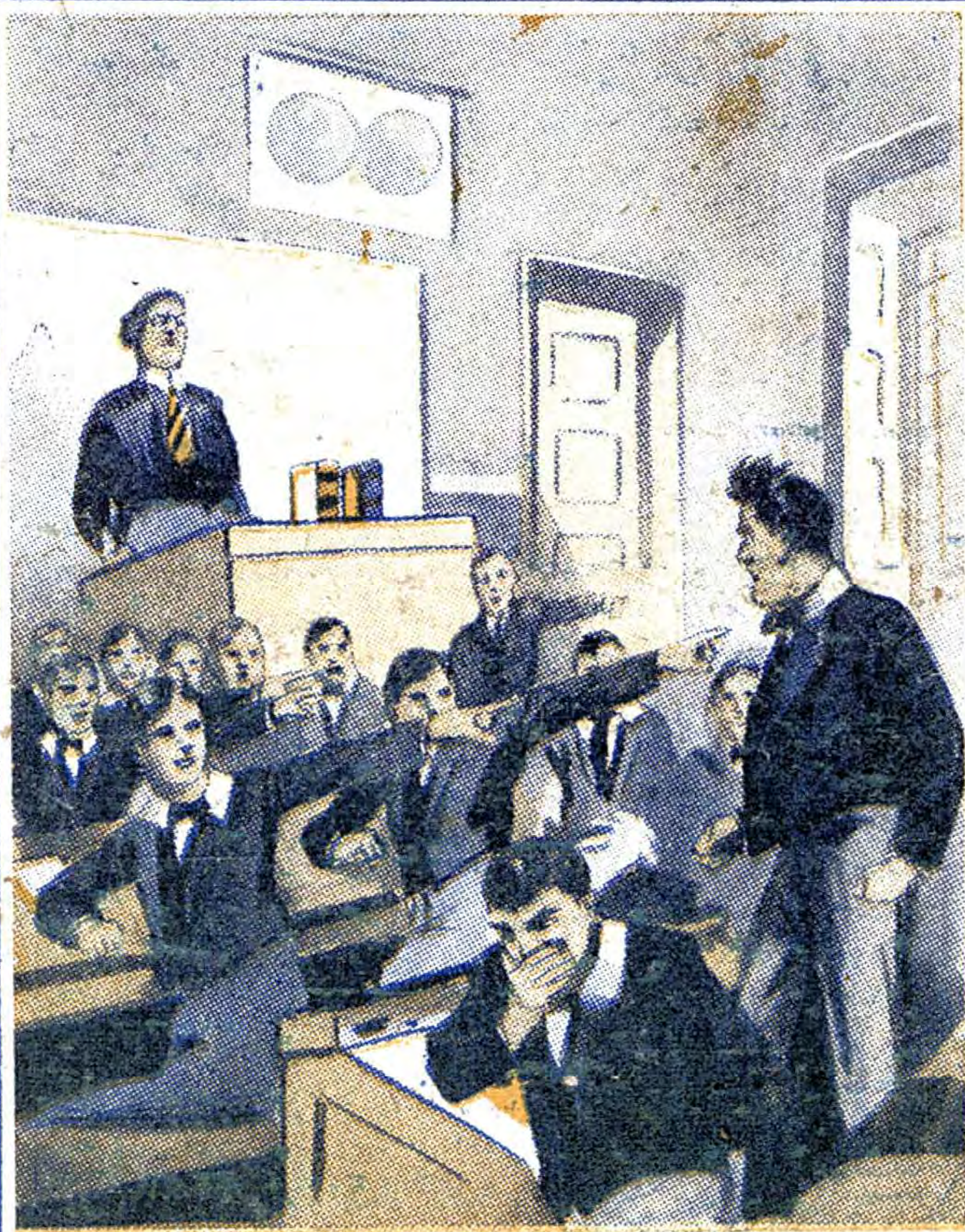


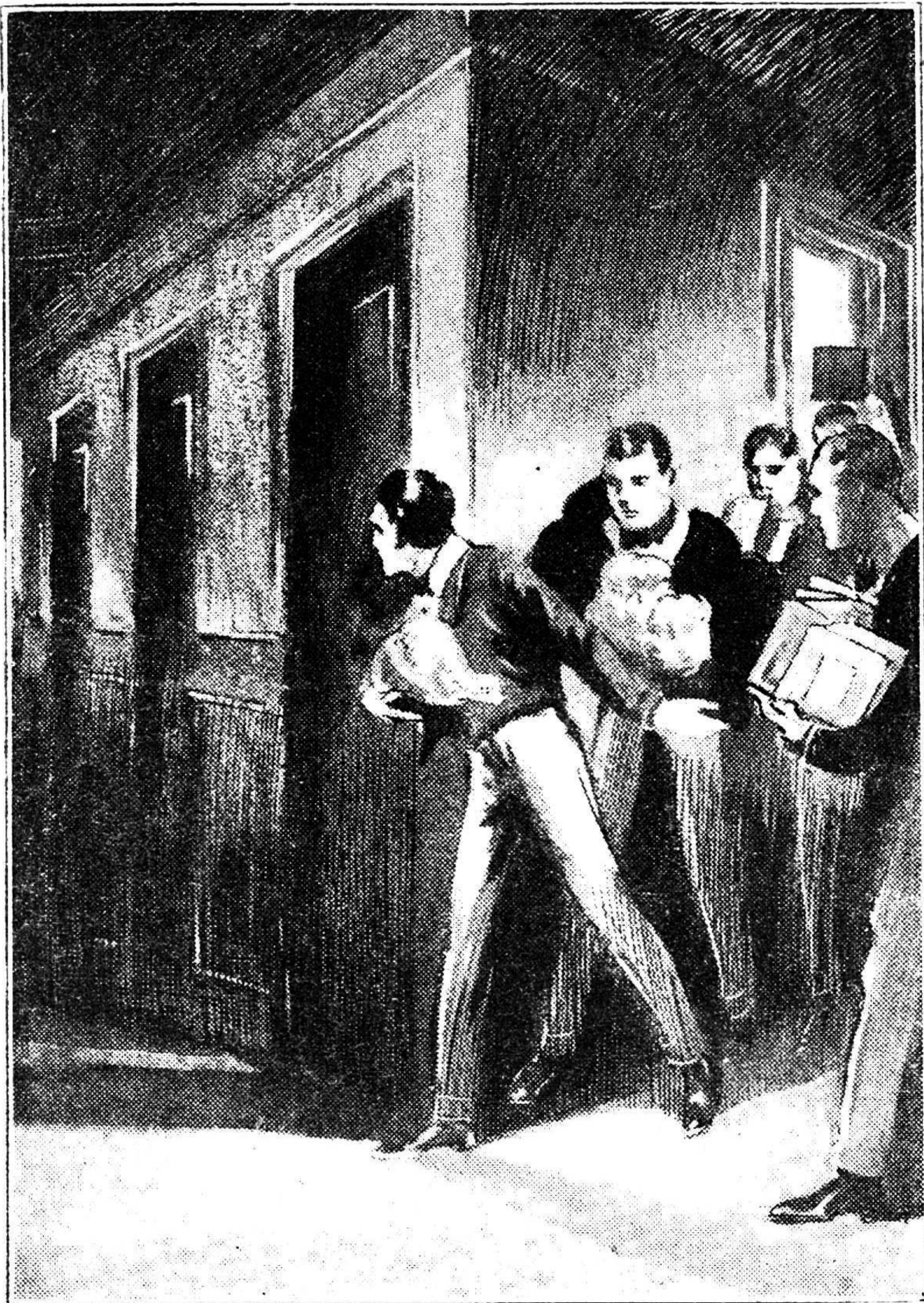
GREAT "BARRING-OUT" SERIES NOW RUNNING.

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PETTICOAT RULE!

A Novel and Amusing Story of the Latest Sensation
at St. Frank's.



And we returned laden with a cooked ham, loaves of bread, tins of sardines, half a cheese, tins of biscuits, and cakes galore. We brought enough stuff to provide the whole Ancient House section of the Remove with a regular feast.

Petticoat Rule!



"GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOL TAKEN OVER BY WOMEN!"

"MISTRESSES REPLACE MASTERS AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE!"

"NOVEL SITUATION AT A BIG PUBLIC SCHOOL!"

the most talked of woman in England. These are a few of the startling headlines which appeared in the Press, announcing to the astonished world the extraordinary events taking place at St. Frank's. Miss Trumble was rapidly becoming far she would succeed in carrying out her schemes was a doubtful matter among educationalists, and a subject for humorous speculation by others.

No one should fail to read the following story which leads up to the most exciting "Barring-Out" series we have had for a long time.

(RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER)

CHAPTER I.

THE JOKE OF THE SEASON.

EDGAR FENTON grinned.

"My dear fellows, there's no need to look as solemn as a collection of dying owls!" he remarked cheerfully. "There's nothing to worry about."

"Oh, isn't there!" growled Morrow.

"Good heavens!" added Conroy major. "I've never known matters to be in such a ghastly condition as thy are now!"

The prefects of St. Frank's were holding a conclave. Every prefect of the whole school had obeyed the summons of Fenton, the popular Captain of St. Frank's.

And now the prefects' room in the Ancient House was pretty well filled. Everybody except Fenton was looking grave and troubled.

It was morning—shortly after breakfast, in fact. Within about half an hour lessons would commence, and the very thought of the morning caused the prefects to shiver. For everything was not normal at the school, everything was topsy-turvy.

Morrow, of the Ancient House, looked astonished.

"Nothing to worry about!" he echoed, turning to Fenton. "That's a queer thing for you to say, old man! Haven't we lost all the masters, including even the Head himself?"

"We have!" agreed Fenton.

"Haven't we got a large number of females planted on us?" demanded Morrow warmly. "Ye gods! Think of it! It was bad enough for Miss Trumble to come down and take charge of the school! But now she's put the lid on things! Women teachers for all the Forms!"

"It's—it's madness!" declared Wilson.

And the other prefects agreed with great vehemence.

They were certainly concerned to a tremendous extent. And they were not concerned without reason. For St. Frank's, at present, was a school without masters.

This, in itself, was extraordinary enough—but things were even worse. The school was under the control of women—lady

teachers who had been brought down by Miss Trumble.

And the whole affair had come about in a somewhat peculiar way.

Miss Jane Trumble was the recently appointed chairman of the St. Frank's Board of Governors. Nobody exactly knew why she had been placed in this responsible position, but that, after all, was of small consequence. She was there, and that was the thing that mattered.

And Miss Trumble—a bony, angular maiden lady of about forty-five—had chanced to arrive at St. Frank's just as a public flogging was in progress. She had been so shocked that she had commanded the Head to cease on the spot. And her tone had been so aggressive, so authoritative, that the Head had taken the only course possible.

He had resigned. It had been out of the question for him to maintain his dignity before the whole school in any other way. To submit to Miss Trumble's dictation, in the presence of all the boys, would have robbed him of every vestige of self-respect. So he had resigned. And all the other masters—even including Nelson Lee himself—had resigned, too.

At the time they had believed that Miss Trumble would be brought to her senses by this action. They had confidently expected that the Lady Head would surrender without delay, and tender an apology to Dr. Stafford.

The masters received a shock.

For Miss Trumble accepted their resignations! And the masters had left the school. An uproar had followed, particularly among juniors. The whole of St. Frank's had wondered what new development would crop up.

Nobody had guessed the truth.

And this morning the shock had come. For Miss Trumble had introduced six ladies to the school—six women teachers, who were to take the places of the absent masters! In short, St. Frank's was to be run by women!

It was hardly surprising that the school was in a ferment.

Even the seniors completely lost their customary dignity, and gathered in groups, discussing the situation with excited and flushed faces. And Fenton, the head prefect, had called all his colleagues together.

Edgar Fenton was a very sensible fellow—a level-headed, thoroughly reliable senior, who carried a great deal of responsibility on his shoulders. He was the most popular skipper St. Frank's had ever had. For Fenton possessed a large amount of that useful quality—tact.

But his fellow-prefects were plainly non-plussed by his present attitude. In their opinion, the whole position was ghastly in the extreme. But Fenton seemed to be enjoying himself.

"Just try to picture what's going to happen!" exclaimed Carlile, of the College

House. "Do you believe for a moment that the juniors will submit to being taught by women?"

"Never!" declared Morrow.

"They'll jib—and they'll jib quickly!" said Wilson. "It's no good talking—the thing's impossible. And think of ourselves! We've even got a woman at the head of the Sixth!"

