaimed.

"The boy must remain in that position of disfavour. He must be made to realise that it is very wrong to be naughty."

Handforth shook even more.

"As for you other little boys," said Miss Trumble, turning to the Form, "I trust you will learn a lesson from your unhappy playmate. I will leave you now, and you must remember that I want you to be good children!"

She swept out of the Form-room, leaving the Remove in a state which was very similar to collapse. A long sigh went up as she closed the door, and the juniors breathed once again.

Handforth turned round, his jaw set and firm.

"I'm not going to stand this!" he said thickly. "I don't care if I'm flogged—I don't care if I'm sacked! But I'm blowed if I'll put up with this any more!"

Mr. Crowell's face twitched.

"I am afraid, Handforth, you take the matter rather too seriously," he exclaimed.

"Under the circumstances, I will not punish you for speaking in such an impudent way. I think you had better go to your desk."

Handforth's face became eager with relief.

"Then I needn't stay in this corner, sir?" he asked.

"Go to your place, Handforth, and sit down," replied Mr. Crowell quietly.

All the juniors were hoping that the Form-master would make some comment upon Miss Trumble's recent visit. But Mr. Crowell was too clever for that. He believed in the policy of saying as little as possible.

But what he thought was a different matter!

CHAPTER III.

MASTERS IN CONCLAVE!



NELSON LEE was looking very thoughtful.

"Of course, Mr. Stockdale, the position is most difficult," he said. "It is hardly necessary to say that the whole school is up in arms—and with small wonder."

"I very much doubt if peace will be retained if Dr. Stafford actually leaves us."

"But such a thought is impossible!" declared Mr. Stockdale, in alarm. "We cannot even consider the resignation of Dr. Stafford. Why, good gracious me! The Head has ruled the destinies of St. Frank's for a great many years, Mr. Lee. For him to depart in such circumstances would be a sheer disaster."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I quite agree, Mr. Stockdale. You were present at the scene in Big Hall, and I think you will realise that the Head had no alternative but to resign. His authority was flouted in front of the whole school by this woman. For the sake of his very dignity, Dr. Stafford was compelled to act in the way he did."

"Certainly—certainly," said Mr. Stockdale, looking worried. "That is why I am so concerned, Mr. Lee. What can we do? It will be a tragedy for the school if Dr. Stafford leaves us in such a way—to say nothing of being a tragedy for himself. What course can we adopt to put the thing right?"

Nelson Lee didn't reply for a few moments.

It was mid-afternoon, and the two House-masters were talking in the privacy of Nelson Lee's own study. With the exception of the Head himself, they were the most important masters in the school. Indeed, they shared far more responsibility than Dr. Stafford.

"There is really only one course open to us," said Nelson Lee at length. "Needless to say, we shall not be content to leave matters in their present state. That would be a calamity. But you may be quite sure that the Headmaster will stand on his dignity without faltering. I do not blame him—I should do the same were I in his shoes."

"Quite so," said Mr. Stockdale. "That is the whole trouble."

"If Miss Trumble could be prevailed upon to apologise, the Head would withdraw his resignation at once," went on Nelson Lee. "He would not hesitate a moment, for he loves St. Frank's, and is far too sensible to keep up the trouble if there is the slightest chance of settling it."

"But do you think Miss Trumble will apologise?"

"I am doubtful," said Lee slowly. "Without question, she owes Dr. Stafford a most handsome apology. I can hardly regard her as a lady while she keeps up her present domineering attitude."

"And yet she is a sister of the late Sir Roderick Trumble!"

"That may be the reason for her arrogance," said Lee with a smile. "You see, she has been placed in a position of high authority—most unwisely, in my opinion; although that is neither here nor there. And the knowledge of her power appears to have got into her head."

"The whole thing's absurd!" growled Mr. Stockdale. "I maintain that no woman, no matter how clever, should be elected to rule the destinies of a boys' school. It is not right, Mr. Lee—it is decidedly wrong."

"In that, of course, I concur," said Nelson Lee. "But we are merely wasting time by discussing the question. I think we are all agreed that Miss Trumble owes the Headmaster an apology. By all, I mean every under-master at the school."

"My dear sir, they are up in arms," declared Mr. Stockdale. "I have spoken to Mr. Pagett, to Mr. Crowell, and to several others. They are filled with indignation at Dr. Stafford's position."

"Then I think it would be just as well if we all met, as a body," said Nelson Lee. "I am very much concerned about the whole matter, and the sooner it is settled the better. I think it would be advisable to call the others together at once, so that we may come to a unanimous decision."

"The boys are at lessons."

"Exactly, but that need not stand in the way of a matter of such importance," declared Lee. "Under any other conditions I would not take the Form masters away from their work. But I think the situation demands it on this occasion. The prefects can easily look after the boys for the rest of the afternoon."

"An excellent idea," said Mr. Stockdale.

And Nelson Lee put it into execution at once.

He went straight to the Sixth Form room and obtained the services of a number of prefects. He then sent them to the various other Form rooms, with definite instructions.

As a result, all the masters of St. Frank's gathered together in Nelson Lee's study during the next ten minutes. They all turned up, including Mr. Langton, Mr. Crowell, Mr. Pagett, Mr. Suncliffe, Mr. Clifford, and even Mons. Leblanc. Not one failed to respond to the call.

They knew why they had been sent for.

"Now, gentleman, I think we will get this rather unpleasant business over as soon as possible," said Nelson Lee. "I take it that we are all agreed regarding the Headmaster?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Pagett. "Most certainly."

"There can be no two ways of thinking," added Mr. Suncliffe.

"In my opinion, the Head's been treated shamefully," said Mr. Clifford, the sports master. "To be dictated to by a woman must be a rather ghastly ordeal. And with all the boys listening, Dr. Stafford's only course was to resign."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "I think it is just possible that Miss Trumble will realise her mistake if she sees that we are all unanimous in our condemnation of her action. Possibly she does not understand that the headmaster of a school must preserve his dignity at all costs. His very authority and prestige depend upon it."

"You think we ought to see Miss Trumble?" asked Mr. Pagett.

"I do," replied Lee. "Not merely one or two of us, but all. She cannot fail to be impressed. We will show her that we are totally opposed to her action, and when she sees that so many are against her, she must surely climb down from her high pedestal."

"Let us sincerely hope so," said Mr. Stockdale.

No further time was wasted in talking.

The masters, led by Nelson Lee, went in a stately body to Dr. Stafford's study. Lee had already sent Tubbs with a message, stating that the masters of St. Frank's would be glad of a short interview at once.

As it happened, Tubbs was met just in the corridor leading to Dr. Stafford's study. The page-boy was grinning.

"It's all right, sir; the lady says that she's ready at any time," declared Tubbs. "She's all alone, sir, and I do hope that you makes things right for the 'Ead!"

Nelson Lee nodded, and they all walked on. And a moment later they were entering the quiet, comfortable apartment which had been appropriated by this lady intruder.

Miss Trumble rose to her feet and gazed at the assembly of masters through her spectacles. Her lips tightened, and Nelson Lee had an idea that he had a very strong will to deal with.

"Well, gentlemen?" said Miss Trumble coldly.

"Possibly you are surprised at this invasion," said Nelson Lee. "You see before you, Miss Trumble, every master of the school. We have come in force, hoping that you may be brought to a realisation of the singular gravity of the situation."

Miss Trumble smiled sourly.

"Is there a grave situation?" she asked.

"Most decidedly there is," replied Nelson Lee. "It may not have struck you, madam, that your treatment of Dr. Stafford this morning was somewhat ill-considered and hasty. I sincerely trust that you have dwelt upon the whole matter in the meantime, and have——"

"I must ask you, Mr. Lee, to be brief!" interrupted Miss Trumble. "My time is valuable, and I cannot waste any of it."

Nelson Lee bit his lip.

"Snubbed, by gad!" murmured Mr. Langton warmly.

"Very well, Miss Trumble, I will be brief!" said Lee curtly. "I am speaking with a voice which represents every master in the school. We feel that your action this morning was unwarranted, and must respectfully request you to tender a full apology to Dr. Stafford."

The lady tossed her head.

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind!" she retorted sharply.

"Pray let me point out——"

"I wish to hear nothing further!" snapped Miss Trumble. "How dare you? How dare you come into this room and dictate to me what I shall do? You forget yourself, sir!"

I am the Chairman of the Governing Board, and I have placed myself at the head of this school!"

"Of that, madam, I am well aware," said Nelson Lee.

"Then I should advise you to remember it in future!" said Miss Trumble sourly.

"Why should I be dictated to by you, sir—and by your colleagues? Do you dare to presume that your opinion is of any importance? I dealt with Dr. Stafford as he deserved."

"I should like to explain——"

"I need no explanations," she interrupted.

"I came to St. Frank's and found Dr. Stafford brutally flogging one of the boys. My only course was to intercept, and to reprimand the Headmaster for his callous savagery. The very idea of an apology is quite absurd."

"Dr. Stafford was administering a flogging to a boy who deserved even more severe treatment," said Nelson Lee. "If you will hear the facts, Miss Trumble, I am quite sure that you will appreciate——"

"Enough!" she broke in. "Gentlemen, I must bid you good afternoon."

Nelson Lee bowed.

The other masters were hot and indignant, but in face of this dismissal it was quite impossible to remain. They turned and filed out of the study—leaving the Lady Head triumphant.

CHAPTER IV.

RESIGNATIONS WHOLESALE.



MR. STOCKDALE was quivering with anger.

"The woman is utterly impossible!"

he declared fiercely. "Never have I met such an unreasonable, obstinate female! But there! Women are very much the same when it comes to an argument!"

"Miss Trumble has taken up this position, and she means to stick to it!" said Mr. Pagett. "Huh! Just like a woman, too! She probably knows that she is wrong, but she is too confoundedly mule-headed to admit it! I'm hanged if I know what things are coming to nowadays!"

All the masters were angry and indignant. They had just arrived back in Nelson Lee's study, and were talking animatedly. Never, in the whole history of the school, had the masters been so unanimously angered.

"It seems that we must put up with this woman's nonsense from morning till night!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "The very thought is appalling! Only this afternoon she came into my class-room and literally took matters out of my hands! I appeal to you, Mr. Lee, to suggest some solution. Life in the school will be quite intolerable if this kind of thing continues."

"I agree, gentlemen—I quite agree," said the Housemaster detective. "Possibly I do not reveal my feelings to such an extent as

you would expect, but I can assure you that I am infuriated. This woman is an intruder, and she has utterly no knowledge of the manner in which a public school should be conducted——"

"But why was she elected to such a position?" demanded Mr. Suncliffe.

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"That is a question which we cannot deal with," he replied. "And, strictly speaking, it does not affect the issue. It is useless to waste time on such discussions, Mr. Suncliffe. Miss Trumble is here, and that is all we need concern ourselves with. How she came to be here is not within our province. Our chief concern is to get rid of her at the earliest possible moment."

"Hear, hear!"

"Many women, no doubt, would be tactful and courteous," went on Nelson Lee.

"We must not judge Miss Trumble's sex by her own individual actions. She appears to be an eccentric, and if she is allowed to have her own way she will create havoc in the school."

"Undoubtedly," growled Mr. Pagett. "Indeed, unless something definite is settled, I shall seriously consider my own resignation!"

"Hear, hear!"

Nelson Lee looked round at the flushed faces keenly.

"That is just the point, gentlemen," he said. "I can assure you that I shall not remain at St. Frank's if this woman retains control. Under no circumstances shall I submit to her dictation. If she persists in her attitude, I shall support the Headmaster to the utmost, and resign."

"If you resign, Mr. Lee, so shall I!" declared Mr. Stockdale firmly.

"Thank you," said Nelson Lee. "With regard to the rest of you, gentlemen, the matter is in your own hands. Without wishing to influence you in any way, I nevertheless feel that it would be just as well if I outlined my own view. I think we shall wield a weapon of great power if we return to Miss Trumble, and inform her point blank that unless her apology to Dr. Stafford is forthcoming, we shall resign—in a body."

"An excellent suggestion, sir," said Mr. Crowell. "I am with you heart and soul."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Pagett. "You are right, Mr. Lee. Arrogant as this woman is, she cannot possibly keep up the farce in defiance of us all. When she is made to realise that we are all determined, she will capitulate."

"That is my own belief," said Nelson Lee. "I should like to know, gentleman, if we are unanimous?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Absolutely!"

"Without question, Mr. Lee!"

All the masters answered at once, including Monsieur Leblanc, who emphatically declared that the idea was "bon." Nelson Lee was not surprised. He had been quite certain of this support.

"Very well, gentlemen, we will go at

once," he said briskly. "Miss Trumble will undoubtedly receive a shock, but that will be all to the good. Possibly she will realise afterwards that she has only succeeded in making herself look extremely foolish. But it would not be polite to tell her so in so many words."

Without any delay the masters made tracks for Dr. Stafford's study once more. This time they arrived unannounced. Lee acted in this way with an object, as he thought it better to take the aggressive lady by surprise.

Nelson Lee opened the door, after tapping, and after a sharp "Come in!" had sounded from within.

Lee was followed by all the other masters. Miss Trumble had been standing by the window, gazing out upon the cold Triangle. She turned, and regarded the visitors with a frown.

"What is this?" she asked sharply. "Have I not already told you that my word is final?"

"We have returned, Miss Trumble, as we consider it our duty to be absolutely plain and straightforward," said Nelson Lee. "We, the masters of St. Frank's, demand that you shall make a full and sufficient apology to Dr. Stafford without delay."

Miss Trumble glared.

"You—you demand?" she repeated shrilly.

"Yes, madam, we demand."

"How dare you!" she shouted. "You—you impertinent busybody. If you are not careful, I shall dismiss you!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That is scarcely a threat which will alarm me," he returned. "I am——"

"Oh, yes, of course—of course!" interrupted Miss Trumble. "You are Mr. Lee, the investigator of crimes! I did not wish to broach the matter, but I am compelled to do so in self defence. I consider it most improper—most irregular—that you should hold a position of authority in a school of boys! You are not the kind of man to rule the destinies of the young!"

"Really, madam, you go too far!" burst out Mr. Stockdale hotly. "Mr. Nelson Lee is loved by his boys of the Ancient House. Indeed, I can safely say that Mr. Lee is the most popular Housemaster that St. Frank's has ever had! Even my own boys, of the College House, pay Mr. Lee far greater respect than they pay to me!"

"That is beside the point!" snapped Miss Trumble. "Well, what is the meaning of this visit? With regard to the apology, I have told you quite plainly that I have no intention of making one."

"I should advise you to consider very carefully, madam," said Nelson Lee quietly. "If you persist in your refusal, we shall be compelled to resign without notice, and en bloc."

Miss Trumble started.

"All—all of you?" she asked rapidly.

"Yes, all of us!" said Mr. Crowell.

"Without exception!" snapped Mr. Pagett sourly.

"You have compelled us to take this stand, Miss Trumble!" went on Nelson Lee. "It is not my custom to force anybody's hand in such a manner, but the circumstances are unusual."