"It's terrible!" said Morrow hotly.

Fenton grinned again.

"Don't get quite so excited, old sons!" he said easily. "Things aren't half so bad as you seem to imagine. Why, the thing's the biggest joke of the season, in my opinion!"

"Joke!" shouted Morrow.

"Yes!"

"You must be mad!" said Conroy major.

"No, I'm not," went on Fenton. "I tell you, it's a joke. The whole thing's too funny to be serious. Why not look at the thing in the right focus, my dear fellows? Don't get any exaggerated ideas. Women at a place like St. Frank's—holding control over the school!"

"It's a farce!" snapped Morrow.

"Exactly!"

"And it can't go on——"

"It can—for a few days," said Fenton. "That's where the joke comes in. Grin, you idiots! The whole situation deserves a perfect yell of laughter. It's a scream! The funniest affair that ever happened!"

The other prefects stared at Fenton in amazement.

"I think it must have turned your brain, old man," said Reynolds.

"Not at all," smiled Fenton. "But it just happens that I've got a sense of humour—and thank goodness for that! If I was different, I should get on my high horse, and start protesting. But that would be a mistake. If we treat the matter as a joke, we can't go wrong."

Morrow took a deep breath.

"Come to think of it, it is a bit funny!" he said, with a faint grin. "I mean, all these women descending on the school to take command!"

"Funny!" chuckled Fenton. "It's what I said just now—the joke of the season. I know for a fact that lots of the juniors are raising Cain about it—and so are some of the Fifth."

"They are holding indignation meetings in every corner," said Wilson.

"Exactly!" agreed Fenton. "But what's the good of doing that? What good can come of protesting and talking about revolt? We've got to keep law and order—discipline must be maintained. If these fellows get their minds firmly fixed on a revolt, there might be some trouble. But if the presence of these women is treated as a kind of comic interlude, there'll be no harm done."

The other prefects were looking less serious.

"Of course, that's one way of regarding it," said Conroy major. "At the same time

I don't quite agree about the joke. I can't see anything to go into screams about

"You will presently!" grinned Fenton. "When these women get fairly started they'll make a hopeless mess of things. It's only natural—women have never controlled a big school of this kind. They're probably capable enough when it comes to a kindergarten, but they'll find St. Frank's a fistful! Experience is costly—as they'll find out."

"So you reckon we ought to treat the whole thing lightly?"

"Of course," said the skipper. "There's nothing else to be done. What's more, I mean to get the whole school with me. These upsets—these indignation meetings and whispers of revolt—are all wrong. And I've called you together because I want you to lend a hand."

"We're game for anything," said Morrow. "By George! I'm hanged if you're not right all the time, Fenny! Women teachers! It's enough to make a cat laugh!"

And Morrow's face broke into a wide grin, and he laughed uproariously. And that laugh set the other prefects going, too. Fenton's sensible view of the situation had wrought a great difference among these stately Sixth-Formers.

"There's another thing," went on Fenton. "I had a few words with Mr. Lee before he left, and I promised him that I'd do my very utmost to maintain discipline. This is the way we can do it. I want all you fellows to go round at once."

"Go round?"

"Yes," said Fenton. "Talk to the juniors in particular. Point out that there's nothing to be worried about. Show them that it's all a joke, and that it can't last long. I'll deal with the Remove."

"Right you are!" said Morrow. "But we shall have to look lively. Lessons will be starting soon."

"By the way," asked Wilson. "What about these women? Who are they? Have you heard their names yet?"

Fenton chuckled.

"Yes," he replied. "Miss Trumble gave me a list of the whole gang. It seems that two of them are to be Housemistresses. On this side we've got a precious female named Miss Babbidge."

"The name is enough!" growled Conroy major.

"What about the College House?" asked Carlile.

"Oh, you're rather more lucky," said Fenton. "The Housemistress over on your side is to be Miss Rice. She's the one with the fat face."

"The pudding face, you mean?" said Carlile. "It suits her name."

"That's the way—make a few jokes!" grinned Fenton. "Why, my dear fellow, I tell you this thing is worth its weight in gold! We'll get endless amusement out of it—and our precious women teachers will

make themselves a laughing-stock before they're through!"

"Hold on!" said Rees. "What about the Sixth?"

"We've got Miss Skinner," smiled the captain.

"Did you ever hear such names?" grinned Morrow. "Babbidge—Rice—Skinner! I must say they're suitable! We saw the ladies, and I don't think we were particularly impressed."

"The ugliest set you could imagine!" said Wilson.

"Well, I'd hardly say that," corrected Fenton. "There's one, anyhow who can easily be separated from the rest. She is the Third-form mistress. Quite young, too. I thought she looked rather pretty."

"Yes, I noticed her, too!" said Conroy major. "Rather a pity we couldn't have her in the Sixth!"

"You ass!" grinned Fenton. "That's Miss Nixon. I pity her! She'll have a fearful time with the fags! The other two are Miss Teezer and Miss Crimp. Miss Teezer, by the way, is booked for the Remove."

"She'll find the Remove a teaser, too!" chuckled Rees.

Fenton made for the door.

"Well, that's enough for me!" he exclaimed. "I'm off—and you fellows had better get busy, too. Don't forget what I told you. Make the juniors thoroughly understand that there's nothing to worry about. I want to see the whole school laughing!"

And Fenton hurried away to the junior quarters.

When he arrived he found matters exactly as he had anticipated. Juniors were talking in the passages, in the lobbies, and in every odd corner. They were excited and indignant.

They regarded Miss Trumble as an intruder, and they reckoned that she was interfering in a manner which could only be described as unwarrantable. There was only one thing to be done—make a stand against it.

Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D, was waxing eloquent. He was preaching revolt, and even suggested that the whole Remove should refuse to go in for lessons at all.

I was in the junior common-room, talking with a number of other fellows. I was rather grave, but not excited. I didn't want to see any hasty action taken.

Some of the juniors were quite capable of making a mess of things. Any ill-considered move now would mean nothing but defeat and humiliation. To have these women triumph over us would be too awful for words.

And then Edgar Fenton arrived.

He was followed by a large number of Removites, whom he had collected on the way. He had told them to follow him, intimating that he had something important to announce.

So, by the time he found himself in the common-room, practically every member of the Remove was there, too. And there was a hush as the skipper raised his hand.

Everybody respected Fenton. He was almost loved by the great majority of the juniors. For Fenton was a kind of popular hero. He was a fine man at sports, and as a prefect he was kindly and always considerate.

"Now, kids, just attend to me," said Fenton genially. "I can see you're all excited, and I'm not very surprised. I take it that you are a bit upset about these lady teachers?"

"We're not going to stand 'em!" declared Handforth aggressively.

"No, of course not!" said Fenton. "Perhaps you will suggest what you intend doing, then?"

"That'll take me about five seconds!" retorted Handforth. "I've got the Remove behind me—and we mean to start a rebellion! We'll go on strike until we get the masters back!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

"We're not standing these women teachers!"

Fenton grinned.

"That kind of talk is very cheap," he said. "Remember, I'm talking to you in a chummy kind of way now. I'm not a prefect—I'm just one of yourselves. If I chose to exert my authority I could give you beans for that insubordinate talk. You young asses! Put all idea of rebellion out of your heads. There's nothing to rebel against!"

"What!"

"Absolutely nothing!" went on Fenton. "No, don't interrupt—I've got something to say. If you youngsters worry over this new order of things, you've got far less sense than I credited you with."

"What do you mean, Fenny?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Exactly what I say," replied Fenton. "Now, I've got a high opinion of the Remove brand of common sense. You youngsters are pretty cute, and it's not often you go wrong."

Fenton was tactful. The Remove gave him full attention.

"Now, I shouldn't like you to shatter this little idea of mine," went on the skipper. "If you kick up a dust about these women—and keep up this ridiculous talk about revolting—well, it'll prove to me that you're a pretty brainless set."

"Look here, Fenton, we're not going to be taught by a woman!" exclaimed De Valerie, with warmth. "We can stand some things—but not that!"

"Of course you can stand it—and enjoy it, too!" retorted Fenton.

"Enjoy it!"

"Certainly!" said the captain. "I don't

mind admitting that I was just a bit alarmed at first. But, by jove, what on earth's the good of worrying? You surely don't think that these ladies will last long? They'll make a hopeless mess of things, and then peter out. But that's private—just between you and me. Don't talk about it too much."

"You think they'll give it up soon?" I inquired.

"My dear ass, they can't possibly stand it for long," replied Fenton. "Personally I give them about a week. Don't jib—don't talk about revolt. Stick it! Go on just as usual—and stick it!"

"But—but—"

"If anything, be on your very best behaviours," continued Fenton. "Look here, we'll strike a bargain, eh? Drop all this strike talk, and give the ladies a run for their money. You can be quite sure that the prefects will sympathise with you, and make things as easy as possible. What you've got to do is to keep law and order, and enjoy life!"

"How can we enjoy it with these giddy females about?" growled Handforth.

"You can find something to laugh at every hour, if you only look for it," replied Fenton. "The whole thing's funny—the very idea is a joke. And I can tell you candidly that if you do any more jibbing, there'll be trouble. The prefects have got to maintain discipline, and if you begin any nonsense it'll not only cause us a fearful amount of trouble, but you'll find plenty of it yourselves! Take my advice, and grin!"

And Fenton, feeling that he had said enough, passed out of the common-room with a nod. And the Remove broke into a babble of excited voices.

"By jove, he's right!" I said, taking a deep breath. "When you come to look at it squarely, the whole thing's funny! These women teachers can't be taken seriously."

"Of course not!" grinned Pitt. "By talking about rebellion we're only making asses of ourselves. I say, can't we have some fun in the class-room this morning? What a chance!"

"Rather!" said De Valerie. "A woman teacher and absolutely new to everything. My only hat! We'll jape her no end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fenton's tonic was infectious. Before five minutes had elapsed the whole Remove was yelling—and all sorts of plans were being made. The Remove had seen the humorous side of the question.

And it was just the same in other parts of the school. All the fellows regarded the position from a new point of view. And by the time the bell rang for lessons there was no further talk of jibbing, and no signs of indignation.

Edgar Fenton was clever.

CHAPTER II.

TEASING MISS TEEZER!



THE Remove was unusually quiet.

Never, in fact had the fellows looked so meek and mild. With scarcely a sound, they had walked into the Form-room,

and had taken their places. And they were all looking innocent and harmless. It really seemed as though butter would not melt in their mouths.

As a general rule, the Remove went in for lessons in a noisy crowd, and Mr. Crowell was obliged to rap sharply for order. But the new Form-mistress would have no such trouble apparently.

So far, she had not turned up. "Don't forget, you chaps!" I whispered. "Keep it up. This is great! We'll spoof her beautifully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was only a quiet, subdued chuckle, and the next moment all faces became composed and innocent once more. For a foot-step was heard out in the passage. Then Miss Teezer arrived.

The Remove regarded her with placid calmness.

Until this moment they had not been quite sure which lady had been told off for the Remove. The fellows were not particularly impressed. Miss Teezer proved to be large, decidedly unhandsome, and there was a certain masculine air about her which was by no means attractive.

She closed the door behind her, and went to her desk.

"Good morning, boys!" she exclaimed pleasantly.

As though fixed together by strings, the Remove stood upright.

"Good morning, teacher!" they said, in a kind of chorus.

Miss Teezer looked astonished.

"You may take your seats, boys," she said smiling. "I am pleased to see that you are so well-mannered. I confess I was hardly expecting it. Apparently Miss Trumble was mistaken."

Up shot Reggie Pitt's hand.

"Please, teacher, may I say something?"

"What is it, little man?" asked Miss Teezer.

"Please, teacher, we're all good little boys!" said Pitt gravely.

It was as much as the Remove could do to sit still. Everybody wanted to howl. There was something indescribably comical about Pitt's face. But Miss Teezer had no suspicions.

"I am very pleased to hear you say that, laddie," she replied. "What is your name?"

"Please, teacher, Reggie!"

"And quite a nice name!" said Miss Teezer. "Well, Reggie, you must not do

any more talking now. We must get on with our lessons."

Pitt sat down, and Church raised his hand at once.

"Do you want something, my boy?" asked the mistress.

"Yes, thank you, teacher!" said Church nervously.

"Well?"

"Please, teacher, I'm feeling thirsty!" said Church. "May I have a drink of water, teacher?"

Again the Remove only held itself in check by an effort.

"Dear me!" said Miss Teezer. "You really should not bother about water now, my dear. I cannot allow you to leave the class-room before lessons have actually begun. You must be patient."

"Oh, teacher!" said Church reproachfully. He sat down and rubbed his knuckles into his eyes.

"There, there!" exclaimed the lady soothingly. "You must not cry! We will see presently."

"Please, teacher, I'd like a drink of water, too!" exclaimed Pitt, holding up his hand once more. "You've got such a kind, sweet face, that I thought you wouldn't mind! You look ever so lovely, teacher!"

Tommy Watson gave a gasping kind of sound.

"Help!" he murmured faintly. "We shall never stick it!"

"Dry up, you ass!" I breathed. "Don't spoil the show!"

Miss Teezer rapped sharply upon the desk.

"There must be no further talk about drinking water!" she exclaimed severely.

"We are here for work, children—not for play. I think it will be far better if we begin by getting to know one another thoroughly. Each child will stand up, and say his name in turn."

The Remove did so, commencing from the back row. And Miss Teezer examined every boy, apparently with the idea of memorising the names. The Remove still maintained its appearance of childlike innocence.

"And now," said Miss Teezer, at length. "what is your usual lesson for this morning? I think it will be just as well to go on in the customary fashion. Can any little boy tell me?"

Up went a dozen hands.

"I think one will be sufficient!" said Miss Teezer gently. "You will do, Reggie. You are a nice, polite little boy!"

"Oh, thank you, teacher!" said Pitt, with a smirk. "This is the day for spelling lesson, ma'am."

"Very well, we will commence with spelling," said Miss Teezer. "By the way, who is the head boy of the class?"

At least a dozen juniors turned in their seats, and pointed straight at Teddy Long, who, of course, was the biggest duffer in the school.

"Please, teacher, he is!" they exclaimed triumphantly.

"Great pip!" gasped Teddy Long, in a faint voice.

He sat there, dazed and rather bewildered. He had known nothing about that little prearranged move. The juniors had been expecting Miss Teezer to ask such a question, and they were ready for it. She went up the room, and patted Teddy on the shoulder.

"So you are the clever little boy, eh?" she said approvingly. "There, there! You must not blush in that way. I can see that you are quite modest. I like it—modesty is a splendid quality."

Teddy Long was too startled to make any reply. And Miss Teezer went down to the desk and looked round once more.

"And who is the backward boy?" she inquired. "It is just as well that I should know, for I would like to help him. Is there one boy among you all who is a dunce?"

"Please, teacher, yes!" went up a chorus.

"And where is he sitting?"

"There, teacher!" yelled the chorus.

And a perfect collection of fingers pointed at Handforth.

Edward Oswald started up, glaring. A joke was a joke, but to be pointed out as the dunce of the Remove was a bit too much of a good thing. Handforth looked rather dangerous.

"You—you—"

"Please, teacher, he doesn't like being told he's a dunce!" interrupted Pitt hastily.

"His name's Teddy, and he's ever such a nice boy. You wouldn't believe it to look at him, but he is."

"I am afraid you must give more attention to your classes, Teddy," said Miss Teezer, looking at Handforth, and shaking her head. "You must not remain at the bottom of the Form. It is hardly a position of honour to be known as a dunce."

"I'm not a dunce!" roared Handforth violently.

It was like a blast from a ship's siren, and Miss Teezer started back. It was the first indication she had received that the Remove was not quite so gentle as it appeared to be.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, in a shocked voice. "My boy—my boy, you must not shout in that way! Whatever are you thinking off?"

Handforth gulped.

"Please—please, teacher, I didn't mean it!" he mumbled thickly.

Handy had been particularly warned not to give the show away, and he just remembered himself in time. But, inwardly, he resolved that several noses should suffer later on.

"I am glad to find that you realise your fault," said Miss Teezer. "We will let it pass. And now we will get our books out,

and commence lessons in earnest. Dear me! We have wasted at least ten minutes. That will never do, children."

But for Fenton's little talk with the Remove, the fellows would have been extremely galled at being thus addressed. But they could now see the ludicrous side of the whole matter.

And instead of getting angry, they were highly amused. These lady teachers appeared to have an idea that they were dealing with infants.

The boys opened their desks, took out books and pens, and made a great show of preparing for work. And while they had their desk-lids up, they grinned at one another, and were permitted to relax for a few moments. But Miss Teezer saw nothing of this.

For one thing, she was startled by her discovery.

Her own desk was a large one. Strictly speaking, it was Mr. Crowell's desk, and was usually filled with an extremely staid collection of scholastic volumes. But now there was a great change.

Upon the flap of the desk a mirror had been fixed—somewhat hastily, but it was certainly fixed. And just inside the desk itself lay a box of powder, with a powder-puff resting on the top.

Near-by there were a few hairpins, and a small tube of lip salve. For such things to be in the desk of a schoolmaster was rather astonishing. Miss Teezer gazed at them somewhat blankly.

"Dear, dear! What can this mean?" she asked wonderingly.

Up jumped Pitt.

"Please, teacher, have you found the powder and the other things?" he asked.

Miss Teezer looked at him severely.

"Do you know anything about this—ahem!—this powder-puff?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes, teacher!" replied Pitt. "We put it in there as a little surprise. Aren't you awfully pleased, teacher?"

Miss Teezer compressed her lips.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed angrily. "This—this is beyond endurance! Why should you imagine that I require such articles?"

"Please, teacher, we didn't know that you were going to be our mistress," replied Reggie innocently. "We thought our teacher would be ugly. But anybody can see that you don't need any beauty preparations."

The Remove held its breath, and nearly exploded.

"Indeed!" said Miss Teezer, in a milder voice.

"So we put the things in your desk, ma'am," went on Pitt. "We thought it would be rather nice for our teacher to have a little mirror and a powder-puff ready. Our sisters always use powder, ma'am."

The lady was somewhat mollified.

"If it was an act of thoughtfulness. I

cannot punish you," she said. "But I should be very angry if I believed that you were deliberately impertinent. We will say no more about the matter, children."

She closed the desk with a little slam, and the Remove waited. The fellows had not expected anything very startling at this point. But the way in which Miss Teezer's leg was being pulled was decidedly rich.

Besides, no work was being done—and this was quite to the Remove's liking.

Work didn't start at once, either. For as the Form-mistress looked round, she was surprised to observe that Fatty Little was using his jaws very effectively. And there was an enormous bulge in one of his cheeks.

Miss Teezer frowned.

"Are you eating something?" she asked sharply. "I am talking to you, my child!" she added, pointing a ruler at Fatty.

"Yes, rather," said Fatty, in a mumbling voice. "I'm just having a snack, ma'am. I always have one at this time."

"A snack!" repeated Miss Teezer, horrified. "Really, I cannot allow such a thing. This is no place for eating—"

"Please, teacher, he's different," put in Bob Christine, holding up a hand. "He's always hungry, and must have something in class, or he wouldn't last out until dinner-time!"

Miss Teezer went to Fatty's desk, and abruptly opened it.

"Good gracious!" she said startled.

The desk was literally filled with foodstuff—sandwiches, miniature pork-pies, jam-tarts, chocolate eclairs, and the like.

"This—this is appalling!" exclaimed Miss Teezer, in a startled voice. "What is all this food doing in here?"

"It's only just a biting on, teacher," said Fatty, in a humble voice. "I generally have more than this, but—"

"I cannot allow it!" said the Form-mistress curtly.

"Oh, teacher!" shouted about a dozen voices reproachfully.



Miss Teezer went to Fatty's desk, and abruptly opened it. "Good gracious!" she said, startled. The desk was literally filled with foodstuff.

"Silence, children!" she snapped, turning and frowning.

"But, you see, our little fat playmate always has food in class, teacher," said Reggie Pitt, with perfect truth. "You surely wouldn't be so unkind? He's different to other little boys."

"By George, he is!" murmured Handforth. "There's not much about him that's little!"

"Except his name!" breathed Church.

"You funny fathead—"

"Upon my soul!" said Miss Teezer, turning. "What was that I heard?"

"I—I— Handforth paused, and gulped. "Oh, nothing, ma'am," he went on. "I—I was just speaking to—"

"You have no right to speak during lessons, little man," said Miss Teezer severely. "With regard to all this food, I will say nothing further at the moment. But I shall consider it my duty to consult Miss Trumble."

She went back to her desk, and Fatty proceeded with his feed. He didn't worry about the future. For the first time since his arrival at the school he was allowed to sit there and openly feed his face during

lessons. And Fatty revelled in the privilege.

Needless to say, the other juniors eyed him enviously. They had expected the food to be confiscated. Such a thing would have been quite enjoyable to witness. But it was a bit rough to sit there watching Fatty scoffing all the good things. Handforth glared round while Miss Teezer wasn't looking.

"Gimme one of those tarts, you glutton!" he hissed.

"Great doughnuts!" muttered Fatty. "I can't spare one. I've only just got about enough to keep me alive!"

The next second he let out a yell. For Handforth, reaching over, seized one of the tarts, took complete possession of it. It was a big tart, too—the best of the lot.

"Hi, gimme that back!" roared Fatty.

"Not likely!" snorted Handforth. "I'm eating this."

Miss Teezer turned, utterly astonished.

"Children—children!" she exclaimed. "What is the meaning of this?"

Up shot Fatty's hand.

"Please, teacher, he's pinched one of my tarts!" he shouted.

"You—you mean bounder!" said Handforth darkly. "All right—take it! I don't want your silly tart!"

Squelch!

Handforth reached over, and handed the tart back to Fatty. He did so in his own peculiar fashion. The tart was delivered squarely in Fatty's face, and it spread over the fat junior's ample features in a most attractive manner. Blobs of jam oozed down.

"Gug—gug—gugg!" gurgled Fatty.

Miss Teezer nearly fainted.

"This—this is terrible!" she said, in a weak voice. "And I thought you were such well-behaved children, too! Oh, dear—oh, dear! Whatever shall I do? I do hope you won't be naughty any more!"

"Dry up, Handy—keep quiet!" breathed Church.

And Handforth just managed to control himself.

A few minutes later the Remove was quiet again. Fatty had cleared the tart off his face—consuming the bulk of it. He didn't see why good food should be wasted. And, at length, the Form settled down to lessons.

The juniors had been ragging Miss Teezer for quite half an hour, and they felt satisfied. They went on with their work in very much the same way as usual. But their tasks were by no means arduous.

In fact, the Remove had an easy time.

And then Tommy Watson suddenly nudged me.

"I believe it's coming," he whispered, with a grin.

I looked up, and then I grinned, too. For Miss Teezer had opened her desk, and was apparently busy with something inside—

believing that all the boys were intent on their work.

"She's powde ing her giddy nose!" whispered Reggie, with a chuckle.

"I jolly well hope so!" murmured Grey. "My hat! Look out for squalls if the gentle creature has really succumbed to the temptation!"

"We can't tell yet——"

The flap of Miss Teezer's desk descended with a crash.

And Miss Teezer sat there, her mouth wide open, and with her features screwed up. Then, as she grabbed frantically for a handkerchief, the whole Form-room resounded with a tremendous sneeze.

"A-tish-oo!" said Miss Teezer violently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could not contain themselves any longer. They had been hoping for this all the morning—and now it had arrived. She sneezed again and again, and was red with confusion.

"Please, teacher, can we do something?" asked Pitt innocently.

The Form mistress glared.

"Oh, you—you wicked children!" she gasped. "You—a-tish-oo!—you naughty little boys! What did you do with that—a-tish-oo—powder?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As a matter of fact, the powder was an invention of Reggie Pitt's. He had borrowed the puff and all the rest of the things from one of the house-maids—and he had thoughtfully mixed a considerable amount of snuff with face powder. Miss Teezer had certainly been powdering her nose!

"I thought she couldn't resist it!" grinned Pitt. "The vain old bounder! As ugly as a gargoyle, and was tempted by face powder!"

He said this in a low voice, and only his immediate neighbours heard it. Miss Teezer was making for the door with quick, short strides. In other words, she fled.

She did not return until ten minutes had elapsed. And now she was composed, firm, and rather grim looking. She was just beginning to realise that the Remove was a different proposition to what she had at first believed.

And as soon as she entered the room she knew that something had happened.

The fellows were all sitting in their places, it is true. There was also an air of calm peacefulness in the apartment.

But, somehow, the atmosphere was hazy, as though a considerable amount of dust had recently been stirred up. And for some peculiar reason, Handforth's necktie was round at the back, and his collar was crumpled and grimy.