Miss Trumble fairly shook.

"This—this is outrageous!" she stormed. "It—it is tantamount to a strike!"

"Not at all!" said Lee quickly. "We are not refusing to perform our duties, madam. We simply find it quite impossible to remain if the Headmaster is treated so badly. We shall not allow him to take his departure alone. It is for you to save the school from this calamity."

Miss Trumble paced up and down for a moment or two, and turned her back. Then she faced the masters once more, and her jaw was set firmly.

"Very well!" she exclaimed quickly. "Since you have threatened me in this way. I will show you that I am not alarmed. I understand that you demand an apology from me to Dr. Stafford?"

"Precisely."

"And if that apology is not forthcoming, you will all resign?"

"Yes."

"Then, gentlemen, I have great pleasure in accepting your resignations!" exclaimed Miss Trumble triumphantly.

The masters gazed at one another rather blankly, although Nelson Lee, during the last few moments, had been expecting something of the kind. But he was not sorry that he had taken up the stand.

"Good gracious!" muttered Mr. Pagett. "The—the scheme has gone wrong!"

"Yes, gentlemen, I accept your resignations!" repeated Miss Trumble. "You see, I am not to be beaten by such drastic measures. I shall take it as a great favour if you will cease your duties from this very moment. You will leave the school at your convenience—but not later than this evening!"

"Think carefully, madam——" began Mr. Stockdale, who was pale with anger.

"I have considered the matter fully," snapped Miss Trumble. "If there are any business matters to deal with in connection with your resignations, I will attend to them at once. Now, gentlemen, please!"

There was no doubt about Miss Trumble's firmness. She had absolutely decided to let the masters go; and, indeed, she seemed rather pleased about it. She was obviously stubborn and obstinate. Although this great pressure had been brought to bear upon her, she had not given way. She wouldn't accept defeat.

The news, of course, could not be kept in for long.

Very soon after lessons were over the truth leaked out. Somebody heard it from somebody else, and it spread like wildfire.

At first it was thought that the thing was only a rumour. Juniors and seniors scoffed



Hand in hand with Miss Trumble, Edward Oswald was led to the Remove Form-room, as though he were a tiny child.

at it as being impossible—too ridiculous for sane consideration. Then confirmation came from Fenton of the Sixth. And Fenton, who was the Captain of the School, was not the kind of fellow to support a rumour.

"Then—then it's true!" said De Valerie faintly, as he stood with a crowd of other fellows in the Ancient House lobby. "It's true! All the masters have resigned, and left us in the lurch!"

"They resigned in support of the Head!" I exclaimed. "Good luck to 'em! I admire their courage; it's given Miss Trumble a bit of a shock, I'll bet."

"Begad, rather!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "But, dear old boy, what's to become of us. How shall we get on without masters?"

"Goodness knows!"

"I expect Miss Trumble will engage a new set," said Pitt.

"That's easier said than done," I said, shaking my head. "Masters can't be engaged on the spur of the moment, my son. She must be mad to let them all go."

"She's pig-headed, that's what it is!" put in Handforth. "I hate anybody pig-headed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the cackle for, fatheads?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Pitt. "You're a wonderful chap, Handy! You can always see faults in others which you can't see in yourself! Of course, you're not pig-headed, are you?"

"No, I'm not!" roared Handforth. "But we can't stop to argue about that! Don't you fellows realise that the Head's going, that Mr. Lee's going, and all the rest of them?"

"It's awful!" said Tommy Watson.

"We shall be left at the mercy of this horrible person!" shouted Handforth. "I don't want to be rude, but there's the absolute fact!"

"Better not let her hear you talking like that, Handy!" said Pitt, shaking his head. "Don't forget that you're a naughty boy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth went as red as a beetroot.

"You—you babbling fathead!" he snorted fiercely.

"Better go and join your little play-mates!" suggested Smith blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George!" gasped Handforth.

It was too much for him. He was being chipped unmercifully by the other fellows. And, without waiting a second, he sailed in, and rushed at Reginald Pitt like a whirlwind.

But Reggie appeared to know what was coming, and by the time Handforth reached the other side of the lobby, Pitt was missing. He wasn't afraid of Handforth, but he was a peaceful sort of fellow.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS.



MISS TRUMBLE looked very important. She felt important, too. For now the

entire responsibility of the school rested entirely upon her own shoulders. In her

obstinacy she had allowed the masters to go—a most insane policy.

She did not seem to realise what the ultimate result might be. Her only thought was that these men had flouted her, and she was certainly not going to give way.

Consequently, against all her better judgment—against all common sense and reason—she had accepted the wholesale resignations, and was left entirely to her own devices.

Dr. Stafford was enormously upset by the news—but only for a short time. During the whole afternoon he had remained in his own private quarters, and Nelson Lee had visited him there, explaining the position.

But Lee had greatly relieved the Head by pointing out that the best possible thing had happened. Miss Trumble would try to carry on, and she might succeed in doing so for a week—perhaps longer. But, ultimately, there could be only one way out.

She would be compelled to admit defeat, and ask for the masters to return. It was merely a question of time.

On the other hand, if the Head had gone, and the other masters had remained, the conduct of the school would have suffered practically no change—and in all probability the Head would never have been called upon to resume his duties.

It was far better for things to be as they were.

The masters had all decided to be quite firm. They would leave in a body during the evening, and Miss Trumble would be left to her own methods. As Lee explained, the boys could be fully trusted to see after themselves. If Miss Trumble went too far, the fellows would let her know. And there were all the prefects, too.

Lee intended to have a quiet word with them before leaving. He would, in fact, impress upon the prefects the importance of maintaining discipline. And the prefects could be trusted to carry out the fine traditions of the old school.

So there was really nothing to worry about.

By taking this action, it was quite possible that the masters would squash the new order of things within a very few days. It was far better to take the bull by the horns at the very outset.

But Miss Trumble herself did not look at things in this light.

She had decided to run the school—and she had certain schemes of her own. Her very first move was to summon all the chief prefects to her study. They came—Fenton, Morrow, Wilson, Reynolds, Carlile, and several more. And they stood opposite Miss Trumble's desk, regarding her with plain disfavour.

Miss Trumble was just a little astonished. These Sixth-Formers were big fellows—some of them, indeed, were nearly approaching men. It was hardly possible to regard them as mere boys. But Miss Trumble remembered that they were pupils of the school, and she treated them as such.

"Now, my dear boys, I expect you are greatly surprised at the remarkable change which has come about during the past few hours," she began. "I have dismissed the masters because they were impertinent—"

"We understood that they had resigned, madam," said Fenton quietly.

"It amounts to precisely the same thing!" snapped Miss Trumble. "You will all understand that in future you must take orders from me. I expect my orders to be carried out to the letter."

"It is not customary for the Head to instruct the prefects, madam," said Morrow. "We always take orders from our Housemasters."

"Since there are no Housemasters at present, you cannot take orders from them," said Miss Trumble. "I shall make new arrangements at once—but in the meantime you will obey me in all details. Later, I will call you together again, and tell you

of my plans. For the moment, you may go."

The prefects went, rather puzzled.

"Simply a waste of time!" growled Morrow. "She didn't tell us anything, and it's as clear as anything that she's all at sea."

"Of course she is," said Fenton. "She's in sole command, and she'll have to be pretty busy in getting a new set of masters. In the meantime, we've got extra duties on our hands."

"I'm hanged if we'll do them!" grunted Wilson.

"We've got to!"

"Why?" asked Wilson. "Couldn't we support the Head, too? Why shouldn't we resign—"

"Because we're not in the same position as the masters," interrupted Fenton. "We're not employed, and paid for our services. It would simply mean expulsion for us—although, if it came to it, I don't suppose Miss Trumble would have sufficient courage to sack the whole crowd."

"Still, she's a handful, and we don't want to run any risks," said Morrow. "We've got to remember, also, that she's the big noise on the Governing Board. If she can let all the masters go, she'd probably let us go, too!"

"Exactly," said Fenton. "So we'd better stick it. There's no sense in doing anything impulsive. Besides, Mr. Lee has particularly asked us to maintain order and discipline. Until Miss Trumble gets a new set of masters, we've got to keep the chaps under control. It wouldn't take them long to lose their heads in a position like this. So it's up to us to keep them in check."

The other prefects agreed, and it was not long before they plainly showed the juniors that there was to be no nonsense. Some of the Remove fellows had an idea that absolute chaos would take charge of things.

They thought there would be no prep. during the evening, no lessons on the morrow. But they very soon found out their mistake. Fenton took care to go round, and his tone was unmistakable.

At the same time, the school seethed with excitement.

And when seven o'clock in the evening arrived, word got round that the masters were just leaving. This was just what the juniors had been waiting for. They rushed out into the Triangle in crowds.

I was with them. We were just in time to see the Head crossing towards the gateway, accompanied by Mr. Nelson Lee, Mr. Stockdale, and all the others.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Good old Dr. Stafford!"

"You'll soon be back, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheering was tremendous.

And not only the Remove and the fags joined in, but the whole of the Fifth, and

a large proportion of the Sixth. The Triangle became congested with fellows.

It was packed with yelling, excited boys.

And cheers were given for the Head, and Nelson Lee, and all the others. The masters, in fact, had to literally fight their way out. The demonstration was one of the biggest that had ever occurred in the old school.

"Hurrah!"

"We'll stick it till you come back, sir!" yelled Handforth. "We'll soon have Miss Trumble tamed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If things don't improve quickly, we'll take matters into our own hands!" roared Handforth. "We're not going to stand any rot, anyhow!"

"Good old Handy!"

At last, the masters were allowed to depart. I was not feeling particularly depressed. It was pretty rotten for the gov'nor to clear out in this way—but he had adopted the only course.

And events at St. Frank's promised to be full of novelty and unusual excitement.

After the demonstration in the Triangle, a fearful orgy of disorder set in. The fellows were excited and reckless. They were in a kind of "don't care" mood, and the disturbances in both Houses were unprecedented.

St. Frank's, in fact, was in an uproar.

And Miss Trumble, sitting in the Headmaster's study, began to feel the first twinges of alarm. The masters had gone now—they had left the school. Those who had been responsible for the maintenance of law and order had taken their departure.

And, somehow, Miss Trumble felt isolated. The full responsibility was now upon her own angular shoulders. For the first half hour she was triumphant and gloating.

But, as the disturbance continued—as the uproar grew in intensity—she had a terrible feeling that she would not be able to cope with it.

And her sensations were rather those of anger than fear. These boys were nothing more nor less than young hooligans! It was the result of harsh discipline and brutal floggings.

Would she be able to tame them? Would she find it possible to fulfil her ideal, and reduce these young roughs into a state of humility and genteel placidity? Miss Trumble almost began to doubt.

Of course, in cold truth, the one plain fact was obvious.

Miss Trumble knew absolutely nothing about boys. She was in ignorance of the fact that a healthy public schoolboy can be a gentleman, chivalrous to the backbone, and yet make use of the most dreadful slang. She did not know that he can punch a fellow's nose without provocation, and yet know his manners to a nicety.

The new Lady Head seemed to imagine that the boys ought to be pampered—petted up and spoilt, so that their real manliness would never have a chance of development.

She meant to experiment at St. Frank's—and St. Frank's was ready for her!

Seated in her study, she could hear the juniors shouting and yelling—she could hear crashes and thuds, and howls and shrieks. It was like pandemonium to her.

She could not possibly believe that all this was merely a perfectly natural safety valve—a letting off of steam, so to speak. And, believing that the school was being wrecked she frantically rang for Tubbs.

Tubbs came, placid and somewhat sulky. "You rang, mam?" he asked, as he entered.

"Yes—yes!" exclaimed Miss Trumble, trying to preserve her calm. "Go at once to the prefects, and send them here."

"All of them, mam?"

"Yes—all of them."

Tubbs went, grinning. He was shrewd enough to see that Miss Trumble had "got the wind up." And it amused him highly. He went round, searching about until he found Fenton and Morrow.

The two head prefects were just about to sally forth on a little expedition, with canes to assist them. They received Tubbs' message with mixed feelings. But they went at once to Miss Trumble's study.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded shrilly, as soon as they entered. "How dare you allow the boys to make such a terrible disturbance? What is happening? Is the school being destroyed?"

Fenton smiled.

"It's all right, Miss Trumble, you needn't worry," he said, in a tone that was slightly contemptuous. "The fellows are a bit excited—particularly the juniors. That's only to be expected, under the circumstances. They'll soon calm down."

"It seems to me that you are quite useless!" snapped the Lady Head.

"Do you wish to give us any orders, madam?" asked Fenton coldly.

"Yes—make the boys quiet at once!" retorted Miss Trumble. "I am amazed that such hooliganism can go on in a famous school like St. Frank's! The junior boys, in particular, appear to be little better than ruffians."

"It's only because you don't understand them, Miss Trumble," put in Morrow gruffly. "The juniors are all right. Come on, Fenton. We'd better get busy, and bring the young asses to their senses."

The two prefects nodded, and passed out of the study without giving Miss Trumble another glance. And they sallied forth into the junior quarters, and proceeded to get busy.

But they didn't use their canes.

Fenton thought it would be more effective

to utilise his tongue—and he did so with excellent effect.

He succeeded in gathering a whole crowd of Remove fellows together in the junior common-room, and he proceeded to give it to them quietly. Everybody listened to Fenton.

"Now look here, you youngsters, I'm not going to preach, and there won't be any punishments for all this unruliness," said Fenton. "But I want you to listen to me for a few minutes—and don't interrupt."

"Right you are, Fenny!"

"Go ahead!"

"We're listening!"

"Good old Fenton—you've got to be the Head now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I made some remark, a moment ago, that I didn't want any interruptions!" said Fenton grimly. "I want to point out that the whole circumstances are exceptional. St. Frank's is left without any masters—but you needn't think that you youngsters can do just as you like because of that!"

"Miss Trumble will fall on us like a load of bricks, eh?"

"She'd better try it!" said Handforth.

"I don't suppose Miss Trumble will do anything violent—she's opposed to it," went on Pitt. "She believes in ruling by kindness."

"That's all rot!" said Handforth. "The only way to make a chap do what you want is to biff him on the nose! I've done it for years——"

"I'm not interested in your methods, Handforth!" interrupted Fenton. "I'm trying to tell the whole crowd of you that you won't improve the position by letting yourselves go. There's absolutely no sense in kicking up a row."

"But we're not going to stand Miss Trumble!"

"Rather not!"

"You've got to stand her!" said Fenton. "She's here, and she's let everybody know it, too! Take my advice, and go on just the same as usual."

"But how can we, without masters?" asked Pitt.

"If you like, it won't make any difference at all," said Fenton. "It remains with you fellows. Calm down, do your prep, and go in to supper in just the same way as ever. And in the morning get up when the rising bell goes——"

"What about lessons?"

"Lessons will start at the usual hour," replied Fenton. "There are quite enough prefects to go round. Of course, you can look forward to a pretty easy time for a day or two—but do keep law and order."

"You can trust us to do that, Fenny," I promised.