In addition, Handforth's hair was ruffled, his face was flushed, and there was an aggressive look in his eyes. Near by, Church and McClure were sitting in their usual places.

Strangely enough, however, they had both altered in appearance.

Church's left ear, for example, was very red, and there was a kind of smear on his lower lip. McClure had great difficulty in seeing out of his right eye, and his nose was apparently tender—judging by the way he held it.

One or two other fellows were also showing signs of recent warfare. Fullwood, for example, was very dusty. Teddy Long was even dustier. But the air of calmness in the Remove reigned supreme.

Miss Teezer stood looking at the Form for a moment in silence.

She was certainly not a simpleton, and she could easily tell that some upheaval had been going on during her absence. But she said nothing. She went to her desk, sat down, and rapped.

"Now, children, on with lessons!" she said curtly.

The Remove was disappointed. The fellows had expected something better. Miss Teezer had undoubtedly been teased, but she was beginning to get the measure of her tormentors.

CHAPTER III.

TROUBLE IN THE THIRD!



MEANWHILE, some rather startling events were taking place in the Third Form class-room, quite near by.

If the Remove was determined to have a bit of sport with Miss Teezer, the fags were equally determined to obtain some fun from Miss Nixon. They had made full preparations for a lively morning.

During the first half-hour, there had been no trouble in the Third.

Miss Nixon, who was a quiet, small, attractive looking girl, had found the fags to be very well-mannered and meek. For Willy Handforth and his merry men had adopted very much the same tactics as the Remove.

Miss Nixon gave the Third a bit of a surprise. Of all the lady teachers, she was undoubtedly the pick of the bunch. The others were angular, ugly, or old-maidish.

But Miss Nixon was quite different.

She was no more than twenty-two, and quite a pretty girl at that. She had a soft, charming voice, and a figure of extreme neatness. For her to be in charge of the Third was the worst kind of hard luck.

For the Third was a pretty complete handful—even for a man.

If the Remove had had Miss Nixon for a mistress, the Remove would undoubtedly have behaved itself. There would have been no japes. For the Remove would have seen that this sweet girl was not the kind to be teased. The fellows would have stumbled over themselves to be polite. For the juniors had a strong sense of admiration for the fair sex. Never for a moment did they consider that Miss Teezer belonged to the fair sex. She wasn't fair,

But the Third was different.

The Third made no distinctions. The fags regarded Miss Nixon as their especial prey. She was their Form mistress, and she had to go through it. Ugly or pretty, it made no difference. The fags had no eye for beauty.

To begin with, Miss Nixon had no trouble. And she almost deluded herself into believing that the Third Form consisted of a collection of cherubs. She had never dreamed that the boys would be so well behaved.

Then she observed that Willy Handforth repeatedly opened the flap of his desk, and attended to something inside. For the first two or three times she said nothing. But it began to get monotonous.

And, strangely enough, Willy gazed over at her every time he performed the manoeuvre.

At last Miss Nixon stood up, and went forward.

"What is your name, my boy?" she asked frowning.

"Handforth minor, miss," said Willy promptly.

"Well, Handforth minor, why do you keep opening your desk?"

"Opening my desk, miss?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I—I was just looking at something, miss," said Willy vaguely.

"What were you looking at?"

"I don't think you'd be interested, miss," said Willy, shaking his head. "Not in your line at all. In fact, I wouldn't advise you to come near here. You might get a fright!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags yelled, as though at some hidden joke.

"Silence!" commanded Miss Nixon. "I am surprised at you, boys! Now, Handforth minor, you will tell me what you have got in your desk that I must not see!"

She advanced, but Willy raised a hand.

"Better keep back, miss!" he said warningly.

"Indeed, I shall not keep back!" retorted Miss Nixon, in a firm voice. "I will not allow you to behave in this manner. I insist upon knowing what you have been doing. Now then—show me!"

She had arrived at Willy's side, and was quite imperious.

Willy looked up at her, all concern.

"Don't, Miss Nixon!" he pleaded.

"Don't make me open it!"

"You silly boy!" said the girl. "I suspect that you are simply trying to make fun of me. If that is the case, I shall punish you. Now, open your desk, and let us have no more nonsense!"

"All right—but don't blame me!" said Willy calmly. "The fact is, miss, I've got my white mice here! Look out!"

With a sudden jerk, he opened the flap. And there, sure enough, were about half-a-dozen grubby looking white mice. Seeing the door of liberty open the mice streaked

out. One, indeed, half jumped upon Miss Nixon, who had turned as pale as a sheet.

"Oh!" she gasped frantically. "O-oh!"

And then she let out one long scream, and fled. She dashed across the Form-room towards her desk—probably with the idea of climbing on to the chair. And the Third roared with callous merriment. In the opinion of the fags, this was the best joke they had enjoyed for terms.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Miss Nixon!"

"They're after you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then, in a flash, the Third's uproarious merriment ceased. For Miss Nixon, turning, saw two of the mice almost at her feet. She clutched at the desk, and then collapsed in a limp heap.

She lay there, huddled up.

"Great pip!" gasped Willy. "She's fainted!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Quick—get some water!" roared Willy. "The joke was all right, but we didn't expect this! What a silly chump! Fancy fainting because she sees half-a-dozen giddy mice. Ain't girls dotty!"

Willy was quite a practical junior, and he rushed to Miss Nixon's side, and raised her head. The Form-mistress had not gone off completely, and was more frightened than anything else.

She opened her eyes, and looked up dully.

"Oh!" she murmured. "Oh, you wicked boys!"

"Only a joke, miss!" said Willy, with concern. "We didn't mean to scare you like this, you know. Buck up! These blessed white mice can't hurt you! They're as harmless as blackbeetles!"

"Have—have they gone?" asked the Form-mistress fearfully.

"Ages ago!" replied Willy confidently. "I think two dodged under your desk, and they're well out of sight now. We just wanted to make you scream—we didn't know that you'd crumple up like this!"

"Cave!" hissed Chubby Heath from the doorway.

Willy looked round.

"What's the matter with you, funny face?" he asked politely.

"Get back to your places, you jossers!" breathed Chubby. "Miss Trumble is coming."

"Oh!"

The fags scuttled to their seats like so many rabbits. And the next second, before either Willy or Miss Nixon could move, the door opened, and the Lady Head appeared.

"I heard a noise in here!" she said severely. "There was a disturbance—Dear me! Whatever's the matter, Miss Nixon?"

Willy looked impatient.

"Oh, don't come butting in, ma'am!" he protested. "She's fainted—that's all!"

"Fainted!" exclaimed Miss Trumble. "What do you mean?"

"My hat!" said Willy. "She's fainted! Haven't you ever fainted, Miss Trumble?"

"Do not be impertinent, little boy!" snapped the Headmistress. "I am very surprised that Miss Nixon should be so weak——"

"Rats!"

"What did you say?"

"Ahem! Sorry!" said Willy. "Just a slip, ma'am! I mean, Miss Nixon wasn't weak at all. She just happened to spot some of my mice. They escaped, you know, and ran over the floor."

Miss Trumble went to the colour of chalk.

"Mice!" she screamed wildly.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Willy. "She's another of 'em!"

"Mice!" gasped Miss Trumble. "Did—did you say there are mice loose in the room?"

Willy nodded.

"Only about four!" he said comfortingly. "No need to get the wind up, ma'am. In any case, mice are as harmless as guinea-pigs! I was surprised at Miss Nixon fainting. She only saw my white mice. I wonder what she'd have done if Chubby had let his collection loose!"

The Headmistress was very startled.

"Are—are there any other mice in this room?" she asked in a voice that trembled with fear and anger. "Oh, you wicked boys! You wicked, wicked boys!"

"No need to rub it in, ma'am!" murmured Willy. "We heard you the first time! And, anyhow, white mice are always liable to slip out! Now, Chubby's got about a dozen real beauties!"

"A dozen!" breathed Miss Trumble.

"All fattened up and as active as you like!" said Willy nodding. "Brown mice, you know—real beauties! He's got 'em in his desk——"

"In—in his desk!" shrieked the Lady Head.

"Why, yes, ma'am," said Willy. "I say, Chubby, just let those mice out and let Miss Trumble have a look at 'em!"

Miss Trumble gave one terrible gulp.

"Don't—don't you dare to do anything of the kind!" she shouted frantically, all her dignity going to the winds. "You naughty, naughty children! I am shocked and amazed!"

By this time Miss Nixon was getting to her feet. She still looked rather shaky, but the colour was returning to her cheeks. The presence of the Headmistress made the girl pull herself together.

"I am very sorry, Miss Trumble," she faltered.

"And so you should be, girl!" snapped the Headmistress. "I am surprised that you should show such arrant cowardice! Just because a few harmless mice are let loose you faint! Disgraceful!"

Chubby Heath frowned darkly.

"The awful old cat!" he breathed. "Slanging her because she was scared—and

Miss Trumble's nearly as scared herself! I'll show her!"

Chubby acted on the spur of the moment. He had not intended doing anything drastic a minute earlier. But the injustice of the Headmistress's condemnation of Miss Nixon was rather too much for the fag.

He opened his desk and fumbled with a wooden box which was just inside. He pulled the box out, placed it on the floor, and opened the lid. About ten brown mice whizzed out, and they spread fanwise over the Form-room, scuttling in all directions, squeaking noisily.

Then the fags started, aghast.

For Miss Trumble screamed again and again—and it was such a scream that the Form-room fairly shook. Miss Nixon's effort had been a mere whisper by comparison.

Without question, it was a most undignified business altogether for a person of such importance as Miss Trumble. And it served to show how really absurd petticoat rule, was at a school like St. Frank's.

The Headmistress raised her hands above her head, turned round about four times, and then collapsed weakly into the chair.

She had fainted.

It was a different kind of faint to Miss Nixon's. There was no question about this one—it was the real thing. And, curiously enough, Miss Nixon kept her head now. Perhaps her previous experience had hardened her; or, possibly, her attitude was the result of Miss Trumble's presence.

She stood there, her eyes blazing with anger.

"Oh, you bad, bad boys!" she said scornfully.

Handforth minor looked rather startled.

"My hat!" he murmured. "She's properly wild this time!"

"What about my mice?" demanded Chubby. "I let 'em out, but I'm not going to lose 'em! Some of you chaps help me to chase the little beggars up!"

Miss Nixon stamped her foot.

"You will all keep in your places!" she said sharply.

"Don't you think I'd better go and fetch some water, miss?" asked Willy. "Miss Trumble looks a bit groggy, you know. She needs something. It won't take me two ticks."

"Yes, you had better go!" replied the Form-mistress. "And hurry!"

Willy dashed off, feeling somewhat concerned. He didn't care a jot about Miss Trumble, but that expression of scorn in Miss Nixon's eyes had rather pierced his armour—and Willy's armour was pretty tough.

He whizzed down the passages, and in about three minutes returned with a big jug of cold water. If he had paused to think, he would have handed it to Miss Nixon.

But Willy was something like his elder brother. He was impulsive. And he raised the jug, swung it back, and dashed the contents of it into Miss Trumble's face.

Swish!

The Headmistress was soaked.

"Oh!" gasped Miss Nixon. "Oh, you bad boy!"

"Well, I like that!" said Willy indignantly. "I'm doing all I can and, then you slang me! There you are! I knew it! The trick's done! There's nothing like cold water!"

Undoubtedly the cure was effective. Miss Trumble recovered. She sat forward, gasping and spluttering. And in a very few moments she was practically herself. But she looked a sorry picture.

Her hair was streaming with water, and the entire upper portion of her dress was soaking. She rose unsteadily to her feet and tried hard to maintain her dignity. It was very difficult.

"I can only believe that this trick was deliberate!" she exclaimed, her voice quivering with anger. "Every boy in this Form-room will be punished!"

"Here, steady on!" said Willy warmly. "Three parts of the chaps didn't take any part in it! Besides, what about the water? Didn't I bring you round? If it hadn't been for me——"

"Silence, you wretched child!" shouted Miss Trumble shrilly. "There shall be no dinner for you."

"No dinner!" roared Willy in alarm.

"There'll be no dinner for any boy in this room!" declared the Headmistress fiercely. "I do not believe in violent punishment, but you shall suffer! In place of dinner, you will all have bread and water! That is my command!"

And Miss Trumble swept unsteadily out of the Form-room. If the Third had not been quite so staggered by the sentence they would have howled with merriment at the ludicrous figure which Miss Trumble cut.

But the Third was startled.

"We have had enough of this nonsense, boys!" said Miss Nixon quietly. "You will get on with your lessons at once!"

And the Third got on with them. The Third was sobered. Playing jokes on the lady teachers was a bit too expensive!

CHAPTER IV.

ROUGH ON ARCHIE!



TEA-TIME arrived, and the day was over—at least, so far as lessons were concerned. Upon the whole, the day had been successful. The lady teachers had done fairly

well.

There had been no trouble in the Fifth and Sixth, for the seniors were quite above indulging in any japes. And afternoon lessons had passed off quietly in the Remove and the Third.

Miss Nixon was proving that she was ready for the fags at all times. And Miss

Teezer had shown the Remove that joking was not to her liking. As for the Head-mistress, she kept strictly out of sight for the remainder of the day.

Willy Handforth and his gang were not supremely happy. Bread and water may be acceptable to hungry mouths, but it was not very palatable. And by tea-time the fags were quite ready for something appetising. Miss Trumble had been as good as her word. The fags had had nothing for dinner but bread and water—plenty of it, but there was not much consolation in that.

Upon the whole, the fags would have preferred a swishing, or even a gating. To punish them, by affecting their stomachs, was terrible.

Of course, there was a great deal of discussion at tea-time. It was all very well for Fenton to say that the whole thing was a joke. It was, up to a certain point. But any joke is liable to become monotonous if it is carried too far.

Most of the boys decided to wait for another day or two. Life at St. Frank's with mistresses instead of masters was a bit of a novelty, anyhow, and it certainly couldn't last.

So the fellows decided to have patience. As long as Miss Trumble didn't make any drastic alterations in the school rules—as long as she didn't make changes which affected the ordinary mode of life—there was nothing much to growl about.

But Miss Trumble did make changes. That was just the trouble. And her first step was one which affected one fellow in particular, but nobody else. Archie Glen-thorne was the unfortunate victim.

He was lounging languidly in his study after a most enjoyable tea. The fire was burning brightly, the air was warm, and Archie felt comfortably drowsy. He lay back among the cushions in a dreamy kind of way.

There came a soft tap at the door.

Archie opened his eyes.

"Come in, old bird—enter, and all that rot!" he murmured. "What ho! Rather an unnecessary expenditure of breath, what? It appears, laddie, that you are in already!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps, who had slipped in with all his usual quietness.

"You know, Phipps, it's rather marvelous," said Archie wonderingly. "I mean to say, the way you steal about. I'm dashed if I know how you do it. Absolutely! It's a kind of stealth if you grasp my meaning."

Phipps looked at his young master with his usual imperturbable expression. Phipps was Archie's valet, and had held the posi-

tion ever since the elegant junior had come to the school. Archie had never been without him. Life without Phipps was not worth thinking about.

"I have something to say, sir," said Phipps quietly.

"Good!" murmured Archie. "Say on, laddie—say on!"

"I am afraid it will give you something of a shock, sir."

"What?" ejaculated Archie, sitting up. "A shock? You don't mean to tell me, Phipps, that the old lounge suit hasn't turned up? The one with the green stripe? How bally awful! I was counting on that——"

"The suit arrived this morning, sir."

"Good!" beamed Archie. "In fact, priceless! To-morrow, Phipps, we shall sally forth in a kind of halo of renewed glory! What ho! That was rather good—what? Dashed near to poetry, Phipps!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "But I was going to tell you——"

"Absolutely!" interrupted Archie. "The old shock, and so forth. Perhaps the bally bootmaker has let us down. Is that it, laddie? The young master is somewhat perturbed."

"I think you will be presently, sir," said Phipps. "I regret to inform you, Master Archie, that, from henceforward, I shall no longer be in a position to attend to your requirements."

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"I'm beastly sorry to trouble you, old lad, but do you mind saying that again?" he asked quietly. "I'm afraid the old bean is a somewhat rusty condish. Strange to relate, Phipps, I fail to grasp the trend."

"Briefly, sir, I cease working for you from this evening."

"That, as you might say, is dashed blunt!" ejaculated Archie. "At the same time, it's the most poisonous piece of rot I've heard for a bally century! Joking, Phipps, is a kind of art. I'm afraid you've never been taught how to do it! The thing is ridic., old bean—absolutely!"

"Unfortunately, sir, it happens to be true."

Archie started.

"True?" he repeated. "Don't, Phipps—don't cause large and excessive quantities of the good old wind to blow up! What, I mean to say, is the scheme? No further work for the young master?"

"Precisely, sir," said Phipps. "I am extremely sorry, but Miss Trumble has given me instructions that I must confine my duties solely to the private section of the house. In other words, I must act as Miss Trumble's butler, without devoting any of my time to you."

Archie sat forward abruptly.

"But that's absolute rot!" he exclaimed.

"Quite so, sir!"

"The most foul business I've ever heard of," went on Archie indignantly. "Do you

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mean to tell me, Phipps, that the lady has absolutely passed the old decree? I mean to say, I'm feeling wounded?"

Archie spoke in a plaintive voice. Phipps, of course, occupied a kind of double position at St. Frank's. Nominally, he was the Headmaster's butler—now the Headmistress's butler. But this was more or less of a farce. For Phipps spent the bulk of his time attending to Archie.

"I can well understand your perturbation, sir," said Phipps. "Needless to say, I am quite indignant, and I see the position keenly. However, it is not for me to take any action. I thought, sir, that you might be able to adjust matters."

Archie started.

"It strikes me, Phipps, that she's a dashed curious person!" said Archie warmly. "I mean to say, rather near the edge, what? Not her business, and all that! Nerve, Phipps—absolutely!"

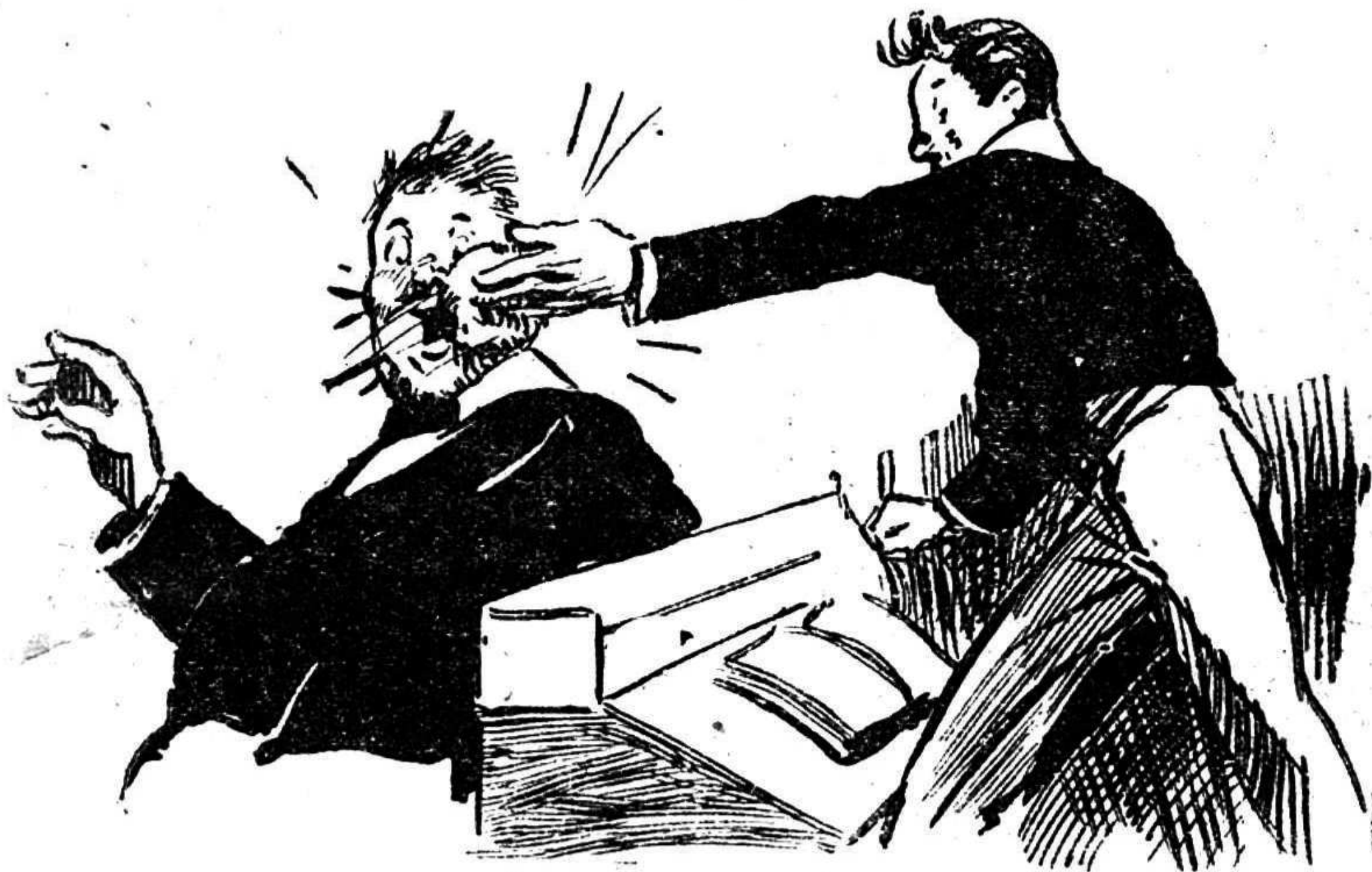
"I was struck by the same idea, sir," agreed Phipps. "At the same time, we cannot exactly blame the lady. You see, sir, she did not know the precise arrangement under which I came to the school."

"But didn't you tell her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what about it, laddie?"

"I am afraid that Miss Trumble was not very attentive, sir," replied Phipps. "She insisted that I should confine myself to the



Handforth reached over and handed the tart back to Fatty in his own peculiar fashion. The tart was delivered squarely in Fatty's face, and it spread over the fat junior's ample features in a most attractive manner.

"But, look here, I'm no bally good at adjusting!" he exclaimed. "I mean to say, when it comes to dashing about, and all that kind of rot, I'm something like the poor onappie on the raft! That is to say, at sea!"

"I can quite believe it, sir," declared Phipps. "I have recently had an interview with Miss Trumble. Needless to say, it was a most unhappy interview, Master Archie."

"Lumps of sympathy, old tulip—large lumps!"

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps gravely. "You see, Miss Trumble was most anxious to know why I spent a considerable portion of my time in this section of the building."

duties of butler. She even stated that it was ridiculous for me to waste my time in looking after a schoolboy."

Archie stood up, and squared his shoulders.

"Now that, as it were, is several feet over the limit!" he said firmly. "You may not believe it, Phipps, but the good old red gore of the Glenthornes is rising! Absolutely rising!"

"Furthermore, sir, Miss Trumble declared that no boy is in need of the assistance of a valet," said Phipps. "I shall therefore find it impossible to attend to your wants in that direction."

"The position grows more foul, as we

proceed!" said Archie, in a hollow voice. "Life, as it were, has become empty! I mean to say, what's the good of a chappie living at all if he's got to dress himself, and all that kind of rot? Phipps, old lad, have pity! I can't do without you! If you go, old darling, I shall wither away like the autumn leaves!"

Phipps kept his face straight—he was well practised.

"I hardly think the matter is as serious as that, sir," he replied. "Needless to say, I am greatly disappointed. I have always taken a keen pleasure in looking after you, Master Archie. This is a sad day for me!"

"Nobly said—in fact, brave words!" exclaimed Archie, with emotion. "They prove that you are as true as the old ivy that clings to the garden wall! More poetry, what. Somehow, Phipps, troubles always seem to make me bring out the old flow with a most marked fluency!"

"What do you propose to do, sir?" asked Phipps practically.

"Do!" said Archie. "My dear old sportsman! What a perfectly ridic. ques.! I shall trickle forth at once, and interview Miss Trumble on the spot. Absolutely! Delay is fatal. There's nothing like taking the old bull by the horns, so to speak."

"I scarcely think it will serve any good purpose to see Miss Trumble, sir!" exclaimed Phipps. "She is a most awkward lady to argue with—as I have found to my cost. I need hardly say that I used every effort to further your interests, sir."

"I quite understand, old tulip—I quite seize the trend!" said Archie. "But it's got to be done, Phipps. These things come along, and a chappie must face them. I mean to say, there's nothing like grabbing the old hollyhock firmly!"