"I know I can rely on you, Nipper, but I want to rely on the others, too," said the school captain. "You see, Miss Trumble is a difficult proposition. She's a woman, and—"

(Continued on page 15.)

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OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

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THE GOAT



Known for a long time as the brain behind a criminal organisation operating in England and on the Continent, the Goat has succeeded where many have failed. How he is eventually scotched by the police is told in the following brilliant narrative of Scotland Yard

BIG RUFÉ DEVLIN and Goat O'Brien moved on different planes of the criminal hierarchy. There was all the difference of status between them that there is between an ambitious curate and an archbishop. For while Rufe was merely a sneak thief of parts, the Goat was one of the potentates of crime with a fat bank balance and little fear of the police. Yet Rufe it was.

You might have passed the Goat a hundred times in the street without giving him a second glance. He was a slim-built, slouch-shouldered little man of seventy, with a trim grey beard and a deprecating manner, who wore well-made clothes untidily. His record ran back through fifty years of subtle and audacious rascality in three continents. Now, in his old age, he had promoted himself from the executive to the less risky but more profitable administrative side of crime. He was, in fact, a receiver, and it was the misfortune of the Criminal Investigation Department that he should have settled down to exercise his talents in London.

It is only in books that a man of the Goat's reputation can avoid the suspicions

of the police. And O'Brien, who knew every trick on the board, had no illusions on the subject. He knew that time and again the keenest men of the C.I.D. had taken the warpath against him, only to retire at last baffled and chagrined, with the futile headache which comes from battering brains against a stone wall. He knew that the department had sworn to have his scalp, and at times he would smile grimly into his little grey beard. They might know he was at the back of half a dozen burglaries, not only in London but in Paris and Amsterdam, that his money had provided the resources, that his brains had planned the coup, that his fingers dipped deeply into the proceeds; but juries require concrete proofs, and proofs were just what were lacking.

More than once a surprise descent of officers, armed with a search warrant, had been made on his cosy flat on the north side of Regent's Park. He would receive them mildly, with a resigned shrug of the shoulders, as one who is the subject of unjust annoyance, against which no protests would avail. On the last occasion it was Almaek, newly promoted divisional

detective-inspector of the 12th Division, who was confident that the Goat knew a great deal more than he ought of a week-end robbery of specie from a West End manufacturing goldsmith. He dropped swiftly down upon the flat with a couple of his staff. Three thousand ounces of gold cannot be disposed of in a hurry, and he hoped by rapidity of action to catch O'Brien before he had time to get rid of it.

It took a full five hours to convince him that wherever else the gold was it was not in the flat. The Goat, with a subtle irony that was not lost on the inspector, produced champagne.

"You've got your duty to do, gentlemen, and I don't complain. I've been a crook, and I've got enough to live on. I've got no need to get in the game again. I just hate to see you wasting your time."

Almack wiped his damp brow. The shifting of furniture is heavy work for amateurs.

"We'll get you, Goat," he said definitely. "You're clever, I own, and you've done us down this time, but we'll get you. Don't you make any error."

The Goat shook his grey head reprovingly. "I believe you would—if you got a chance," he admitted. "But, as I said, I've enough to live on, and I'm side-stepping all work on the cross. It would save your people a lot of trouble if you'd believe me. Well, here's promotion." He lifted a thin-stemmed wineglass and sipped lovingly. "Did I ever tell you how I lifted a parcel of diamonds from the Rietfontein post-office?" He sighed. "That was in the old days. And, mind you, the diamond field police were smart men."

He saw them urbanely off the premises, even offering to send for his car to take them back to headquarters. But Almack was in no mood to accept further civilities.

"A 'bus will do for us, thanks," he retorted. "See you again some other time. So long."

"Drop in whenever you're passing," said O'Brien. "Always pleased to see you or any of your friends, Mr. Almack."

Not until they were out of hearing did Almack say the things that were burning within him. To fail was bad enough. To be taunted by the old man in the presence of his subordinates was worse. But worst of all was the knowledge that the department would know that he, the last created "D.D.I." had wrecked a lance against the Goat and been ignominiously unhorsed. He swore fervently.

The "under-world," as the pictures call it, is no freemasonry society of brothers. It is only by chance that its inhabitants get to know one another, for there are no obvious signs by which a crook betrays himself as other than a law-abiding citizen. Consequently, when a mild-looking, little, old man moved slowly out through the swing-doors of the Great Southern and Northern

Bank in Holborn and signalled a 'bus, Big Rufe had no conception that he was beholding in the flesh a fellow-crook as far above him as the stars. All that he saw was, in his own vocabulary, a possible "mark."

Times were bad with Rufe, and though his trousers were carefully creased and his sleek black hair was parted in the centre as definitely as though by a sword cut, he had only five small silver coins in his pocket. For seven days he had sat before the same marble-topped table at a restaurant that commanded a view of the portals of the bank, and spent most of his time chewing a toothpick and watching. Three times had he seen the feeble little man with the vague face enter and emerge, and from the mass of the bank's customers he had decided that this was the one Providence indicated as the instrument which was to provide him with the means of life for a period.

His hand dropped to a pocket. Rufe's limitations might have been gathered from the fact that he carried a heavy 7-shot automatic. No big professional criminal, in England at least, carries arms as a usual thing. It makes a big difference in the sentence to be found with a weapon. There are other ways of offence and defence.

One minute later he had swung himself on to the 'bus that contained O'Brien, and the listless eyes of the old man rested on him indifferently as he took his seat. Rufe met them with equal indifference, and presently stooping, picked up a coin from the floor.

"Did you drop this, sir?" he said politely.

The Goat stretched out a thin hand.

"Thank you very much. Must have slipped down while I was paying the conductor."

Rufe saw one-fifth of his worldly wealth vanish into the pocket of his destined victim. Though he mentally condemned him as a "tightwad," he smiled philosophically.

After all, it was an investment. He flashed a hand forward—a hand that boasted a big imitation diamond set in a gold ring.

"Rotten weather, ain't it?" He imagined he had the society accent to perfection. "Looks as if we hadn't finished with the rain yet. Say, is it always wet like this in London?"

Not a change in O'Brien's face showed that he recognised the awkward gambit of the unskilled confidence man. Rufe had conveyed that he was a stranger in the metropolis. The big diamond on his finger showed that he was a man of wealth. His accent was meant to show that he was a man of culture.

The Goat folded up the paper which he was reading.

"Sonny," he said gently, "if you get off this 'bus you will soon find a constable. Tell him you've lost yourself, and get him to hand you over to your nurse. She'll take you home and tuck you up in your little bed. London's a big place for an innocent youth to get lost in. There's a lot of wicked

characters about, and you never know when you might get taken in."

Rufe's jaw dropped. For a second the devil peeped out of his green eyes and his fists clenched. His chagrin and disappointment were plain for any one to witness. He spat out a malevolent oath. The Goat's eyes half-closed as though he had lost all interest in the incident.

"You——" Words failed Rufe, and he choked.

"Count twenty slowly," advised the Goat solemnly.

Rufe could have broken the frail body of the older man between his two hands. He pushed his head forward until he was within a couple of inches of the other's face.

"Say, you!" he demanded, with all the intensity of malice he could inflict into his voice. "You gimme back my shilling, or I'll eat you up."

O'Brien folded his thin hands in his lap.

"I think not," he said placidly. "I think not."

Had he shown anything like aggressive defiance, Rufe was in a state of mind to carry out his threat. But the cool defiance of the Goat somehow deterred him while it did not lessen his anger. A sort of vanity, which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of men of his type, was hurt at his designs being frustrated. He glared inarticulate.

When the Goat descended from the bus he was aware that six feet of wrath was dogging him. He walked homeward serenely contemptuous. It did not even amuse him that he had been selected for the crude experiment of Big Rufe. He knew that the other was raw at the game, otherwise he would not have lost his temper. He knew, too, that Rufe was keeping him in sight in hope of finding an opportunity to give physical effect to his passion. That, too, worried him little. In streets as well policed and as frequented as those through which he had to pass, no assault could be committed with impunity. He had other affairs to think of than this trivial encounter with a minor crook.

That contempt was where the luck which for half a century had been his handmaid deserted him. Had Rufe been the rawest detective patrol, the most stupid of plain-clothes constables, the Goat would have been warily on his guard. If he thought of the matter of at all, it was merely that his follower's passion would evaporate when he found that there was no chance of violence. He slurred into his block of flats without even turning his head.

Now five minutes or more before, Rufe, who was not altogether a fool, had resigned himself to seeing his victim escape for the time being. He recognised that he had made a mistake, and though he was still sore, his first anger had passed. He was capable of more or less sound reasoning. He had no very clear idea, but he was cer-

tain that somehow, if he could hit on it, there was a way of digging money out of the little old man who had not only bilked him out of his money but administered such a nasty jolt to his self-esteem.

He walked boldly up to the lounging janitor at the doorway.

"What's the name of that bloke that's just gone in?" he demanded bluntly.

"Skinny little chap with a grey beard."

"What y' want to know for?"

Rufe was more in his element at this kind of thing. He lowered his voice mysteriously, and glanced round with melodramatic emphasis.

"Sh. I'm a split—a 'tec,' y' know. I can't tell y' all about it, but he looks like a man we want. I'm not sure. I'm only going by what I remember of a photograph."

"I reckon you've made a bad miss this time," said the attendant. "He's no gaol-bird. His name's O'Brien, and he's got pots of splosh. Runs a motor and Lord knows what 'all. I've been here six months, and always found 'im a perfect gentleman. You'd never guess he was an American."

The name O'Brien is a fairly common one. It never occurred to Rufe to associate it with the Goat, otherwise he might have hesitated. He pulled at his top lip.

"Looks like a bloomer, don't it?" he said frankly. "We all make mistakes. Still, you can't be too sure. Since I've wasted me time comin' here I shall have to make a report. Tell me what you know about him." Another of his precious shillings passed.

This time, however, he was satisfied with his investment. He had pumped the janitor dry before he walked thoughtfully away. His idea was beginning to take shape. He was no pedant specialist. When he wanted money, methods didn't matter. Results were all that concerned him. And he wanted money badly.

Exactly at half-past two in the morning Big Rufe drove his fist on to the point of the jaw of the drowsy night porter whose sleep for a couple of hours thereafter was sounder if no more refreshing. And ten minutes later the Goat awoke.

It was a proof of the soundness of his nerves that he merely opened his eyes and made no motion, although he was perfectly certain that there was someone in the room. He continued to breathe with audible regularity, but eyes and ears were tensely on the alert. For several minutes the ticking of the little bedside clock was the chief sound in the room. But the Goat knew what was happening. The intruder had clumsily made some sound, and was now waiting, motionless, until he could be sure that the sleeper had not roused.

Presently there was a faint click, and the darkness of the room became less intense. The Goat instantly shut his eyes, and the next second felt a beam of light searching his face. Then it was gone, and he felt rather than heard a stealthy footfall.

Slowly, with deliberate caution lest the rustling of the bedclothes should attract attention, he began to turn over so that he should face the burglar. He was not at all alarmed, but he was curious. There were several friends of his—business friends—who were quite capable of deeming him worth a professional visit. It has not been unknown for a thief to recover in the night the stolen goods he had sold in the morning.

He could see dimly a black, formless figure moving stealthily about the apartment, and the pencil of light from the electric-torch darting searchingly over the various articles in the room.

The Goat raised himself on one elbow. His visitor's back was towards him, and in the farther corner of the room were half a dozen walking-sticks. Many a time in his younger days had the Goat's liberty depended upon his soft-footedness, and his old cunning had not yet deserted him. He lowered his feet gently until they touched the carpet, and noiselessly and swiftly crossed the room.

He had reached the corner and his hand encircled a malacca cane when the beam of light suddenly wheeled round. Instinct seemed to have warned Big Rufe of his danger. The Goat blinked his eyes as the circle of light blinded him, and then found himself looking down the barrel of a heavy automatic.

"Keep your yap shut or you'll get it!" said the steady voice of Rufe.

It was then that O'Brien recognised him. He did not venture to move, but he gave a thin, harsh cackle of laughter.

"Hello! You come to collect that shilling? Say, son, I'd sooner have you as a con man than a burglar out of the funny papers. Take my advice and give up being a crook. It will pay you better to open cab doors for a living."

"Shut it!" ordered Rufe peremptorily. "You know what I want. Where d'you keep the stuff? Come on. Cough it up, or it'll be the worse for you."

"You're surely some tough!" taunted the Goat. His grip on the stick shifted and tightened. "Gish, but you've nearly got me frightened. Who trusted you with a great big gun like that? Do you know what would happen to you if it went off while you're pointing it at me? You would be hanged by the neck until you were dead, and your mummy would have to buy nice new black clothes for you."

"That's enough!" growled Rufe. "I don't want to be hard with an old man like you." The pistol muzzle dropped. There were men who could have told Rufe that the only time the Goat could be considered safe was while one had him at the end of a gun. But this knowledge he had yet to acquire.

A man more astute might realise that the Goat's gibes were intended to distract attention. In fact he was only waiting for that pistol muzzle to drop.

Rufe understood too late. The Goat lunged with the stick as a fencer with a sword, and the other doubled up like a clasp-knife as the ferrule caught him on what the doctors call the solar plexus and boxers the bread-basket. Even while he was gasping, the cane swished again through the air twice in rapid succession. He dropped clumsily forward and lay still.

O'Brien switched on the light and, replacing the stick, opened the door and listened. Presently he went a little way along the corridor, tapped at another door, and pushed it open.

"George!" he called softly. "George, come here!"

A sleepy grunt answered him, and a moment later a middle-aged man with immature side-whiskers had leapt out of bed. He was chauffeur valet to O'Brien so far as the outside world was concerned. He was also general assistant in a variety of affairs of which the public knew nothing.

He followed O'Brien back to his own room, and his employer jerked his head to the prostrate figure.

"Woke up to find that tough here. Had to lay him out," he said succinctly.

George expressed no surprise. He went to the unconscious man and rolled him over.

"Hit him precious hard, didn't you?" he commented, noting the bruise on the temple.

"He had a gun on me. Not croaked, is he?"

George turned a serious face upwards. He was holding Rufe's pulse. "He seems mighty bad. What do you reckon we'd better do? Shall I 'phone for the doctor?"

"Don't be a blamed fool," said the Goat with asperity. "That'd mean giving the bulls a chance to come in and out here all the time they were hanging up a case against him. Go and get some clothes on. Well dump him out in the street and trust to luck."

"There's the night porter" remonstrated George.

"I know all about that. You go and get dressed."

The Goat himself hurriedly flung on some clothes and reconnoitred down the stairs. He found the night porter breathing stertorously in a corner of the little partitioned off office, and nodded sagely. He knew now all the steps that Rufe had taken, and he understood how he had got possession of the master-key. He returned upstairs.

With jerky reluctance the tape machine rattled out a message, and Divisional Detective-Inspector Almack, who had lingered on his way upstairs to his own office to chaff the sub-divisional, idly tore off the message and glanced at it.