"You mean the nettle, sir?"

"I knew it was one of those jolly horticultural things," said Archie, nodding. "As you say, Phipps, the nettle. Possibly you have an idea buzzing about in the old works that I shall get stung, what?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Have no fear, Phipps—have no fear!" declared Archie firmly. "When I start on a thing, I—well, don't you know, I start! Nothing can keep a Glenthorne back once he gets fairly going! So now I shall proceed to dash off like one o'clock. Or don't you think so?"

"I leave it entirely to you, sir."

"Perhaps you are right, Phipps!" exclaimed Archie. "I absolutely dislike trouble, but when it does come, I revel in it! Miss Trumble has displayed large consignments of nerve. It is up to the young master to stagger into her presence, and do a little ticking-off business!"

And Archie, with his mind firmly made up, passed out of the study, and wended his way along the passages. When he grew nearer to the Head's study he was not feeling quite so confident.

But he would not turn back—no matter

what his feelings were, he would go on. Archie was not the kind to show the white feather. He reached the Headmistress's door, and tapped.

"Come in!" commanded an acid feminine voice.

"Chills, and what not!" murmured Archie. "I mean to say, something after the sensash of the good old shower-bath! Spine tricklings, and all that sort of thing!"

He squared his shoulders, gathered himself together, and opened the door. Then he marched into the study, beaming. Archie thought it was rather a good idea to beam.

"Well, here we all are!" he observed genially. "What-ho! Greetings, fair lady! Archie has come to chat!"

Miss Trumble was astonished. She was busily engaged in going through a pile of papers—for she was finding that the position of Headmistress entailed a lot of hard work.

And to be suddenly disturbed by this elegant youth was rather calculated to surprise anybody. And Archie's opening words were original. Miss Trumble looked at him coldly.

"You should not have come here without my permission, child!" she said severely. "I do not allow my boys to disturb me."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "I quite agree, old dear! I mean to say, it's frightfully frightful when a chappie comes buzzing in, and disturbing you when——"

"Stop!" commanded Miss Trumble. "I think your name is Glenthorne?"

"Well, don't you know, that's rather remarkable!" said Archie. "How, as it were, did you discover the secret? Absolutely! My name is Glenthorne! As a matter of fact, I've got a large assortment of other names, too."

"You need not trouble to mention them," said Miss Trumble curtly.

"You think not?" asked Archie. "They're rather priceless names, you know. But still, just as you like. I wouldn't dream of bothering a lady——"

"Why did you come here?" broke in Miss Trumble.

"Oh, ah!" said Archie brightly. "Dashed careless of me! Why, as it were, did I come? Gadzooks! That's frightfully queer, you know! I don't seem to remember—What-ho! The good old plates of memory have come to my assistance! We have it, dear lady—absolutely!"

The Headmistress rapped her desk.

"You are a most absurd boy!" she said impatiently. "I have had quite enough of this foolishness! You must tell me the object of your visit at once, or I shall order you to leave!"

"The old boot, what?" said Archie. "Of course, that's deucedly fearful, between you and me and the inkstand. I gather that you would prefer me to start on the old chat?"

"I am growing impatient——"

"Sorrow!" said Archie hastily. "Well,

(Continued on page 15.)

EVERY WEEK—TWO GRAND COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORIES!



CONTAINS TWO OF THE VERY BEST COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORIES.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

No. 9. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." Feb. 3, 1923



Pink-Edged Notepaper

A Clever Detective Story revealing how Scotland Yard set to work in unravelling an abduction mystery case.

ROCKWARD'S hand was shaking, and his strong, heavy face was quivering as he finished. Yet he was held by common repute a man completely beyond human emotion—a man whose soul was wrapped in the collection of millions.

"If it is blackmail, why haven't they demanded money in the letter? I'd have paid anything—rather than the girl should run the risk. Here's three days gone since she vanished." He was working himself into a petulant anger, unusual for a man of his temperament. "If your people had taken it in hand at the first you might have done something. As it is, I've employed two confounded agencies, and we're not an inch nearer finding her."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rockward," said Barracough. "If we had known when you first reported it that your daughter had been abducted we might have handled it. You see," he went on soothingly, "more than ten thousand people are reported missing to the police every year. Very few of them have committed any criminal offence, and in the majority of cases there is some perfectly natural explanation of why they went away. There'd be no end of trouble if the department went chasing after each one. All that can be done is to circulate a description and have men keep their eyes open. But you can rely that, now we have something

to go upon in Miss Rockward's case, she will turn up safe and well in the end."

The millionaire proffered his cigar-case.

"Forgive me, Mr. Barracough. I'm a little overstrained. I know you will do your utmost, and if you want money, call upon me—never mind for how much."

Detective-inspector Barracough did not often smoke half-crown Havanas, and he took one now with gratitude. He could understand the millionaire's feeling in the circumstances and make allowances. But in spite of his professional optimism—a detective, like a doctor, is bound to have a surface optimism in dealing with outsiders—it was with a perplexed mind that he made his way back to headquarters to lay the matter before his chief.

"It's a bit out of the ordinary run, sir," he said in the privacy of the superintendent's room. "Rockward's half off his head, and I don't wonder. Miss Elsie Rockward's a young girl—she'll be nineteen next June—and the old man would have spoilt her if he could. That's nothing to the point, though. As a matter of fact, she went out, according to the servants, at eleven o'clock on Monday morning—three days ago. She was believed to have been going to Regent Street. Anyhow, she's not been seen since. This morning Mr. Rockward had a letter,

This is what it says." He produced from his pocket, and read:

"Sir,—This is to inform you that your daughter is safe and well. She will be permitted to return to you unharmed in probably less than a week from to-day, provided you comply with a certain request which may be made to you, and which will cost you nothing. This is not blackmail. You will be wise to remain quiet and not approach the police."

"This letter is unsigned and in palpably disguised handwriting. It was posted at Winchmore Hill, and is postmarked midnight yesterday. That, of course, only means that the one place we're certain the writer will not be found is Winchmore Hill."

"There's more than one kind of blackmail," commented the chief. "In some City deals, for instance, if Rockward could be induced to throw his weight one way or the other it would tip the balance."

"Yes." Barraclough sucked in his lower lip. "Of course, I've not lost sight of that. I suppose I have a free hand?"

"Entirely. Go ahead, and good luck to you."

Barraclough went away to begin pulling the obvious wires necessary to an investigation. There was the already circulated description of Miss Rockward to be gone over, to see that nothing was omitted from the colour of her eyes to the texture of her stockings. Two photographs of the lady he sent down to have sufficient copies made to supply every divisional section of the Criminal Investigation Department, to say nothing of the more important provincial police forces.

In their little studio on the second storey the staff photographers were busy with the letter that had been sent to Rockward. One of the shirt-sleeved assistants came to tell Barraclough that all was ready. He followed the man up to a windowless room, at one end of which stood a square, white screen. The photographer touched a switch, and the screen alone remained illuminated. Then he inserted a slide in the magic-lantern, and the letter magnified enormously, leapt into being.

Very carefully Barraclough examined the enlargement, word by word and letter by letter. He had had the thing thrown on the screen, not because he had any definite idea as to what he was to look for, but on the general principle that it should be submitted to the minutest possible examination. At last he came to the final word, and drew back.

"Thanks," he said. "It doesn't help much, but that isn't your fault. By the way, have you got the focus right? The edges of the letter seem to be in the shade."

The photographer switched on the light.

"That's not the focus, sir. That's on the letter itself. There's a kind of pinkish shade on the margin."

"Oh, yes! I was forgetting," said Barraclough.

The tint around the margin of the letter had not escaped his notice, but it had not impressed him particularly. He went back to his own room, and considered the original closely. There was a decided, uneven pink border, shading off irregularly into the cream colour of the paper itself. Moreover, the envelope showed the same peculiarity.

He called Cranley, the first-class detective-sergeant who was his inevitable assistant in his investigations, and handed the sheet to him.

"Notepaper—good vellum, very best quality, I should say," commented Cranley. "It's an educated writing, though it's disguised. No finger-prints, sir? That's a pity. I imagine whoever wrote this is not an ordinary crook. Maybe one of Rockward's friends in the City."

"Oh, shut up!" said Barraclough irritably. "It may be the butler of one of Rockward's friends, or it may be the Lord Chancellor, but we don't know. You're a good chap, Cranley, but carrying deductions too far will bring you into trouble one day. An anchor tattooed on a man's hand doesn't prove that he is, or has been a sailor, but it's a mark of identification."

All of which Cranley knew as well as Barraclough. Being a wise man, however, he recognised that he had laid himself open to rebuke, and apologised with a certain degree of humility.

"What we want," went on the inspector, "is something that'll save us guessing. I don't object to guessing when you can't do anything else, but if it's possible to know, I prefer that. Who's a good paper manufacturing firm?"

"I'll go and find out," said Cranley.

He went away, and in a little returned with a ponderous directory. He planked it on the table, and, with a stubby forefinger, turned over the leaves till he came to the trade section.

"There's Rogerfelt's, in Upper Thames Street," he said. "They're about the biggest people in the trade."

"Right you are. I'll go along to see them. You'd better stay on tap here till I come back. I may want you."

When Inspector Barraclough emerged from behind the yellow-stained partition which shielded off the sanctum of one of the departmental managers of Rogerfelt's from the common herd, his face betrayed a supreme content. The most hardened campaigner does not seek discomfort. If he can sleep on a bed instead of the bare ground he does so. Equally so a detective does not enjoy being baffled. He prefers to see his way as clearly as possible. He does not climb a fence if he can open a gate.

Barraclough knew that his quest was still far from simple. Nevertheless, he had at last something to go upon, something definite to unravel. He made his way to

a public telephone call office, and called up Cranley.

"Yes, it's me, Barraclough. I want you to get through to the divisions. Find out if they know of any wrong 'un who's been ill lately, or who's had illness in the place where he's staying—it doesn't matter what for. I can't tell you over the wire. Get on to it as soon as you can, sonny. Get someone to help you if you can. Me? Oh, yes, oh, yes, I'll be about! I'll either drop in or ring up. I've got a lot of business to do."

He hung up the receiver and wended his way eastwards. It was a warm day, and by the time he had reached the Convent and Garter, off the Commercial Road, he was glad to turn into the gilded and plated saloon. He ordered a lime-juice and soda, and leant against the bar with the air of a man to whom nothing mattered. All the while his eyes were quietly searching the groups of customers.

Presently he beckoned to a group of three, and they greeted him with deference. One would never have guessed from their joyous manner and their anxiety to pay for his drinks—which he would not permit—that they were each mentally checking off any secret exploit of theirs that might have excited the attention of a staff man from Scotland Yard.

Something of the same scene was enacted at Blackfriars, at Islington, Brixton, and half a dozen other districts of London. Barraclough was always genial, willing to buy drinks and talk over affairs. There was nothing of the stern, iron-handed, clumsy officer of police, beloved of the novelist, about him. Had he not strictly confined himself to non-intoxicating drinks, it would have been a drunken man who reeled back to headquarters. As it was, disappointment and physical weariness were plain on his face when he dropped into his chair.

"If you offer me a drink, Cranley, I'll hit you," he said. "I'm full up to the lid with lime-juice and ginger-ale, and ten thousand other poisons. Who says we don't earn our pay?"

"Any luck, sir?" queried Cranley.

Barraclough shook his head.

"Not a ha'porth. How about you?"

His subordinate handed him a sheet of paper, which the inspector perused with wrinkled brows. Ultimately he crushed it up, and, with a gesture of disgust, threw it into the wastepaper-basket.

"Not a bit of it," he declared. Then, as Cranley's puzzled gaze met his: "I meant some infectious disease—I ought to have made that clear. Ah, well!" He yawned wearily, and drew out his watch. "Feel inclined to make a night of it, Cranley? It's eight o'clock. Let's have a bit of dinner and drop into the Alhambra, and forget all about things for an hour."

Doggedness is one of the most valued attributes a member of the Criminal Investigation Department can possess, and

Barraclough had a reputation for that quality. He had a bulldog tenacity in following up a case until he had shaken it to pieces that had on occasions served better than a thousand brilliant inspirations.

At ten o'clock he and Cranley had commenced a fresh tour—this time of the supper-rooms and restaurants of the West End. Cranley was puzzled—more puzzled than he would have cared to admit. He could have grasped it if they had been seeking some particular crook who could have given definite information. But apparently Barraclough was merely questing around in search of a scent. With the reticence which he sometimes displayed even to his most intimate colleagues, he would vouchsafe nothing beyond that he wanted to find a criminal who had recently been in some house where there was an infectious disease. For the life of him, Cranley could not see how an infectious disease could be connected with the threatening letter that had been written to the millionaire.

But everything has an end. A string band was making an undercurrent of melody to the laughter and conversation of hundreds of men and women clustered in twos and threes about little tables under shaded lights, as they descended into the basement of one of the great supper-rooms—where no one ever dreamt of taking supper. A frock-coated under-manager caught a glimpse of them out of the tail of his eye, and promptly threaded his way towards them. Barraclough laughed.

"Just having a look round, that's all," he explained. "Nothing to get alarmed about. We know you're always pleased to see us."

The official smiled and rubbed his hands. The proprietors liked to be on good terms with the police.

"We're very careful. You know that, Mr. Barraclough."

"Of course," agreed the detective cheerfully. "You've got your licence to consider. I suppose you'll give a certificate of character to every one here—men and women?"

"We see that everyone behave themselves," said the under-manager. "Where would you like to sit?"

Cranley was looking over Barraclough's shoulder into one of the big mirrors.

"There's Big Billy sitting at the eighth table on your right," he said.

"We'll go and have a talk with Billy," said Barraclough.

He picked his way along the tier of tables and dropped a hand heavily on the shoulder of the fat man who was seated with his back towards them.

Big Billy sprang to his feet with a start, and a liqueur-glass tinkled in fragments on the carpet.

"Snakes!" he ejaculated. "Is it you, Mr. Barraclough? You shouldn't do that. You gave me the jumps."

"Sorry, Billy," said the detective penitently. "I'll be more careful another time."

He sat down and indicated another chair for Cranley. "How's things? I haven't had a talk with you on business for a long time."

The twinkling little ferret eyes set in the heavy, broad face became a trifle apprehensive. Big Billy did not like the officer's tone. His nerves had been a little shaken by the sudden manner in which Barracrough had announced his arrival.

"Business!" he said, with a laugh that ill-concealed his nervousness. "I didn't know that you wanted to talk business with me, or I'd have called on you before this."

Barracrough crossed his legs.

"Oh, it isn't exactly business, Billy. We spotted you just now, and we thought we'd like a talk over old times. I'm sure your lady friends will excuse us for ten minutes."

"Right you are. Run away for a little while, kids," said Billy.

The two girls who had been enjoying Billy's hospitality seemed inclined to resent this abrupt dismissal. Cranley, however, had half-turned his head, and the under-manager was rapidly approaching. They rose and swept away, haughtily contemptuous.

"And now what'll you have?" said Barracrough.

"Absinthe will do me," said Billy. And as the detective gave the order: "Now, gov'nor, what's the lay?"

There are few more hoary maxims than that which insists that there is honour among thieves. If the axiom held, the work of the professional detective forces of the world would be tenfold more anxious and arduous than it is. In isolated cases now and again criminals will keep faith one with another. But such occasions are very rare. Weakness, jealousy, revenge, the mere desire to curry favour with the police are motives upon which it is possible for the tactful detective to play. The devious channels of information that run to Scotland Yard from the underworld are a great asset in the preservation of law and order.

"Oh, nothing much, Billy," Barracrough lay idly back and began to toy with an empty glass. "Seen anything of Dongley Green lately?"

The fat man wrinkled his brows. He was all alert to fathom the detective's intentions, and whether any harm to himself was coming. He sipped his absinthe.

"Dongley!" he repeated. "Why, Dongley went down at Nottingham for six years three months ago. Didn't you know that?"

"Come to think of it, so he did," said Barracrough. "It had slipped my mind. He always was unlucky, was Dongley. Do you remember that jewel business in Bond Street? You were on top then?"

The reminiscence was apparently not pleasing to Big Billy. He shot a malevolent glance at the detective. He remembered how Dongley and he had concocted a neat little scheme to attack a certain five hundred guinea ring; how Dongley, in the neatest of morning-dress, and with a small

piece of chewing gum in his mouth, had walked into the shop inspecting trays and trays of gems; and how he had at last failed to properly fix the ring he had abstracted to the ledge of the counter with the chewing gum, whence Billy was later on to take it when he strolled in as an independent customer after the trouble had died down. Dongley had worked all right up to a point, but while he was being searched, the ring and the chewing gum had dropped from their hiding-place. It had been a narrow shave for Billy, against whom nothing could be proved.

"He was a clumsy dog," he growled.

"Wasn't he in with Gwennie Lyne for a time?" queried Barracrough, with the air of one trying to keep up a languishing conversation.

Big Billy settled himself heavily.

"That old hag always seems to slide along, but anyone who works with her seems to catch it," he growled. "There was Dongley. Now, poor old Brixton George is in for it. Yid Foster has been staying at her place down at Tooting, and he pretty well died of typhoid or measles or something. I'd like to wring her neck."

Cranley shot a significant glance at his superior, who seemed to be suppressing a yawn. Here was the information that Barracrough had been seeking, and yet it seemed to make little impression on him.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "Brixton George! He was committed for trial a week or two back with one of the bank clerks. The Great Southern Bank forgery, wasn't it?"

"That was a neat job," broke in Billy. "Someone's split up a hundred and twenty-odd thousand, and all you get is George and the stool-pigeon. That is, unless you've got someone in line." He looked cunningly across the table.

Barracrough smilingly shook his head.

"I'm not handling that case. Well, we won't keep you any longer from your friends. So long!"

He thrust his arm through Cranley's as they got outside and hurried him with long, quick steps to Trafalgar Square, where they picked up a taxi. "The best piece of luck I've had to-day," insisted the inspector more than once.

At Great Derby Street the cab halted, and Barracrough hurried into headquarters. When he returned ten minutes later he brought with him a third man, a sloping-shouldered individual with shrewd eyes and a light moustache.

"Three of us ought to be enough even for Gwennie," he said. "I've sent someone to drag Watford out of bed—he's looking after the Great Southern Bank case. But I doubt if we shall want him."

Cranley tugged at his moustache.

"I'm not quite clear what the point is yet, sir," he said.

Barracrough's eyes twinkled, and he regarded the other whimsically.

"I'm too old a bird to show my hand until I'm dead sure," he smiled. "I'll tell you all about it sometime—when it's needful for you to know."

The car whizzed on and conversation languished. In half an hour it drew up panting at the corner of one of the neat, respectable streets of villas that fringe Tooting Common. Barraclough laughed as he got out, and cast a glance down the row of tiny front gardens arranged in geometrical designs of calceolarias and geraniums.

"No. 107, sir," he said.

They advanced up the path and Barraclough plied knocker and bell. In a little a light was switched on at an upper window. They heard footsteps. Then a light sprang up in the hall and the door opened.

A skeleton of a man with deep-sunken eyes and a dressing-gown hanging lankly about him, stood peering out at them. "Well," he demanded curtly, "what is it?"

Cranley leant nonchalantly against the doorpost, so that it was impossible to shut



Cranley leapt swiftly. The revolver crackled noisily as he overbore the little man, and they fell a wriggling heap on the tiles.

"Civil Service clerks, small business men, and maiden ladies," he commented. "Wonder what some of the neighbours will say when they learn who Gwennie is? Come on, boys. You'd better wait, driver."

Not a soul did they meet as they sauntered down the dimly-lighted street, scrutinising the numbers on each side. At last, Cranley lifted his hand in signal, and his companions joined him outside the gate at which he was standing.

the door. Barraclough, dazzled somewhat by the sudden glare of electric light, wrinkled his brows at the interlocutor.

"That you, Velson?" he said, as he picked out the features of the man. "How's Gwennie?"

"I don't know you," retorted the other. "And my name's not Velson."

Barraclough stepped inside.

"No, very likely not," he admitted coolly. "Shall we cut all that out?"

A sudden blaze of wrath flamed in the dull, sunken eyes of the little man. He withdrew his right hand from beneath the folds of his dressing-gown, and the blue barrel of a revolver showed in the electric light.

"No funny business!" he warned them. "You guys can't play it on me."

Cranley leapt swiftly. The revolver crackled noisily as he overbore the little man, and they fell a wriggling heap on the tiles. But Velson stood no chance. In rather less than sixty seconds he was disarmed, pulled to his feet, and handcuffed.

Barraclough picked up the revolver.

"I knew you were a gun man, Velson," he observed quietly, "but I didn't think you were a fool. You wouldn't have pulled out the weapon unless you were mighty frightened that something was going to happen."

"You go to blazes!" said the prisoner sulkily.

"All right." The inspector added the formal warning. "No need to tell you we're police officers. Anything you say may be used as evidence, you know. You look after him, Conder. Take him into the dining-room. Cranley, you'd better stay at the door." There were movements upstairs, the shuffling of footsteps, the sound of voices. Then the authoritative tone of a woman could be heard apparently ordering the frightened servants to bed.

As Barraclough reached the foot of the stairs the woman descended, dignified and self-possessed. She was somewhere about fifty years of age, not uncomely—indeed, at one time she must have been possessed of striking beauty. Her complexion was as delicate as a child's, and only the grim mouth and an indefinable quality about the velvety-blue eyes gave any plausibility to the supposition that she was a crook.

There had been plenty of time for her alert wits to gather what had happened. Her face showed no sign of perturbation. She smiled sweetly at Barraclough.

"Good morning, Gwennie!" he said urbanely. "It's a pity to wake you up. Suppose you know what we've come about?"

The smile persisted.

"Good morning, Mr. Barraclough! I see it's gone one, so it is good morning!"

If Barraclough had hoped to surprise any admission out of her he was disappointed.

"Is there anyone else in the house?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Only the two maid-servants. But you won't take my word for it, I know. You'll search anyway."

"That's so. You're a sensible woman. Come on."

He half led, half pulled her into the dining-room, where Conder and the other prisoner were seated. She took a chair with composure.

"You've overdone it this time, Mr. Barra-

clough," she said. "What are you pulling us for?"

Barraclough shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll learn that a little later on," he said. In point of fact, he was still uncertain himself as to what the charge might be. "Meanwhile, if you will tell us where Miss Rockward is it may save trouble."

She elevated her eyebrows.

"Miss Rockward! Who is she?"

The detective turned abruptly away.

"I'm going to search the house," he said.

He went through all the twelve rooms that composed the villa to make certain that Gwennie was speaking the truth when she said that there was no one else in the place but the maid-servants.

From the two servants, all in a flutter by the unexpected raid, he extracted little. Mrs. Frankton—which was the name by which they knew Gwennie—had employed them for about six weeks—that was since she had taken the house. They understood that she was going to conduct it as a boarding-house. There had been only two boarders so far—Mr. Green (Barraclough understood that Velson was meant) and a Mr. Shilworth. Mr. Shilworth was a commercial traveller. He was now away on business—had been away for four days.

Here was food for thought. Miss Rockward had been missing for three days. Barraclough shot a question at the more intelligent and least flustered of the two girls. Yes, Mr. Shilworth had been away before—sometimes for one day, never more than two. He was a middle-aged man, with a scar on the right temple, had a pointed beard, slightly auburn, and light hair, two-coloured.

Barraclough got them to point out the rooms which had been occupied by Gwennie herself, by "Green," and by "Shilworth." It was in the drawer of a writing-table in the apartment of the commercial traveller that he came across what he wanted. He descended to the dining-room and addressed the two prisoners.

"See here, you two people. You know as well as I do that I've no right to question you, but I may as well tell you that I'm not on the bluff. I've got evidence that you were concerned in the abduction of Miss Rockward, and I know why. You can't do any good by holding her up any longer. We're bound to find her—and Yid Foster. Now, where is she?"

"You're a wise guy," sneered Velson.

"Shut up," ordered Gwennie imperatively, and the little man relapsed into scowling silence. She fixed an appraising gaze on Barraclough. "You're a gentleman, Mr. Barraclough," she said. "Will you let up on us if we put you on the line?"

"I can't make bargains, I'm afraid," said Barraclough.

Gwennie placidly crossed her arms.

"Then you'll have to work out your own business," she observed.

Detective-Inspector Watford faced Detec

tive-Inspector Barraclough as they sat in two of Gwennie's softly-cushioned armchairs. Gwennie and Velson were safely on their way by taxi-cab to King Street police-station, and a more minute search of the house than Barraclough had been able to make was being systematically conducted by the three men Watford had brought with him.

The latter tapped the bowl of an empty pipe thoughtfully upon the heel of his boot.