"In consequence of an outbreak of swine-fever at Cheam the Board of Agriculture have prohibited. . . . Hello, what's this?" His eye had fallen to a later message.

There is a constant interchange of police news day and night between the ten-score

police stations of London—by telephone, by motor, by official newspapers, and by the tape machine. It may not seem essential that a constable at Ewell should know that a burglary has been committed at Bayswater—but the burglar may live at Ewell. News—swift news—is the life-blood of the greatest police organisation in the world, even as it was in the old days of hue and cry.

Almack twisted his reddish moustache absently and, passing the strip of tape abruptly to the sub-divisional inspector, strode off to his own department. One of his sergeants, a broad, ruddy-faced man, was sprawling against the mantel-piece, and a clerk was writing beneath the barred window.

"Mornin', Horand," said Almack. "I've

"They've picked him up outside High Cliff Mansions—that's the Goat's place—badly knocked about. He's in the infirmary now, and he won't say who put it across him."

Horand stared at his chief with something of contempt. "There don't seem much to that to drag us right across London. I know Rufe and I know the Goat. They'd no more have anything to do with each other than—than a banker with a confectioner's assistant."

Almack had a respect for his senior assis-



The Goat lunged, and Rufe doubled up as the ferrule caught him in the solar plexus

just got a hunch that we may get a line on the Goat after all."

"Huh," commented Horand, and spat in the fire. He was a veteran of the old days who had never troubled to attempt the further examinations preliminary to higher promotion, and was a pessimist in certain ways. He had known many campaigns against the Goat, and he had small faith that the young "D.D.I." could achieve anything. Still discipline is discipline, and he said nothing.

"We'll get right over to Regent's Park again," went on Almack. "There's a report just come through on the tape that's put me thinking. Ever run across Big Rufe Devlin?"

"I have so," admitted Horand, struggling with his overcoat.

tant, but he sometimes wished that the other's common sense was not so arrogant. It blunted enthusiasm. "All the same it's deuced funny that he should be picked up practically on the Goat's doorstep. It needs looking into, anyway. A bit of fresh air will do you good."

Horand ventured no further comment. By the time they had reached the infirmary and stood by Rufe's bed he had become bluffly genial. He had his private opinion that they were on a wild-goose chase, but that would not prevent him from loyally carrying out any steps that Almack might initiate.

"How do, Rufe. You remember me? My name's Horand. Heard you'd been banging yourself about and thought I'd give you a look in. Friend of mine—Mr. Almack." He

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seated himself with the familiarity of an old friend on the bed.

The crook glared at him resentfully. "You ain't troubling about my health," he said inspiciously. "I'm about sick of you blokes pushing your noses into my private affairs." he ostentatiously turned his back, and tried in ineffective snore.

"Slip along to High Cliff Mansions and see whether you can pick up anything there," whispered Almack. "Now, Devlin,"—his voice was tinged with incisive authority—"listen to me."

"Oh, blazes," said Rufe wearily, and turned over again. "You rozzers don't give any one a chanst." Ever since a couple of constables had picked him up and brought him on an ambulance to the infirmary he had been parrying questions and wondering why his assailant of the flat had not handed him over straight away to the police.

"How did you manage to get that?" Almack jerked his head to the bandage that encircled the crook's head.

"Blind to the world," ejaculated Rufe crisply. "Must have tumbled over something and smashed myself on the pavement. You know how it is, guv'nor, when—" He broke off as he encountered Almack's disbelieving smile.

"So you said when you were picked up. Do you know what the doctor here says? He says you couldn't have done that by a fall. Somebody hit you—eh?"

Rufe expressed the opinion that the doctor was a condemned fool.

"Now see here, Mr. Devlin"—Almack's tones were honeyed—"I want to know what really did happen. Perhaps I can help you to get one back on the man that socked you."

"I reckon not," said Rufe doggedly. "There ain't no man."

Since by some miracle his exploit in the small hours had not been brought to the notice of the police, he considered that he would be a fool to disclose it himself. And Almack began to feel that there was something solid behind his "hunch." The crook would not be so clumsily secretive if his injuries had not come about while he was engaged in some illegal business. He idly watched Rufe's face as he sprung his next question.

"Then it wasn't Goat O'Brien?"

Rufe sat sharply up in bed, his green eyes glittering with interest. He knew of the Goat, naturally and an explanation of the recent events in which he had been concerned hit him like a blow with the detective's casual question. It restored something of his self-esteem to realise that he had been worsted by a master of the profession although he remained none the less bitter against the other. But the police were dangerous men to confide in, and he slipped back into a recumbent position and shook his head. "I've never seen the Goat."

But Almack was satisfied so far. An unqualified assent could not have carried greater conviction. He leaned sideways to-

wards Rufe and, though he was smiling, his voice had an indefinable menace.

"Listen here, Rufe,"—he judged the time was right to drop the Mister Devlin—"you've got a rotten record, haven't you? Our people pick you up at three this morning in a street of residential flats. That looks bad, you know." He shook his head solemnly.

He was within the letter but outside the spirit of the law. It is absolutely illegal to intimidate a man into incriminating himself. But for his eagerness to run the Goat down he would never have hinted—as he had done—at the possibility of arresting Rufe as a suspected person. The shot told.

"You wouldn't do that, guv'nor!" exclaimed Rufe in alarm, shifting himself to allow for a better view of the stern, clean-cut face. "You wouldn't do that?"

"I'm not saying what I shall do," said Almack with careful vagueness.

Rufe hesitated a second. Either of the two alternatives by which he was confronted seemed to lead directly to the dock—but if he spoke the police would probably deal with him gently. He took the plunge. Aided by a shrewd question now and again the whole story came out. He held his clenched fist out of bed as he finished, and shook it vindictively. . . . "And if it was Goat O'Brien, as you say, guv'nor, strike me—"

"Just so," said Almack. "You say it was a malacca cane he used. You're sure of that?"

"Dead sure," said Rufe. "Didn't I hold him up for Lord knows how long. It was a light yellow malacca cane."

For a staid divisional detective-inspector Almack felt uncommonly youthful as he passed out of the grimy courtyard of the infirmary. He felt like doing a step-dance on the pavement.

"Luck—incredible luck," he murmured joyfully. "I can't be wrong—I simply can't be wrong."

And then the burly figure of Horand came in sight. The sergeant accosted his chief with an "I knew it" air.

"Nothing doing yonder," he reported. "No one knows anything about this business. The Goat leaves for Paris by the twenty."

Horand paused in the act of lighting his pipe and shot a quick inquiring glance at his chief.

"I see," he muttered slowly. "Do you mean to say you've actually got a tip from that yob?"

"Do you think," said Almack, "that a little snipe like the Goat could lay a man like Big Rufe out with a malacca cane?"

The lighted match burnt the sergeant's fingers. He dropped it hastily and wrinkled perplexed brows. "What's the point?" he asked.

After he left Horand, Almack swung cheerfully back to his division. He was young enough to feel tempted to ring up Scotland Yard and expound his idea, but he resisted

the temptation. He had very little that was tangible to go on, and there was always the possibility that he was wrong. He decided to wait.

He pulled down a much-thumbed copy of Whitaker's Almanack from a shelf—propped it open at a certain page, and with the aid of a pad of paper became absorbed in a series of calculations.

Presently he lay back in the chair and surveyed the result of his labours discontentedly. "That would take months," he grumbled, "months and months and months. I'm dashed if I can see where I'm wrong." He stood up and strode up and down the narrow office, hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets. "I'll see it through," he said resolutely. And then a new train of thought occurred to him. He literally jumped to the telephone, and his fingers played an impatient tattoo while he waited for a reply.

He was satisfied, when at a quarter-to-two that afternoon he arrived at Charing Cross Station, that every precaution had been taken. He felt a premonition of success, and he chuckled grimly to himself as he loitered near the bookstall in a position which commanded an unostentatious view of the barrier for the continental train. Somewhere among the throng which congregated the station were three men he knew he could rely on. It only remained for the Goat to walk into the trap.

O'Brien was punctual. As a business man he knew the virtue of always being in time. He and George descended from a cab outside the station just five seconds before another cab that carried Horand and a colleague.

He saw Almack step out smilingly and greet the old man.

"Why, Goat, you're never leaving London. Who'd have expected to see you here?"

"Hello, Mr. Almack. This is good of you. You've come to see me off, haven't you? There's a couple of your men been tracking us here in a taxi. We've been quite a procession."

Almack laughed. "You're not losing your eyesight, Goat"—they were becoming the centre of a little group of uninterested men—"we'll just take a peep inside those bags of yours if you don't mind."

The Goat smiled his humble smile. "Why, sure," he ejaculated. "You're an active young man, Mr. Almack. You ought to get on. Fancy springing this on us."

"I've had a waiting-room kept empty," said Almack, hooking his arm into O'Brien's, while someone performed a like kindly office for George. "We won't be long."

"I hope not," said the Goat easily. "I don't want to miss that boat-train." He took the hold-up quite as a matter of course.

In the waiting-room he surrendered his keys docilely, and waited while Almack rummaged the bags perfunctorily. The inspector relocked them and made a half-bow as he handed the keys back.

"Just one minute," he exclaimed, and

made a snatch at the thick malacca stick the Goat was carrying. Even the alert O'Brien was taken unawares and for the moment his nerve-balance deserted him. He made a wild spring at the inspector, but big Horand caught him in mid-air and swung him back.

"No wonder poor Rufe was knocked out," said Almack, balancing the stick in his hand. "It's as heavy as a bar of lead." He swung the stick by the ferrule twice against the solid fender. At the second blow the silver knob gave way and a quantity of yellowish pellets trickled like hail on the floor. "I think, Goat, we'll have to trouble you to put off that trip for quite a while."

"It was Big Rufe gave me the idea," said Almack, making a verbal report to the superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department. "He was so certain that he'd been knocked out by a malacca cane—and there was only one supposition—that the cane must have been loaded. As a fact, when we'd made a search the previous day we'd noticed a collection of sticks, and I'd picked up one or two about which there was nothing apparently abnormal. We find that most of the sticks were honest enough, and even if we'd hit on one of the prepared ones there was nothing to give it away before it was filled up. These sticks just had a hollow steel lining, and those we took away from the Goat and George held just over three pounds of gold apiece—worth in all getting on for £300.

"As you know, sir, the Goat hasn't often received any bulky stuff, and that confirmed my impression about the walking-sticks. But I'll admit it puzzled me as to how he could have stowed away three thousand ounces of gold. That would have needed a whole armoury of sticks. Then it occurred to me to make sure if he often went to Paris. I rang up, and had the word passed to Horand to make inquiries. He found that either the Goat or George—mostly George—was away from the flat every week-end. I guessed that meant continental trips, and that they probably intended to get stuff over piecemeal.

"That was all there was to it, except when we went over the flat again to-day we knew for sure that the stuff was somewhere and it wasn't where we had looked before. Of course we had tapped for secret panels and all that sort of thing, but it occurred to me that the one place that neither we nor any one else had ever looked at was the windows. As a matter of fact, most of the woodwork of the windows was just a thin veneer over steel boxes and tubes—all made to open and all full of gold. They had remelted it to the most handy shape for their purposes. That's all there is to the business, sir."

"I really think"—the superintendent beamed at the divisional officer—"that we may get a conviction this time."

"There seems to be a probability, sir," agreed Almack dryly.

THE END.



The CASE of the EL TORO MINING SYNDICATE

The Strange & Remarkable Exploits of CARFAX BAINES

"PIPER! Extry piper! 'Orrible murder in the Temple! Barrister shot!"

The above startling announcement, with variations, was bawled along Fleet Street by shrill-voiced newsboys one rainy, misty April afternoon. It caused but little excitement, considering the near proximity of the tragedy, for murders and rumours of murder are almost daily events in London. People bought copies of the evening journal, read the meagre line or two, and for the most part went about their business. Some few, morbid-minded and curious, made their way into the precincts of the Temple, only to be stopped at the entrance to Fig Tree Court, which was choked up with lawyers and clerks. A police-constable stood at the doorway of the dingy building on the south side, keeping back the crowd, and admitting only those who had a right inside.

At the end of the passage on the first floor a plate was inscribed with the name of Archibald Hazlett, barrister, and that unfortunate gentleman had taken his last brief, delivered his last speech to a judge and jury. He lay cold and dead on the floor of the outer room, with a bullet in his heart, and a fierce, agonized expression on his rigid face. His feet were stretched towards his desk, and his head rested on the iron bars of the grate. He was but partially dressed, lacking a coat and waistcoat for the completion of his toilet. The janitor, who carried a key to the barrister's apartments, had discovered the tragedy at midday, when he let himself into the rooms for the purpose of filling the water-bowl. He gave the alarm, and a surgeon was summoned. At two o'clock a cab brought Detective-inspector Meelboom and Carfax Baines; the latter was at Scotland Yard when the news of the crime arrived, and as he had long been a friend of Archibald Hazlett he accompanied the inspector to the Temple.

It was four o'clock, and as the three men stood in the dingy room, glancing furtively at the corpse, they felt that they were in the presence of a deep mystery,

an uncommon crime. The surgeon watched his companions. Inspector Meelboom had just completed a thorough search of both apartments, and Baines was scribbling in a note-book. The latter had so far taken a passive part, saying very little, and leaving the inspector to pursue his investigations by himself. Inquiries had been made, but they threw no light on the murder. According to the janitor's story, Mr. Hazlett had on Saturday morning gone down to Kent to visit a friend, and he had stated that he would not be back until Monday evening. But this was Monday, and he had met his death that morning, so he must have changed his mind and returned to the Temple some time during Sunday, presumably during the evening. The janitor did not know that he was back, nor had any one else seen him. There was a single clue to the crime, and that a slight one. At the early hour of eight in the morning an inmate of the Temple had observed a tall man, with his face almost hidden by the collar of his mackintosh and the peak of his cap, come out of the doorway in Fig Tree Court and walk rapidly towards King's Bench Walk. It was then rather foggy, and rain was falling.

"I'm afraid we're at fault," said Inspector Meelboom. "Of course, it can't be a case of suicide, since there is no weapon."

"No, it's not suicide," replied the surgeon. "To my mind, gentlemen, what happened here this morning is pretty clear. Mr. Hazlett was dressing in his bedchamber when a noise brought him to the outer room, where he was confronted by the murderer. There was a hand-to-hand struggle—you see how that rug is turned over—and it ended in the scoundrel clapping a revolver close to Mr. Hazlett's heart and firing. But what was the motive? There has been no attempt at burglary. There is a purse of gold in the barrister's pocket, and his watch is in his waistcoat. And nothing has been broken open."

"It's a deeper mystery how the man got in," said the inspector. "The windows have not been disturbed. He may have come with Hazlett and spent the night here, but how did he lock the door after him when he went away? The key is still on the barrister's ring."

"Suppose you examine the door, especially the lock," suggested Baines.

Meelboom decided to do so, and the surgeon went with him. As soon as their backs were turned, Baines bent quickly over the dead man, forced apart the clenched fingers of one hand, and took from them a triangular corner of a letter, an unopened one apparently, the rest of which must have been torn away by the murderer. He slipped his prize into his pocket, and just then Meelboom exclaimed, eagerly:

"I've got it! There are some tiny bits of wax sticking to the lock, so the fellow must have taken an impression and had a duplicate key made. That accounts for his entrance and exit. The next thing is to find the murderer—the man with the mackintosh and the cap."

"To start with, you had better take Hazlett's key and ascertain who made the duplicate," said Baines. "By-the-by, what luck did you have in your search?"

"Nothing but letters, and they are of no importance. It won't be an easy task to ferret this thing out. I shouldn't wonder if a woman was at the bottom of it. And the janitor may bear watching. I'll be back in a moment, Baines. I'm going out to Fleet Street—my throat is as dry as tinder."

The surgeon went away with Meelboom, and Baines was left alone. His first step was to examine the fragment of paper he had taken from the barrister's hand. Part of an American stamp was on the corner of the envelope, and one of the bits of the letter inside contained a single word, but a most significant one to the detective; the sparkle of his eyes betrayed his satisfaction. He paused briefly in the inner room, noting the disordered bed, the soapy water in the basin, the dead man's coat and waistcoat hanging on a chair. A brief search, and then he returned to the outer room, the barrister's office. On the desk by the window were half a dozen letters, evidently left by the postman that morning. These were unimportant in themselves, but Baines wondered who had taken them from the box in the inner side of the door. Pursuing his investigations, he found a pile of correspondence in one of the drawers of the desk, and after going over them hurriedly, he chose one letter and put it in his pocket. Then the waste-basket caught his eye, and here he discovered and appropriated a letter torn in two parts, which had been thrown away with other rubbish by the dead man.

When Inspector Meelboom returned, after an absence of half an hour, he was accompanied by the coroner, whom he had met on the way back. Baines left them in charge, slipped out of the Temple without being recognized, and walked along the Embankment to his chambers in Villiers Street. He found a letter there, and the contents had a peculiar interest for him.

"My Dear Sir,—I promised you a year ago, when you recovered my wife's diamond necklace, that I would do you a good turn if I ever got the chance. I think I see my

way clear now. Watch for the report on the El Toro mine—Hazlett, the mining expert, has been sent out by the syndicate—and if it is favourable buy all the shares you can. They are bound to rise to a high figure—Sincerely yours,

"CAMELOT."

Stephen Hazlett, the well-known mining expert, was the brother of the murdered barrister, Archibald Hazlett. Baines picked up the morning paper, and glanced at a eulogistic article about the El Toro Mining Syndicate. Nearly every day for weeks he had read something similar, and he knew the particulars by heart. The gold-mine was in the west of America, just over the Colorado border in New Mexico. After being abandoned for years it had been bought by General Townsend, an operator well known in Wall Street, and he claimed to have opened up new and valuable veins. He came to London to float a syndicate, and furnished expensive offices in the City. The shares were to be issued as soon as Stephen Hazlett's report was received. The public were excited, and General Townsend's reputation gained him the necessary footing. It was said that an eminent banker was to join the board, and that Lord Camelot, a financial power, was to be Chairman. They were only waiting for the expert's report, which was a foregone conclusion.

"No, I sha'n't buy any shares," reflected Baines, with a grim smile. "and unless I am much mistaken I shall do Lord Camelot another service."

He sat up until a late hour that night, thinking and smoking, studying the documents he had brought away from the Temple, and comparing one of the letters with the scrap of writing found in the dead man's grasp. When he went to bed his mind was made up, his course of action settled.

In the morning the papers were full of the barrister's murder and the mystery that enveloped it. And there was news of another sort. Stephen Hazlett had cabled a splendid opinion of the El Toro Mine; his written report was to follow. Until noon Baines was in the City, and after lunch he went to Cockspur Street, where he engaged passage on a vessel that left Southampton for New York the following day. Then he visited Scotland Yard, and was closeted for more than an hour with Inspector Meelboom, into whose care he gave certain papers, and to whom he confided instructions of the utmost importance.

"But why take this long journey?" asked the inspector at parting. "Why not arrest him at once on this evidence?"

"For two reasons," replied Baines. "Because his arrest now would almost certainly cause the other man to be murdered, and, moreover, the latter's presence in London will be necessary to procure a conviction."

If a complete change of costume can disguise a man, assuredly none of his friends could have recognized Carfax Baines as he

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

rode along the desolate mountain trail one sultry May afternoon, mounted on a wiry little Mexican horse. His trousers were tucked into spurred boots. He wore a faded shooting-jacket over his flannel shirt. A rifle was slung at his back, and his shrewd face, burnt red and brown, was shaded by a greasy sombrero, with an enormous brim. There was nothing new about his attire, which was the effect he wanted. After a tedious ride a stage-coach had landed him at El Toro the previous day, and at that rude New Mexican settlement he suffered a serious check to the plan he had in mind. But it did not discourage him; he set out alone the next morning, without the aid he had counted on, without any definite course in view, and knowing that he was taking his life in his hands. And now, as the sun drooped lower to the west, he was nearing his destination.

The sure-footed horse picked its way up the winding bridle-path, its hoof-beats echoing through the gorge. To the left Snake Creek, a tributary of the Rio Grande, foamed over its rocky channel between the towering mountain walls, bare and scarred, that rose to the sky from both sides. It was five o'clock when the valley suddenly widened and the El Toro gold-mine burst upon the traveller's view. As he approached walking his steed, his keen glance took in the details—the main shaft sunk slantingly at the base of the mountain on the left, the heap of ore beside it, the stables, the few huts, and the fairly large buildings of logs that were scattered along the plateau of level ground. He noted the significant fact that there were no signs of work in progress.

All at once, as if by magic, half a dozen rough-looking men appeared from different quarters. One, of a superior class, came out of the house with a gun on his shoulder. He was a young man, with a cunning, intelligent face, and the detective knew that he must be Anson Dole, the manager of the El Toro mine. He scowled at the visitor, and demanded brusquely:

"What do you want here?"

"I am afraid I have lost my way," Baines replied, as he dismounted. "I wanted to go over the border by the San Christo Pass, and I was told to take the valley to the right after leaving El Toro."

"You were deceived, then; you should have kept to the left. There is no road beyond here."

Baines glanced at the sinking sun. "It is too late to go back," he said. "Can you put me up for the night?"

"You are an Englishman?" questioned the manager.

"I used to be; for three years I've been living in Colorado."

"Well, I suppose you can stop," Dole assented, with an ill grace, after he had given the traveller a long and searching glance.

Baines had dreaded a refusal, and his suc-

cess made his heart leap with satisfaction; but not by the movement of a muscle did he betray his feelings. His horse was led to the stables, and he languidly followed the manager to the house. There was only one floor, and the greater part of this was taken up by the living-room, furnished with chairs and a large table. A number of rifles hung on the walls, and Baines was told to put his weapon with the rest. Then Dole opened a door at one side, revealing a small room with a single window, containing a chair and a camp-bed.

"You will sleep here," he said, gruffly.

Baines soon discovered that his host proposed to keep him in the house, and he made the best of the situation. He had fixed the positions of the different buildings in his mind, and he had counted in all ten men about the place. For the rest, he could only wait in the hope that luck would bring him the chance he desired. It grew dark rapidly, and at eight o'clock a palatable supper was served in the living-room, which was shared by three of Dole's companions, swarthy, sinister-looking men, who answered to the names of Pablo, Manuel, and Diego. They were evidently Mexican half-breeds.

After the meal the table was cleared, and the men gathered around it with pipes and cards. A bottle of whisky contributed by the detective was heartily appreciated, and it partly melted the reserve of his companions. A game of poker was started, and Baines took a hand. But presently he began to yawn and to nod his head; with difficulty he kept his eyes open.

"If you want to turn in—" began Dole.

"Thanks, if you'll excuse me," said Baines, rising. "I've been in the saddle all day."

He took a lighted candle and retired to his room. Divesting himself of his boots and coat, he threw himself on the bed. He lay there, apparently sound asleep, for half an hour. Then Dole noiselessly crept into the room, bent over the slumbering man for a moment, and slipped away as cautiously, closing the door behind him.

"Dead as a rock," he said audibly to his companions.

An instant later Baines, who had been merely feigning sleep, was out of bed. He knelt by the door, and listened for some minutes to the murmur of voices in the next room. He had begun to despair of learning anything, and was wondering what steps he had better take, when his patience was unexpectedly rewarded. He heard Dole say distinctly, with a sudden rise of voice:

"It won't do to let the obstinate fellow starve, though he deserves it. Go and take him some supper, Manuel, and see that everything is secure."

The confused murmuring broke out again, but Baines had heard enough, and he knew that he had not travelled thousands of miles on a false scent. He was breathing hard as he crept away from the door, a desperate purpose in his mind. He slipped on his coat, arranged the pillow and the blanket

as well as he could in the shape of a human figure, and then climbed quietly out of the window with his boots in one hand. He had no sooner put them on than he heard a door open and close.

The next instant, in the dim light, the man Manuel came round the corner of the house, carrying a tin platter. Followed by the detective, he pushed up the gorge, keeping close to the base of the mountain. The narrow path suddenly made a sharp turn, and Manuel stopped before a little hut of stout timbers that was built against the wall.

"A friend!" replied Baines. "Hush! make no noise for your life!"

He knelt beside Manuel, felt in his pockets, and drew out a key. It fitted the padlock that secured the hut, and an instant later the door swung open. A tall figure reeled out to the path—a young man with sunken cheeks and a matted beard.

"Who are you?" he demanded, hoarsely. "What does this mean?"

"I have come all the way from England to rescue you," Baines answered. "I'll tell you more later."

"Thank God! I am free at last!"



Bending low in their saddles, they rode like mad, followed by a shower of bullets

Baines was half a dozen feet behind. Drawing one of his brace of revolvers from his pocket, he made a dart forward, and with the butt of the weapon struck Manuel on the back of the head just as he stooped to put the platter down. The ruffian's skull was thick, and he did not fall. He staggered, swung round with a smothered cry, and then fell headlong, as a second and heavier stroke landed on his temple; he lay limp and motionless.

"Who's there?" came an eager voice from the hut.

"Not yet, Stephen Hazlett. The worst is before us. Quick, we must lose no time in getting to the horses. That is our only chance."

With a glance at the unconscious Manuel, they were off. Gliding like cats along the base of the mountain, they passed the huts of the men, who had not retired, and then the larger building from which floated the voices of the card-players. They breathed easier as they slipped by the dark shaft of the mine, and a few yards more brought them to the stable—a long shed.

-There was no one on guard here, and Baines quickly led out his own steed and another for his companion. "We must stampede the rest of the animals, and drive them ahead of us," he whispered, as he took a knife from his pocket, "otherwise we shall be overtaken—"

Just then, as luck would have it, a shrill commotion rang from the house, which was sixty feet away. The door burst open, and, against the square of light, dark forms were seen rushing out. Yells and curses made the night hideous.

"They have discovered my escape!" gasped Baines. "Here, take the knife; cut the horses loose and drive them off! Quick, man!"

Hazlett snatched the weapon and dived into the stable. With one hand the detective held the bridles of the two chosen steeds, and with the other he levelled his revolver at the mob of ruffians, who were dashing towards him. Crack! There was a yell of agony and a dull fall. Crack, crack! Another man was down, and the advance was checked for a moment. Then a couple of rifles blazed, and Baines felt the air of a bullet as he fired again, three times.

With angry clamour Dole and his companions came on, reinforced by the men from the huts; shot after shot rang out. But the next instant there was a furious clatter of hoofs as the stampeded horses sped down the valley, and then Hazlett sprang to the detective's side. In a trice they were in the saddle, and bending low they rode like mad, followed by a futile shower of bullets as their snorting steeds tore along the precarious paths that wound between stream and cliff.

The fugitives had no fear of pursuit, and within an hour they slackened their speed, and rode on more leisurely through the night. Baines explained everything to his companion, and Stephen Hazlett wept like a child when he heard of his brother's foul murder and the detective's theory of the crime.

"You are right," he said, huskily. "I see it all. It is no news to you that the El Toro Mine is worthless. Those scoundrels sent me out here in the hope that they could bribe me to help them rob the public. But I refused their offer—this was after I had looked at the mine—and before I was shut up in the hut I managed to write a letter to my brother, and to send it away by a young fellow whom I thought I could trust; I also instructed him to inform the sheriff of El Toro that I was a prisoner at the mine. The boy was all right; for he posted the letter just as the mail was leaving on the coach, and then hunted up the sheriff. But the sheriff is a partner in this mining fraud—"

"Yes, I learned that in El Toro," interrupted Baines, "so I had no choice but to attempt your rescue single-handed."

"The sheriff detained the boy, who gave away the address on the letter," resumed Stephen Hazlett, "and Dole subsequently

boasted to me that it would never reach my brother's hands—he said he had fixed that by a cable to London. Poor Archibald, I feel that I am to blame for his terrible death! I pray Heaven the murderer may hang!"

"You may be sure of one thing," replied Baines. "He has no more chance of escape than if he were already locked up in Newgate."

When Baines and Hazlett reached London, the shares were on the point of being issued on the strength of a forged report in Stephen Hazlett's name.

General Townsend—he had no right whatever to the title—was arrested, and the knowledge that he was fast in the toils, that there was no loophole of escape, brought on a seizure of the heart which carried him off within a week of the day fixed for his trial. But before he died he confessed to the murder of Archibald Hazlett. When he received the cablegram from Dole, warning him that the expert had written to his brother denouncing the mine, he calculated correctly what steamer would bring the letter, and when it would be delivered in London.

He had entered Archibald Hazlett's chambers, thinking him away, been surprised by the barrister and, to avoid exposure, had shot him dead.

The reader is curious to know, perhaps how Carfax Baines grasped the correct clue on the day of the murder. The part of the letter he took from the barrister's dead hand contained half of the writer's signature—the word "Hazlett." The letter found in the desk drawer was from Stephen Hazlett, and he wrote to say that he had just arrived at El Toro, and that he would write again as soon as he had seen the mine. In the event of a favourable report—which he did not seem to anticipate—his brother was to invest what money he had in the syndicate shares. The letter rescued from the waste-basket was an invitation to dine with General Townsend at the Savoy on the preceding Sunday—doubtless a bait, sent for the purpose of ascertaining if Archibald Hazlett was to be in town that weekend.

They were slight enough, these presumptive links, but they told a long story to Baines. That General Townsend was a swindler, and the gold-mine worthless, that Stephen Hazlett had discovered as much, and written home to that effect to his brother, that the general had killed Archibald Hazlett to get possession of the fatal letter, and that the expert was held a prisoner out in New Mexico—such was the detective's clever and correct deduction, proved by after events. His opinion had been strengthened, it may be added, by the fact that the description of the man who had been seen leaving Fig Tree Court on the morning of the murder fitted General Townsend in several particulars.

THE END.

(Continued from page 14.)

it would be pretty ghastly if all you chaps were accused of ungentlemanliness. You've got to be on your best manners, and obey all orders. Then, if there's any trouble, it'll be her doing—not yours."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the stuff, Fenny!"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "What ho! In other words, old beans, it seems to me that's it's distinctly up to us to keep things going in the good old way, what? No bally noise, and no violence!"

"That's the whole thing in a nutshell," agreed Fenton. "I think I've said enough—I'll put you chaps on your honour, and leave it at that."

And Fenton went.

"Rats!" sneered Merrell. "I'm blessed if we're going to take any notice of that idiot. Now that we haven't got any masters we'll do as we like."

"No, we won't!" I interrupted grimly. "Don't forget that Fenton has put us on our honour. The best thing we can do is to pull Miss Trumble's leg a bit. We'll be as meek as lambs. She'll think we're so sugary that she'll be absolutely spoofed. If we have to assert ourselves, well—we'll be ready."

And the Remove agreed.

CHAPTER VI. MUDLARKING!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH stood at the Ancient House doorway, and glared into the Triangle.

"Cheerful, ain't it?" he growled, in a gruff voice.

"My dear chap, we can't always have good weather," said Pitt, coming up. "Let's hope it clears up before this afternoon."

Morning had arrived—after a comparatively peaceful ending to the evening, and a fairly normal night. The rising bell had gone in the same manner as usual and the prefects had seen that all the fellows had turned out. No slacking was allowed.

And the Remove had come down to discover that rain was pelting from the skies—a cold, pitiless rain which had converted the Triangle into a kind of shallow lake.

It had been raining all night, apparently. "No sign of it clearing up!" grunted Handforth. "A half-holiday, too! Just our rotten luck!"

"There's a match on this afternoon," said Pitt. "We're playing Redcliffe—a jolly important fixture. Of course, we shall play the game, rain or not. There's only one thing that stops football—fog!"

"Or a flooded ground!" I put in. "And, judging by appearances, Little Side will be in a fairly boggy condition by this afternoon. But as long as it's not actually flooded, it'll be all right."

The weather conditions had a rather depressing effect upon the whole school.

This was not to be wondered at. A miserable, rainy morning generally has an effect of this kind.

Most of the juniors were disappointed, too. St. Frank's had no masters—they had all gone. And the school was under the sole care of Miss Jane Trumble, with the prefects to see that her orders were carried out.

Many of the fellows had believed that it was the beginning of a kind of free and easy time—when things would go on in a sort of ragtime style, without any lessons and without any semblance of order.

The opposite was the case.

To all intents and purposes, the school was unaltered. Morning lessons started at just the same hour as ever. The Form masters were not present, to take the boys, but there were prefects substituted.

As a result, the various Forms carried on—but the prefects were by no means as hard to please as the masters. So, in this way, the fellows had a big advantage. They quite enjoyed themselves that morning.

The wet conditions outside caused them to prefer the Form rooms to anything else. For everything was cosy and warm inside—and bleak, chill and soaking outside. It was rather extraordinary that the sky should clear at dinner-time. The clerk of the weather was not generally so obliging as this.

But the fact remained. The clouds passed away, and a weak-looking wintry sun shone out from a pale sky. And the sunlight glittered on great patches of wet grass and leafless trees. Little Side was in a fearfully muddy condition. In many places there were great patches of water.

But, after inspecting the ground, I decided that football was easily possible. There was no reason why we should postpone our fixture with Redcliffe. We would have the match, and thoroughly enjoy ourselves.

Playing football in the mud isn't nearly so unpleasant as one would think. Once a fellow is really muddy, he doesn't mind how much more of it he gets. And a muddy field has the great advantage of being soft. Falls are not harmful.

Just before dinner Miss Trumble came round on a tour of inspection. She went through the various corridors; she looked into the studies, she visited the common rooms.

And everywhere she went, the fellows were as mild as milk. They greeted her with sunny, childlike smiles. She was so delighted that she could hardly find words to express herself.

And she was triumphant. Already, in this short space of time, she was proving that violence was not necessary.

The boys were only too pleased to be free from the threatening presence of the masters. Now that these tyrants had gone, the fellows were peaceful and obedient and gentlemanly.

If Miss Trumble could only have known the actual truth, she would have got a bit of a shock. The juniors seemed meek enough,

but inwardly they were boiling. They wanted to show this woman what they actually thought of her.

But Fenton had placed them on their honour—and they remembered it. They decided to give Miss Trumble no cause for complaint. If there was any trouble, it would come from her—not from them.

The afternoon was their own, anyhow. She couldn't possibly interfere with their leisure time. And as the weather had cleared up so unexpectedly, the Remove chaps were feeling quite bright and cheerful.

The Redcliffe crowd turned up rather early—only about half-an-hour after dinner in fact. Most of them were new to us. We had played Redcliffe before, but they had been making big alterations in their Junior Eleven.

There were only one or two of last term's players in the whole team. All the rest were newcomers, including the skipper. I didn't particularly like him, either. He was a big, aggressive sort of chap.

"You've got a pretty rotten ground!" said the Redcliffe captain. "It's more like a pond than a football pitch!"

"Sorry you don't like it, Pritchard," I said curtly. "I can't very well see how any ground could be in a much better condition after all this rain. It's been pouring all night, and all morning."

Pritchard laughed.

"You ought to see our ground!" he said, in a contemptuous kind of tone. "It's well looked after—that's the chief thing. Still, we're not grumbling—we'll give you a good game, in spite of the mud."

And he walked off to join the other members of his team.

"Polite sort of chap!" remarked Pitt, with a grin.

"I don't like him," I said, frowning. "I may be wrong, but I've got half an idea that he's a dirty player. He's left-back for his team, and he'd better look out if he starts any fouling."

As the prefects were all so much engaged, we got a Fifth-Former to act as referee. Phillips was the senior who officiated—a thoroughly good player, and a sportsman.

And the match started prompt on time.

It was a rather curious sort of game. The mud was so thick that it was very difficult to get up any kind of speed. And once a fellow did get on the move, he almost invariably slithered over when attempting to make a turn.

As a result we were all smothered with mud in less than ten minutes. From the spectators' point of view, it was an excellent game. There was something very attractive in seeing the footballers sliding and slithering about.

"Gadzooks!" said Archie, as he looked on from the ropes. "I mean to say, the whole thing is somewhat fearful, if you grasp the old trend! Mud-larking, what? The dear chappies might just as well have a bally bath, and done with it!"

"They're enjoying it!" grinned Owen major.

"Oh, absolutely—especially Handforth," agreed Archie.

Handforth, who was goalkeeper, was having quite a muddy time. The Redcliffe forwards were very aggressive, and on more than one occasion during the first ten minutes of play they literally rushed the defence.

Our backs played well, but the slippery mud put them off their game a bit. Anyhow, the visitors made progress. Time after time they swept down. And during a scramble in the goal-mouth Handforth went down.

The mud, just here, was about four inches deep, and Handforth fairly wallowed in it, clutching the ball tightly, so that it could not be wrested from him. And, in some miraculous kind of way, he threw it out into play.

Then, before he could get to his feet, it came whizzing back. Handforth saved—with his face.

It was a pure piece of luck. The ball struck him fairly and squarely, rebounded into play, and was cleared in the nick of time. And the game went on in mid-field.

Handforth was left isolated.

He was glad of it, for he couldn't see, his mouth was full of mud, and he was in a pretty fearful condition generally.

"What-ho!" said Archie, from the rear of the net. "Large chunks of sympathy, old lad! I mean to say, gazing at you sideways, so to speak, the effect is somewhat poisonous!"

"Gug-gug-guggg!" said Handforth thickly.

He was black from head to foot. Mud clung to him in sticky, greasy masses. Great blobs of it hung from his hands, and his face had been fully plastered by the ball.

"By George!" gasped the goalie, at last. "I may be muddy, but the bounders didn't get the ball into the net, did they?"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Good man! In fact, dashed good man! I mean to say, you're a bally hero! If I did anything like that I should have to rest for about seventy-three years to restore the old tissues!"

"Better look out, Handy—they're coming again!" warned somebody.

Handforth was ready. He had kept his goal intact so far, and he had no intention of letting the ball pass now. But, although he meant well, fate was against him.

The Redcliffe forwards were on the move again.

Their outside-left was on the run, dribbling the leather with extreme dexterity, considering the bad condition of the ground. And the inside forwards were placed in favourable positions to take advantage of any centre kick.

Over came the ball, and it dropped just in front of the Redcliffe inside-right. He

was on it in a moment. But one of the St. Frank's backs was ready. He raced up, and took the ball neatly from the opponent's toe.

Then, just before he could clear, another Redcliffe forward hooked his foot round. The St. Frank's junior collapsed with a gasp of pain. It was a deliberate foul, but the referee didn't spot it, as his line of vision was impeded.

Slam!

From close range the Redcliffe forward shot for goal. It was a stinging kick, and Handforth valiantly attempted to save. He reached the ball, but it was so slippery that it eluded his grasp.

"Goal!" roared the visitors.

"Foul—foul!"

"Send that cad off the field, Phillips!"

"That wasn't a goal; it was scored after a foul!"

Phillips pointed to the centre of the field.

"I say, Phillips—" began Pitt, running up,

"It was a goal all right, so don't grumble!" interrupted Phillips. "I didn't see any foul. I'm not favouring either side. If any player starts any dirty business I'll soon pull him up!"

Phillips acted in good faith, but there was no doubt that he had made a blunder. And it had cost us a goal.

The game went on, and the Redcliffe juniors entered into the spirit of the thing with more energy than ever.

Apparently, they believed that they had a simple referee to deal with. For the game had only been going about five minutes more when Reginald Pitt met with a really nasty mishap.

He had got command of the leather, and was streaking down the touchline with all his usual vim and vigour. The ball was at his feet, and he viewed with complacency the rushing approach of Pritchard, the Redcliffe skipper.

The back came dashing up, and Pitt simply stopped dead, dodged, and then went on.

He tricked Pritchard with supreme ease. And a roar went up from the spectators.

"Centre—centre!"

"Good old Pitt!"

"Go it!"

"Now's the chance to score!"

Reginald Pitt was just preparing to deliver one of his famous centres. Many and many a goal had the St. Frank's inside forwards scored from such placings. And I was just ready to receive the leather when it came across.

But Pritchard was not having any.

He was enraged by Pitt's clever manoeuvre, and in a flash he was round. He raced after Reggie, but found it impossible to rob him of the ball. And he allowed himself to foul.

Out went his foot, and it caught Pitt a nasty, jarring blow on the ankle. Reggie went down with a stifled groan, and lay flat in the mud.

"Foul!"

"Oh, you dirty coward!"

The whistle went shrilly, and Phillips came running across. His brow was as black as thunder.

"I've a good mind to send you off the field, you young blackguard!" he exclaimed, glaring at Pritchard. "Another foul of that kind, and you'll go!"

"It was an accident!" said the Redcliffe captain.

Phillips turned his back, and placed the ball for a free kick. It was dangerously close to the penalty area. Reggie Pitt was over the touch-line by this time. He was surrounded by a group of juniors, who were supporting him. He limped badly, and was in pain.

"The cad!" he muttered. "He deliberately kicked me!"

"Yes, and there'd have been a goal, too!" declared Hubbard.

They all looked up as the whistle blew. Sir Montie took the kick, and he placed the ball beautifully. It descended right at my foot, and I was on it in a flash, before the Redcliffe backs could get near.

Crash!

I sent the leather hurtling into the goal. The visiting custodian had no chance. But immediately after the goal was scored I was sent flying. Whether it was an accident or whether a piece of pure spite I couldn't tell. In the confusion nobody else noticed it.

"Goal!"

"Good old Nipper!"

The score was now level, and the game proceeded. But we were getting wary of the Redcliffe footballers. Upon the whole, they were a dirty crowd, and it seemed that the rest of the game would be exciting.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THUNDERBOLT!



HALF-TIME arrived, and the scores were still the same.

We were glad of the rest, too. There were many minor injuries to see to. Some of the fellows were bruised and scratched, and all, of course, were black with mud. We didn't mind the mud, but we did mind the injuries.

For nearly all of them had been caused by questionable play on the part of our opponents. And when play recommenced the Redcliffe juniors continued exactly the same tactics.

In nearly every case they played the man instead of the ball. They were utterly unscrupulous—tripping, charging, and performing all sorts of tricks which were totally opposed to the sporting nature of the game.

As a result, they scored again after fifteen minutes. Handforth was in the wars once

more. The goal resulted from a mix-up between the posts. Handforth was ready and alert. He gathered up a feeble shot, and was about to throw it out when two of the Redcliffe forwards charged him.

They kicked recklessly. A boot struck Handforth on the wrist, and he doubled up. The next moment he dropped the ball, mainly owing to the pain which shot up his arm.

The leather was literally pushed into the net, and Handforth lay there, roaring. It was a goal right enough, but most unfairly obtained. Phillips was almost on the point of disallowing it.

But he was a St. Frank's fellow, and he didn't want to show any favouritism.

"Yes, it was a goal all right," he said gruffly. "I don't think Handforth was fouled—accidents like that can always happen."

"Call yourself a referee?" roared Handforth furiously. "These rotters kicked me—"

"That's enough," said Phillips. "We can't waste time."

Play went on once more, and Handforth examined his wrist, with a glare. It was badly grazed, and blood was oozing out amongst the mud. And there was another scratch on his face.

He didn't know how he had obtained this injury, but it was there. He looked a pretty picture, with blood trickling down his face and down his hand. But he didn't care—he would never give in. And he was determined that no further goals should be scored.

As it happened, the Redcliffe forwards didn't send in another decent shot. They had no opportunity, for they were hemmed in their own half of the field. By this time we knew their game, and dealt with it accordingly.

Dirty play never pays in the long run, and this was no exception to the rule. Long before the whistle blew we had obtained three more goals, for the Redcliffe defence went to pieces.

They resorted to foul after foul—and this, indeed, was one reason for their collapse. Free kicks were continually awarded against them, including a penalty kick—which, by the way, wasn't converted.

Anyhow, the game ended with full and complete honours for the Remove. Throughout the match they had played a consistently clean game, and had won by a big margin, in spite of all the unsportsmanlike play of the visiting team.

We didn't speak to the Redcliffe fellows afterwards.

We let them go to their dressing-room, in the pavilion, and decided that we would go straight indoors. The Redcliffe crowd could take themselves off as soon as they liked.

"Well, we whacked 'em, anyway!" said Pitt, as he limped along with us. "This ankle of mine is hurting like the dickens!"

I shall have to get Mrs. Poulter to shove a bandage on it."

"What about me?" demanded Handforth gruffly.

"You've done fine, old son!" I said approvingly. "If the visitors had played the right game they wouldn't have beaten you at all!"

"The cads!"

"They deserve to be kicked!"

"Yes; instead of that they kick us!" said Edward Oswald. "I'm aching from head to foot! Any other fellow would have chucked it up long ago! It's a wonder I'm able to walk!"

Handforth was certainly knocked about.

His arm was in a bad state. The blood had been pouring down, and he had taken no care to stop it. It had dried up now, mixed with the mud, and the effect was not pleasant to look upon. His face, also, was smeared with gore. And the mud clung to him in masses.

"But I'm not going to put up with it!" he went on. "I've decided what to do!"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"You can say what you like, but my mind's made up!" snapped Handy. "As soon as I've changed I'm going to fight those Redcliffe cads!"

"Now, look here——"

"I'm going to fight them!" snorted Handforth. "Every giddy one! I'll take Pritchard first, and wipe him out. Then I'll run through the others! By the time they go home they'll have a fine collection of fat noses and thick ears!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Always on the offensive!"

"Yes, but it won't do!" I said firmly.

"Won't do?" shouted Handforth.

"No!"

"I tell you, I'm going to fight the lot

"You won't have a chance because we'll keep you indoors!" I broke in. "For goodness' sake have a bit of sense, Handy. These Redcliffe cads have played a dirty game. We'll show our feelings by ignoring 'em. It's the best thing to do. Why, I shouldn't think you'd soil your hands by touching them!"

Handforth grunted.

"You can't put me off like that!" he growled. "I've made up my mind, and nothing is going to alter it——"

"Hallo!" broke in Tommy Watson. "Look out! Here comes Joan of Arc!"

"Eh?"

Watson nodded his head, and we all saw that Miss Trumble had just emerged from the Ancient House and was crossing the Triangle. The Remove Eleven, at the same moment, had entered the Triangle from the playing fields.

I'll admit we looked a sorry collection. Smothered with mud, limping, with several of us showing traces of gore, we were certainly not in a presentable condition.

But, after all, what else could one expect

after a match on such a muddy field? We walked on, rather curious to see what Miss Trumble would look like as we passed her.

But she had halted, and was standing in the middle of the Triangle, waiting for us to come up. And upon her face there was an expression of utter horror. She looked terribly shocked.

"Boys—my dear children!" she exclaimed frantically. "Whatever have you been doing? What is the meaning of this terrible, terrible plight? Have you met with some accident?"

The Remove Eleven grinned.

"It's all right, ma'am—only football!" I said calmly.

"Football!" echoed Miss Trumble. "And—and is this the result of playing a game of football?"

"Only a little mud, you know," said Pitt.

"But—but you are in a terrible condition, my little men!" exclaimed Miss Trumble, holding up her hands with renewed horror. "You are limping—you are injured! Some of you are even bleeding!"

"After all, it's nothing to be worried about, ma'am," said Jack Grey. "We generally get like this on a muddy day. It soon comes off, and you won't be able to recognise us after we've changed."

Miss Trumble placed a hand to her heart.

"I cannot explain how shocked I am!" she exclaimed. "I always imagined football to be a quiet, pleasant game. But this is a fearful eye-opener! I had no idea! It seems that football is really a most dreadful scramble in the mud! I cannot allow it!"

I smiled.

"There's nothing to worry about, Miss Trumble," I said lightly. "On another day we shan't get into a state like this—"

"You certainly will not!" interrupted Miss Trumble firmly. "Now that I have seen with my own eyes I can realise how it is that so many people are opposed to football! It is a rough, brutal game—a game fit only for hooligans!"

"Here, steady on!" said De Valerie gruffly.

"Fit only for hooligans!" repeated Miss Trumble firmly. "I shall certainly not allow it to be played any more at this school! Henceforward, football will be strictly forbidden!"

The Remove Eleven was electrified.

"Forbidden!" I shouted. "Look here, Miss Trumble. That's impossible! We've got two fixtures for next week, and the First Eleven are playing on Saturday. Football's a big thing at St. Frank's—"

"Silence, child!" demanded Miss Trumble. "This one sight is sufficient for me! I shall ban football absolutely and completely. It is not a game—it is a terrible exhibition of ruffianism! Not another game shall be played at St. Frank's! I am firm—my mind is made up!"

"Is that final, ma'am?" asked Pitt. "Do you really mean it?"

"Yes, indeed!" retorted Miss Trumble.



And then, out in the open space, a "crocodile" was going round and round, led by Miss Jane Trumble.

"Football will never be played again at St. Frank's! Never!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDIGNATION MEETING.



"Of course, we can't stand it!" said Cecil De Valerie. "That goes without saying. Football is absolutely a part of life!"

"We couldn't exist at St. Frank's without it," agreed Pitt. "Football in the winter, and cricket in the summer—that's the order! And this—this female spoil-sport comes along and puts up the ban!"

"She's mad!"

"Absolutely off her rocker!"

"Well, she started it, anyway," I declared grimly. "We've kept our word to Fenton. We told him we wouldn't jib, but I'm hanged if I'll be responsible for the fellows now. If she comes along and forbids football, there's nothing but trouble to be expected."

Handforth snorted.

"And she's stopped it because it's a rough game!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Rough! Did you ever hear such rot? Football's as gentle as croquet! Does she think we're made of sugar candy?"

"It seems like it," I replied. "In a way, I'm not absolutely surprised that she should take such a view. She doesn't believe in

anything vigorous. Look how she stopped the Head when he was flogging Kenmore. And we certainly did look a bit mauled about when she met us in the Triangle."

We were all in the dormitory now, and we had just finished changing. The result was surprising. We looked clean, fresh, and healthily flushed. The game had done us a world of good.

Handforth's injuries were only slight after all. After a thorough wash, and the application of two small portions of court plaster, there was practically nothing to tell that he had been hurt.

Miss Trumble had seen us under the worst possible conditions. And, on the spur of the moment, she had banned football for good! Knowing her as we did, we were quite certain it would be worse than useless to make any protest.

And this was not merely a question that affected the Remove.

Every Form in the school was affected.

The whole school played football—the fags, the Remove, the Fifth, and the Sixth. In the Sixth, indeed, football was a kind of fetish. The First Eleven had been doing particularly well this year, too—they had covered themselves with glory by winning every match, home and away.

In a big public school like St. Frank's, junior football is considered, by the seniors, to be a matter of very small importance. But the doings of the First Eleven are followed with a kind of sacred interest.

And football was barred!

Miss Trumble had delivered a thunderbolt. At first, the thing was looked upon as a joke. The seniors positively refused to believe a word about it. They declared that we were a set of young asses to believe such tosh.

Then a notice appeared upon the board in the lobby, and a similar one was pinned up in the College House lobby at the same time. It was a brief order, signed by Miss Trumble, to the effect that football in every shape and form was no longer permitted. It was forbidden by the Board of Governors!

Then the trouble started.

The whole school was in a ferment. I'm not going to say much about what happened among the seniors. But I can say at once that the Upper School was in the biggest twitter imaginable.

The Remove absolutely let itself go.

Tea wasn't even thought of. A great indignation meeting was called on the spot. The fellows rushed into the lecture hall, took possession of it, and speeches were going on in about twenty places at once.

No prefects came along to stop the uproar.

The prefects, as a matter of fact, were taking part in the Sixth Form meetings. They completely forgot their normal duties in the stress of the acute situation. And the Remove meeting continued.

From the platform I addressed the whole crowd.

"Look here, you chaps, it's no good yelling like this!" I shouted. "Let's conduct this meeting in a proper way."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"I'll make a speech!" roared Handforth.

"I'll show you—"

"Dry up, Handy; let Nipper do the talking!"

"Rats! I've got a lot to say—"

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to say it afterwards, old man!" I interrupted.

"This speech of mine's not going to be a long one. I don't want to monopolise the meeting. It won't take me long to get my bit over."

"Oh, all right!" growled Handforth.

"Go ahead!"

"For years—ever since the Head himself can remember—football has been a kind of institution at St. Frank's," I shouted seriously. "Football is the grandest winter game that's ever been invented—"

"Hear, hear!"

"When football is played properly, it's clean and healthy and good for the whole body!" I went on. "It's one of the best games in the world! And yet the Lady Head calmly comes along and stops it!"

"Shame!"

"We won't stand treatment like that!"

"Never!"

"Down with spoil-sports!"

"Hurrah!"

"Steady—steady!" I shouted. "Keep your heads! All I want to say is that I'm perfectly ready to back the Remove up in any form of protest that it likes to make. We were quite willing to stand Miss Trumble as long as she kept her place. But we're not going to have her interfering with the school games. We'll jib at that!"

"Rather!"

"We'll do something to show her that she doesn't understand the nature of her job!" I went on. "It's all very well to take charge of a boys' school and then—"

"Look here, am I going to get a look in or not?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"Yes, you can come up here now," I retorted. "There's nothing more I want to say at the moment. All I ask is that you chaps should keep your heads. There's no sense in getting wildly excited. Football may be banned, but that doesn't mean to say that football won't be played!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll play, ban or no ban!"

"Rather!"

Handforth jumped up and waved his arms about. He was very excited, and he quite overlooked the fact that other fellows were standing near by. One of his huge fists caught Solomon Levi and sent the Jewish junior whirling off the platform. Another fist smacked De Valerie in the mouth.

"Listen to me!" roared Handforth.

"You—you dangerous maniac!" gasped De Valerie. "Keep your silly hands to yourself!"

"By my life!" said Solomon Levi, picking himself up. "You—you lozer! You clumsy —"

"I haven't got time to waste on your troubles!" snapped Handforth. "If you don't want to get biffed you shouldn't stand in the way! I've got an idea! I've got a first-class scheme!"

"Oh, help!"

"Can't somebody smother him, or something?"

"My idea is to make Miss Trumble play football herself!" shouted Handforth. "The only reason she bans the game is because she doesn't understand it! It's simply a matter of ignorance! As soon as she finds out what football really is she'll change! We've got to make her play!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How?" asked Pitt pointedly.

"How?" snorted Handforth. "What's that got to do with it?"

"A lot, I should imagine," said Pitt. "It's one thing to say that Miss Trumble's got to play, and it's another thing to get her on the job!"

"You're quibbling!" shouted Handforth. "But if you haven't got any brains, I'll tell you! The best way will be to go to Miss Trumble's study in a body, grab her, and cart her out to Little Side! Then we'll make her play football, whether she likes it or not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if we do that, I suppose she'll remove the ban?" asked Church sarcastically. "We've got to use violence, smother her with mud, and goodness knows what else, and then she'll come round?"

"Yes!" roared Handforth. "She must come round! Can't you fatheads understand that she'll be so struck with football that she won't be able to resist it?"

"There's no doubt she'll be struck with the football all right!" agreed Pitt. "But I don't think she'll appreciate it, old man. The best thing you can do with that idea is to take it away and bore holes through it!"

Handforth glared.

"You—you unappreciative rotters!" he snorted bitterly. "It's always the same! Whenever I get an idea you squash it—just because you're jealous! Do you call yourselves sportsmen?"

There was a deep hush in the lecture hall. Handforth pulled himself together and calmed down a bit. At last he was beginning to get his audience into ship-shape. Unfortunately, he was labouring under a little delusion. He thought the hush was for him.

But, as a matter of fact, Miss Trumble had just appeared at the rear—and Handforth didn't know it. She was advancing slowly, with an expression which was not exactly pleasant.

Still Handforth was unaware of her entrance. This was partly owing to the fact that the back of the hall was rather dull,

for the lights had not been turned on in that section.

"Well, I'm glad to find you've got the decency to give me a fair hearing!" said Handforth sourly. "What I've got to say —"

"Shush, you ass!" hissed Church, in a fierce whisper.

"And I don't want any interruptions!" went on Handforth.

"Miss Trumble's here, you babbling fat-head!" breathed Pitt.

"Of course she's here—don't I know she's here?" snorted Handforth. "My hat! That's what all the trouble's about! Miss Trumble's here, and she's been messing the whole regulations to bits! I don't want to be insulting, but I think Miss Trumble ought to be shoved in a padded cell at Colney Hatch!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady Head. "Indeed!"

Handforth felt a curious sensation down the back of his spine. There was no mistaking that voice. For one hopeful second he tried to make himself believe that somebody was having a lark. But then the angular figure of Miss Trumble pushed forward through the crowd of juniors. Handforth stared at her in a fascinated kind of way, dumb with horror.

"I am pleased to hear an unprejudiced opinion!" exclaimed Miss Trumble acidly. "Needless to say, I am greatly shocked. I had no idea that any of you little boys could be so dreadfully common."

"Common!" repeated Handforth warmly. "How the dickens was I to know that you were listening? I'm sorry, ma'am. I didn't mean you to hear that about Colney Hatch."

"But you meant to say it behind my back?"

"Well, not absolutely," said Handforth uncomfortably. "Still, a chap is quite at liberty to think things—whatever he says!"

"You are only making things worse by your blundering attempts to justify your appalling vulgarity!" exclaimed Miss Trumble angrily. "You're an extremely rude little boy!"

"Oo's been very naughty!" came a voice from the crowd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "Who said that? I'll punch every giddy nose until I'm tired! I'll make your faces into pulp! I'll —"

"Stop! Stop at once!" shouted the horrified Miss Trumble. "It appears, my boy, that you are terribly bloodthirsty! It is so painful that I can hardly bring myself to believe you are a normal boy."

"He isn't!" said a voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"However, I shall give special attention to you when we are a little more settled down," continued the lady Head. "I am quite sure that a few serious talks will do

you a world of good. There, little man, you must not cry!"

Handforth nearly choked. He had brushed a loose hair out of one eye, and Miss Trumble had evidently been under the impression that his movement had quite a different meaning. The other juniors didn't laugh.

They were learning to detest Miss Trumble more and more. Her action in stopping all football had completely destroyed the humorous side of the question. The whole matter was serious now.

The juniors were just wondering what would happen when Miss Trumble looked round, and frowned.

"This is quite wrong—quite wrong!" she exclaimed. "You're all excited, children, and excitement is not good for the young. I think matters will be greatly improved if we go for a little walk!"

"A walk!"

"Not likely!"

"Therefore, you will form into a double line!" shouted Miss Trumble shrilly. "You will leave this hall in twos, and follow me out into the playground."

"The playground!" gasped Pitt. "I suppose you mean the Triangle, ma'am?"

"No—the playground!" replied Miss Trumble curtly.

CHAPTER IX.

GETTING UNBEARABLE!



"GADZOOKS, and all that sort of thing!" Archie Glenthorne was startled.

He had just strolled out of the the lobby. For the past hour or so he had been indulging in forty of the best in his own study. Archie was a great believer in sleep at all times.

The matters which were concerning the Remove so much did not particularly interest him. Football, after all, was quite outside his own province.

His interest in football merely consisted of watching a game now and then. And, even so, he would much prefer a quiet lounge in the study. Archie was not an energetic youth.

At the present moment he was attired with all his usual elegance, his monocle was jammed into his eye, and he was bent upon strolling to the village. It was quite early in the evening, and Archie wanted to make one or two purchases.

As a rule, he entrusted Phipps with little matters of this kind. But, as he had explained to the valet, he felt that a little walk would brace him up somewhat, and improve the old circ!"

And so Archie was just going to dash about. His idea of dashing was to stroll to the village at about two miles an hour. But before he had really started on the journey, he received a shock which brought him up standing.

"I mean to say!" he ejaculated. "What ho! What ho! Dash it all, what ho again! This is simply wondrous, as you might say. Do my eyes deceive me, or is it absolutely so?"

He adjusted his eyeglass again, and stared.

The Triangle was very dim and chilly. But the lights from many windows shone out, causing brilliant patches here and there.

And there, out in the open space, a "crocodile" was going round and round, led by Miss Jane Trumble.

In other words, the Remove was being marched round the Triangle by the new lady Head—in a double column. It was snaking its way round the trees in regular formation. Now and again, Miss Trumble would give some instructions.

As everybody knows, a "crocodile" is one of those long lines of school children—generally girls—which one frequently sees marching along a street. But this form of exercise was essentially suitable to an infants' school.

For the St. Frank's fellows to be marched round the Triangle in such a fashion was not only humiliating, but fearful to contemplate.

And Miss Trumble appeared to think that it was quite in order—quite the right thing to be done.

At first about half the Remove had been inclined to jib. But there was something so compelling in her tone that the juniors could do nothing else but obey. Miss Trumble was a very difficult person to defy.

And there, round and round the Triangle, the Remove went—with Archie Glenthorne looking on in a state of bewilderment.

"Well, I mean to say!" he exclaimed. "It appears that the lads of the village are going through a somewhat poisonous experience! Large chunks of sorrow well up into the old breast! That is to say, I feel dashed rotten about it! It appears that Archie is escaping the jolly old ordeal!"

But Archie wasn't to escape for long.

It suddenly struck him that his best move would be to retire—gracefully and sedately. In any case, it was quite impossible to venture out into the Triangle, for he would certainly be spotted. So the genial ass of St. Frank's commenced a masterly retreat.

Unfortunately, he had left it until too late.

Miss Trumble caught sight of him, and her lips closed tightly.

"Halt!" she commanded. "Children, you will all remain quite still. It seems that one of your playmates is anxious to join us!"

Miss Trumble turned, and walked towards the Ancient House steps. And the Remove conversed in low, fierce, sulphurous tones. They were feeling very near to boiling point.

"Look here, are we going to stand this any longer?" hissed Handforth.

"Dry up! we've got to!"

"Oh, have we?" snorted Handforth.
 "We ain't kids! Fancy being marched round the giddy Triangle——"

"You mean the playground!" grinned Pitt.

"The Triangle!" roared Handforth thickly. "Do you think I'm going to call it the playground? St. Frank's isn't a giddy kindergarten!"

"He's talking German!" said Church, shocked.

"You—you babbling worm!" snorted Handforth. "Just you wait until I get you in Study D! I'll slaughter you!"

"Now, now, little man!" said De Valerie, shaking a finger at the enraged Handforth. "You mustn't say nasty things to your playmates!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"I've had enough of this!" he hooted. "I'm fed up! Why, by George, I'd rather be expelled than stand this rot any more! It's—it's enough to make a chap go off his rocker!"

"That would be rather difficult in your case!" said Reggie. "Once a chap's off, he can't go off again!"

Biff!

Handforth, exasperated to the point of violence, struck out wildly. "Somehow or other, it was nearly always Church or McClure who suffered. In this case, Pitt just managed to dodge, leaving McClure exposed. The latter went to the ground with a gasp, and a fearful squelch.

Sitting in a muddy puddle is by no means pleasant!

"You—you dangerous ass!" howled McClure wildly.

"Sorry, old man—that was meant for Pitt!" said Handforth. "But I'm not going to put up with this nonsense——"

"Steady, Handy!" I put in. "It's all very well to jib, but this is hardly the time, and certainly not the place."

"What do you mean?"

"Before we take any action, we want to get all our plans cut and dried," I whispered. "It's no good doing anything hasty. We've got to stick it, and the best thing is to stick it meekly."

"I don't see that——"

"Oh, you chump!" I growled. "Can't you see that we shall have an advantage if we give Miss Trumble the impression that we're mild and milky? She won't dream of any activity, and she'll be unprepared."

Handforth looked eager.

"Then you mean to do something?" he asked.

"Very likely," I replied guardedly.

"Very likely?"

"Well, it all depends," I said. "If things get to a certain pitch, we shall undoubtedly take action. But any action we do take must be well considered and fully thought out."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Pitt. "That's the advice of a wise general! If we revolted now, it would be absolute madness, simply

because we've got nothing prepared. The only thing is to obey!"

"You're right!" said Bob Christine. "Our game is to wait—do as we're told, and wait! It goes against the grain, and it makes our blood boil, but there's nothing else for it."

I was very glad that practically all the fellows were in agreement. Even Handforth, the most impulsive fellow in the Remove, was beginning to see it now. On the very face of it, we should ask for trouble if we took independent action against Miss Trumble."

Such a thing would be futile.

And not only futile, but really disastrous. To act without any previous arrangements would be to get the whole school into a state of hopeless confusion. But if we pretended to accept the position, we should have time to make plans, time to gather our forces together, and prepare a revolt.

It was not a very nice word, but it certainly sent a thrill through me. A revolt—a rebellion—a barring-out!

Was it possible that Miss Trumble's advent at St. Frank's was to lead to such developments? I didn't know, and at such an early stage it was impossible to guess. But there were certain elements in the whole situation which made me wonder.

And while I was standing there in the Triangle, thinking these startling thoughts. Miss Trumble herself was at the bottom of the Ancient House steps, holding a rather difficult conversation with Archie Glen thorpe. The latter had been called back just as he was about to disappear. He had realised the hopelessness of getting away. So, turning, he politely raised his hat and bowed.

"Greetings, old bird!" he observed. "Gadzooks! I—I should say, greetings, fair lady! Pray pardon me——"

"It is rude of you to talk before you are spoken to, little man!" said Miss Trumble kindly. "I am pleased to see that you are different from the other children. You are not so rough or careless."

Archie beamed.

"Absolutely not!" he agreed. "But, I mean to say, rather ridic.—what? That is, children, don't you know! Somewhat savouring of the bally old insult, in a way of speaking."

The lady looked surprised.

"You talk in an extraordinary way, my child!" she exclaimed.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Meaning, of course, absolutely not! Extraordinary—what? I mean, I'm simply reeling forth a few quantities of the good old King's English! But, to refer to the previous sub. About the chappies. Some of them, of course, are blighters of the first quality! But there are others—many of them!"

"I do not know what you are talking about, boy!" interrupted Miss Trumble sharply. "Indeed, I hardly think you know what you are talking about yourself! I almost begin to suspect that you are mentally deficient!"

Archie's monocle dropped out of his eye.

"Well, that, so to speak, is somewhat dashed fearful, and so forth!" he ejaculated indignantly. "The insult direct, and what not! Mentally defish? Kindly allow me to point out, old onion, that——"

"What did you call me?" demanded Miss Trumble.

"Sorrow—sorrow!" said Archie hastily. "A slip, dear one—an absolute slip! The fact is, old bean, I'm getting slightly confused. I think it must be your face, don't you know. It rather puts a chappie off his stroke!"

"You silly, absurd boy!" snapped the lady. "You will come down at once, and join your schoolmates at exercise! After that I intend to send every one of you to bed. There shall be no more disturbances this evening!"

"But, dash it all!" said Archie. "I mean to say! To bed—what? Rather frightfully early, isn't it? I mean, about seven o'clock! What about the jolly old supper?"

"There shall be no supper for naughty children!" retorted Miss Trumble.

And, to the horror of the Remove, she kept to her word.

After another fifteen minutes of the hateful exercise, Miss Trumble marched all the juniors indoors, and led them upstairs into the dormitory. She stood at the door while everybody filed inside. Then she closed the door, and locked it.

The storm broke on the second.

"Sent to bed—supperless!" gasped Reggie Pitt. "Can you beat it?"

"It's—it's monstrous!" said Tommy Watson indignantly.

"I—I shall write to my pater about it!" wailed Fatty Little. "She's starving us! Great doughnuts! We sha'n't live until the morning! I haven't had any tea yet, and if I go to bed without supper——"

"There are worse troubles than grub, Fatty!" I put in grimly. "It's no good jibbing. We've got to stand it! Just think what would happen if we revolted against Miss Trumble's authority now?"

"It would bring her to her senses!" snorted Handforth.

"Would it?" I said. "I don't think so! Simply because we should revolt without any preparations; we should be beaten within two hours. No, we've got to sit tight and bear everything."

"And plan something in the meantime?" suggested Somerton.

"Exactly," I said. "That's the very idea."

But it went against the grain. This humiliation was worse than anything else. To be sent to bed in the middle of the evening like so many naughty infants! It was galling in the extreme.

And then Morrow of the Sixth arrived. He didn't grin, and he wasn't facetious. In fact, he was full of sympathy, and promised to smuggle us up some grub, if he could possibly manage it.

It was so decent of him that we felt rather better. And Morrow advised us to take things quietly.

"You needn't worry, kids!" he said, as he prepared to depart. "You can take it from me that this order of things won't last long!"

"We'll see to that!" declared Handforth firmly.

"No, you won't!" retorted Morrow. "We're not going to have any rebelling business; there's no need for it. Miss Trumble has bitten off more than she can chew."

"I wish I had!" murmured Fatty Little plaintively.

"I'm speaking metaphorically, you fat young ass!" growled Morrow. "All you youngsters must have a little patience. I don't think Miss Trumble will last another day. She'll have to get the masters back, after admitting defeat. So take the advice of your big uncle, and turn in!"

It was, after all, an excellent suggestion. And ten minutes later the entire Remove was in bed.

We should not have dropped off to sleep so easily if we had known what the morrow was to bring!

CHAPTER X.

THE BIGGEST SHOCK OF ALL!



MORNING dawned dull and cheerless.

But the rising bell went as usual, and the fellows turned out as usual. There was nothing else to be done. When we all got down, however, we found that there was a little excitement afoot.

There were notices up on the boards instructing the whole school to assemble in Big Hall half an hour after breakfast. There was no reason given for this command, which was signed by Miss Trumble.

But the juniors were full of surmises.

"You can take it from me, my sons, that everything will be all right!" declared De Valerie. "The whole thing's as clear as daylight!"

Handforth sniffed.

"Daylight isn't clear on a foggy morning," he said tartly. "And we're in a bit of a fog, I can tell you!"

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "Look here, we're all ordered to assemble in Big Hall—not only the Remove, but the whole school. What does it mean?"

"Goodness only knows!"

"It means that Miss Trumble has had a bad night!" said De Valerie. "She's been thinking over things, and she's come to the conclusion that the job's bigger than she can undertake. That's the size of it. She means to tell the whole school that the masters are coming back."

"By jingo, it looks like it!"

"Let's hope so, anyway."

The idea grew in strength, and long before breakfast the majority of the fellows were firmly of the opinion that the school would soon be running in its normal way.

And a few of the more adventurous spirits were rather disappointed. They had been hoping, in their innermost hearts, that some big trouble was coming, and they rather liked the prospect of it.

The discussion went on, but nobody could say with any definite truth what the meeting had been called for.

"All this jaw is useless," I pointed out. "I expect you're all wrong; people generally are when they start guessing. The best thing is to wait until Miss Trumble makes her speech."

"Hear, hear!"

And we did wait, since there was nothing else to do. Very soon after breakfast the fellows began to collect in Big Hall. They were not usually so keen to obey a summons of this nature. But just now they were filled with curiosity, and were impatient to learn the truth.

And at length the whole school was present, including the prefects. Big Hall was crowded, and filled with a low murmur of voices. There was a kind of suppressed excitement in the air.

Everybody had an idea that Miss Trumble was about to give in. And the school gloated in the very thought. More than anything else, they wanted to see the last of this angular lady.

And then came a hush.

The door at the rear of the platform had opened. Miss Trumble emerged, looking just as firm and business-like as ever. There was nothing in her attitude to indicate that she was on the point of surrender.

She looked out over the crowded hall, and nodded.

"Good morning, children—good morning!" she exclaimed, with a smile. "I am glad to see that you are all so obedient and quiet. I have news for you—news which will come as a pleasant surprise, I am sure."

She paused, and the school was silent.

"As you know, your teachers acted in the most outrageous manner yesterday," continued Miss Trumble. "Without any pro-



"These, children, are your new teachers," exclaimed Miss Trumble, blandly. And St. Frank's gave one gasp—one horrified gasp.

vocation, they resigned, and left the school in a body."

"We hope they're coming back, ma'am!"

"Hear, hear!"

Miss Trumble frowned.

"No, indeed!" she exclaimed sharply.

"Your teachers are not coming back. They are impertinent, and I would not allow them to step inside this school again! I have engaged other teachers."

"Oh!"

"Other teachers!"

Everybody became alert, and a low murmur went through the school. Miss Trumble looked pleased. She had created an impression already.

"Yes, children, I have been very hard at work!" she exclaimed. "In order to get these teachers down to St. Frank's at once, I was very busy with telegrams and the telephone yesterday afternoon. As a result, I am now pleased to tell you that your new teachers are all here, having arrived by the early train this morning."

And Miss Trumble, smiling, went to the door at the back of the platform and opened it.

Then it was that St. Frank's received the shock.

It was a shock which came with twenty times more force because nobody had

expected the nature of it. All the fellows anticipated the arrival of seven or eight learned gentlemen.

Instead, a number of elderly, unpleasant-looking ladies filed out upon the platform with a firm, steady tread. They came forward, and gazed out upon the school in a grim, defiant kind of way.

Miss Trumble waved to them with a smile.

"These, children, are your new teachers!" she exclaimed blandly.

And St. Frank's gave one gasp—one horrified gasp.

"Women!" muttered Pitt faintly. "Oh, help!"

"We—we've got lady teachers!" moaned Tommy Watson. "It can't be true; I must be dreaming it!"

"By George!" said Handforth wildly.

"Women teachers! It's—it's too mad for words!"

But there was no question of it, as we soon learned. For Miss Trumble informed the whole school, with an air of quiet triumph, that she was determined to make big alterations.

She did not agree with the principle of having masters to teach the boys. It was essentially a task for women, who were more kindly, who understood the little wants of children, and who would teach the lessons in a much more thorough manner.

To say that St. Frank's was shocked would be putting it very mildly indeed. It was a fearful blow. St. Frank's College—one of the most famous old public schools in the kingdom—was to be run entirely by women!

Feeling ran high, and the events of the future could not even be imagined!

THE END.

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A number of Form-mistresses, as we have seen, have already arrived at the school. Some of them, judging from the artist's impression, appear to be even more formidable than Miss Trumble. Will the boys submit tamely to this new order of things? I think not. The situation is one without precedent. It is safe to say, however, that the majority of the boys, whatever form their action will take, will remember that chivalry towards these good-intentioned, yet misguided ladies must be observed.

This, of course, renders their task of restoring the old order of things more difficult. If Nipper's scheme of combating Miss Trumble's sweeping changes is adopted, it will not be long before this fearless lady finds it necessary to retire

with her colleagues as gracefully as she can to her proper sphere. But before it can be forced home to her that her presence is not wanted at St. Frank's, there are sure to be some lively doings at the old school. Some of these happenings will be related in Next Week's entertaining story; "PETTICOAT RULE."

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