"I wish I was sure you hadn't dragged me out of bed on a wild-goose chase," he observed.

Barraclough stood up.

"Of all the infernal gratitude! Why, man, it's as clear as crystal! Here's this forgery committed. You suspect one of the bank clerks, and keep young Elsiegh under observation. You find him colloquing with Brixton George, and, like a sensible man, you send 'em both down. They're both as tight as oysters, and there's a hundred thousand of the best stowed away somewhere that you can't lay your finger on."

"Well?" said Watford dryly.

"Well, it stands to reason that there's something behind it. They've briefed Luton, K.C., to defend them at the trial. Somebody's finding the money, and that somebody has got the hundred thousand stowed away in an old stocking. Now, you told me the other day that the defence intend to apply for an adjournment to the next sessions when the case comes up at the Old Bailey."

"Well?" repeated Watford.

"There'll be an application for bail," went on Barraclough. "The rest of the gang know Brixton George. They've got to get him out if they want him to save their own skins. He would talk too much if they deserted him. That's what Luton is for—to get bail—and then George could slip the country. Now the judge is bound to want a person of reputation as well as financial standing for bail—a man like Rockward, for instance."

"I see your theory. Miss Rockward has been abducted to force Rockward to go bail for Brixton George."

"That's it. It's certain that Brixton George has been in close touch with Gwennie and Yid Foster. Add it all together and you couldn't get a likelier gang than Gwennie, the Yid, Velson, and George for a job of this kind. And why did Velson draw a gun?"

A tap at the door, and the entry of one of his men prevented Watford from answering. He took from him a couple of letters and three bank pass-books, and looked them through. The creases smoothed out of his bronzed face.

"By the great horn spoon, you're right!" he cried. "Here's letters from the Yid. Why on earth Gwennie kept them I don't know. Where did you find them?"

"Stuffed between the mattresses and the spring of her bed," replied the other.

"Listen to this," said Watford. He read: "You're a real wonder, Gwennie. After you had given the girl the dope in the tea-room in Bond Street I got her away to Charing Cross as simply as A B C. She kept up her daze right across the water, though I got a bit of a shock at Boulogne when I thought she was coming round. However, it was a false alarm. We got here safe enough to your friend at Rue Vailant 24."

"Then there's the other letter: 'I went round to see the kid this morning. She's a little tartar, but I guess T. will teach her to be good. I am staying at the Bristol, and am feeling a heap better. Have you fixed up about Chelsea yet?'"

"The Bristol!" remarked Barraclough. "That's going some. I suspect the Yid will have worse lodgings before long. Will you go out and burn up the wires, or shall I?"

"I'll go," said Watford.

The unravelling of a skein, once the right end of a mystery is found, proceeds rapidly. It was ten o'clock in the morning when Barraclough and his assistants finished ransacking the house at Tooting. A bath and a shave effaced the traces of a sleepless night, and Barraclough made his way to Scotland Yard. He found Watford in his room, with a packed bag in one corner.

"Paris?" he asked.

"Yes," replied his friend. "I'm off to fetch the Yid. The business is well weighed up now. Those bank-books show that all the money has been paid into the account of Gwennie and her pals, and we shall have no difficulty in proving the case. The Brigade de Sûreté have nobbled Foster and found the girl. She was in a little house, cooped up with an old hag named Templeton, who was with Gwennie in a swindling ladies' bank in the States some years ago. Rockward is going over with me. He asked to be remembered to you, and said that if the commissioner approved he would like to hand you over a cheque."

"That so," said Barraclough. "Good!"

Watford tapped him on the shoulder.

"See here, old man, I'm puzzling how you got on to this in the first place. You might tell."

Barraclough sighed and dragged the note that had been sent to Rockward out of his pocket.

"See how that's edged with pink?" he said. "That's how I got my tip. It seemed that sulphur fumes might have done the trick—they had heard of a case where it had happened when a room had been fumigated."

"I bit right on to that. A room would probably be fumigated after some infectious disease, and that was what I had to look for. I had gone right over London before I hit Big Billy and got the straight tip. That's all there was to it."

THE END



The Case of MAGDALENUS and COMPANY

The Strange & Extraordinary Exploits of CARFAX BAINES

THE morning was yet young, and the crowds that streamed out of the District station and poured in steady procession up Villiers Street numbered many clerks, book-keepers and salesmen who were going to their employment in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Carfax Baines, sitting over coffee and toast in his room, which was warmed and brightened by the October sunlight, felt inspired by the trampling feet and the rumble of traffic—the voice of the mighty London that he loved so well. His breakfast finished, and the tray removed by his landlady, he lit his pipe and consulted the pages of a notebook. He had plenty of work on hand, and what case should claim his attention that day was the problem at which he now hesitated.

"The Diamond Dealers' Protective Association, of New York," he audibly remarked to himself. "They want me to discover who has been smuggling diamonds into the United States, in large quantities, about once every six weeks. Been going on for a year. Humpf, a deep business that! Main artery in Holland, I'll warrant. I may unravel it in time, but it won't be an easy task, and I'm all in the dark so far. Here's another affair with a Dutch flavour. Man, unidentified, robbed at Amsterdam, and thrown into the harbour. He comes to his senses long enough to describe his assailant, who is supposed to have escaped by the Harwich boat. Inspector Flint, acting on instructions received, watches for his man in vain yesterday. Thinks he gave him the slip, and wants me to search for the fellow in London. I can't do it to-day. I promised to consult with Lord Templeton at two o'clock about his stolen Raphael, and that engagement stands. There's a case to my liking. Nobody but a criminal of the first water would venture to—"

Baines did not finish the sentence aloud, for just then he heard footsteps in the passage, and an instant later there was a timid rap on the door. Being invited to enter, a man about forty, short and stout, waddled into the room. His round, ruficund face was a mixture of cunning and good-humour; he wore a black moustache

and goatee, and his eyes were small and deep-set.

"I believe I address Mr. Carfax Baines?" he said, in English, with a foreign accent that proclaimed his nationality.

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

The reply was irrelevant—a eulogy of the detective's skill and reputation, doubtless offered by way of explanation. Baines cut in short.

"I am very busy," he said. "Will you come to the point at once?"

"My name is Pieter von Whele," the visitor stated, "and my business is of a rather peculiar nature. I want your professional help, but with the understanding that you will be guided entirely by me, and that you will respect my confidence."

"Go on, sir."

"As I said, this is a matter out of the common," resumed Mr. von Whele. "I hardly know how to put it. But let us suppose that a certain young man, in a moment of temptation, robbed his employers and fled the country. And suppose the young man's family, and because of his previous good record, desire to hush the affair up and give him another chance, to take him back on condition that he is penitent and makes restitution."

"Spare me your allegory," Baines said, curtly, "and give me facts."

"You shall have them, Mr. Baines. You are a gentleman, and my confidence will be safe with you. The young man is Dirk Maas, and he robbed an Amsterdam firm—which I have the honour to represent in London—of a—large sum of money. He got away by a cargo steamer that sailed at an early hour yesterday morning; it is a fast vessel, bound direct for London, and should anchor off Wapping some time to-night."

"The name of the steamer?"

"The Zeeland."

"And the firm?"

"Magdalenus and Company," was the hesitating reply. "They are large exporters of—of tobacco and cigars."

"And buyers and cutters of diamonds as well," Baines said to himself. "The name of the firm was familiar to him, and he was quick to smell a rat. It was at least a strange coincidence, he reflected, that

this visit should fall on the heels of the other Amsterdam affair, and at a time when he held a commission to check the smuggling of diamonds into the United States. But he did not betray any signs of interest. Having filled and lit his pipe, and motioned the Dutchman to be seated, he asked carelessly:

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I am instructed to procure your services," replied Von Whele. "It is a very simple matter. I have reason to know that Dirk Maas—who believes that his escape by the Zeeland is not even suspected—sailed in the guise of a commercial traveller for the firm, with some sample boxes of cigars. He will make no disguise of that, though his name will not be Maas. He will come ashore with the Customs officers, after they have boarded and inspected the vessel; our commercial travellers very often do that. You will be waiting at the quay, and when he lands you will draw him aside, intimate that you are an officer of the law, and that he is to have a chance to redeem his folly. Tell him he is not under arrest, and that I—mention my name—am empowered to make terms with him. Then bring him to the Silver Key in Lower Thames Street, just behind the Custom House. You will find me there, in the private bar, and between us a very little argument will persuade Dirk Maas to give up the stolen property and consent to return with me to Amsterdam."

"You seem to have calculated his movements very precisely."

"That credit belongs to the firm, sir, and they have evidently done some good detective work in brief time. I merely repeat what they communicated in their letter."

"But why do you need assistance?"

"Because I should probably bungle the affair by myself, and perhaps lose my man. The knowledge that an officer is ready to arrest him, that there is no alternative, will speedily bring Dirk Maas to terms."

"Then I had better have a warrant in my pocket," suggested Baines.

"Oh, no, that will not be necessary."

"Does this young man deserve the mercy you propose to grant him?"

"Yes; it is his first offence, and he yielded to a sudden temptation. And I may tell you that he is a distant relative of the head of the firm."

"That puts a different complexion on the matter," said Baines. "I have acted in similar cases, and under the circumstances I think I will help you in this one. But I can improve on your plans. I have a friend in the Custom House, and I will go with the men when they board the Zeeland. Thus I shall be able to keep Dirk Maas in sight."

Pieter von Whele stirred uneasily in his chair, and opened his mouth once or twice. "Yes, yes, that is a good idea," he assented, in a tone that belied his words. "But

you will say nothing to him until you are ashore?" he added, after a pause.

"Certainly not."

At this Von Whele brightened up and entered into a further discussion of the matter. A few minutes later, after describing Dirk Maas, he took his leave, stating that he would go to the Silver Key early in the evening, and there await the arrival of the detective and his quarry. The public-house was one that remained open for the benefit of the night toilers in the vicinity.

Baines, when the door had closed on his visitor, threw himself into a chair, and powdered and smoked for half an hour. He was far from believing that the affair of Dirk Maas had any connection with the diamond smuggling or with the man who had been assaulted at Amsterdam, but on the other hand, from long experience, he was too wise to utterly throw overboard such a theory. Moreover, he was convinced that all was not what it seemed to be on the surface—that there was something being concealed for a purpose.

"I'll stick to the letter of my agreement with Von Whele, I can't do less," he resolved, "but at the same time I'll keep my eyes and ears open, and try to discover what is going on beneath. The Dutchman is deep and cunning, but he is not a good actor. He didn't want to tell me the name of his firm, and he has the prospective movements of Mr. Dirk Maas down just a little too fine. And how his jaw dropped when I said I would go aboard the Zeeland with the Customs people! I'll do it, too, though at present I can't make head or tail of the thing. I would give a good bit for a peep at that letter of instructions from Magdalenus and Company."

Big Ben at Westminster was striking the hour of ten, and the sonorous pealing reminded Baines of his day's work. He took a District train to the Monument and walked to the Custom House, where he sought and found his friend, one of the surveyors, and made all necessary arrangements with him.

"Glad to do you a service, Mr. Baines," said the kindly official. "Yes, I'll wire you as soon as the vessel is reported. And when you come to-night my men will look after you."

The weather changed early in the afternoon, and what promised to be a steady rain set in; the air was raw and biting. On returning to his rooms at eight o'clock, after being engaged for many hours on the mystery of Lord Templeton's stolen Raphael, Baines saw the expected telegram on his desk. It was to the effect that the Zeeland had passed Gravesend, and would reach the Pool towards midnight. So far, so good. The detective dined, smoked a pipe, and was at the Custom House by eleven o'clock, ready for anything that might develop from his blind lead.

A patrol-boat was tossing at the foot of the stairs, and a number of men were standing about waiting. It was still raining

smartly, and the wet stones were responsible for a strange accident—and of a far-reaching one—to the detective. He slipped at the edge of the quay, slid down the granite stairs, and plunged head first into the water. He was caught by a bystander and dragged out in time to escape a thorough ducking, but his hat was dripping, and so were his sleeves and the upper part of his coat.

"This won't do, sir," said the coxswain, who had been instructed by the surveyor to look after Baines. "Come inside, and I'll fix you up with dry togs. There is plenty of time; we don't start for ten minutes yet."

A little later Baines had exchanged his slouch hat for a regulation glazed and peaked cap, and his drenched outer garment for one of the blue coats worn by the Customs officials when on duty.

"Couldn't be a better fit, sir," said the coxswain, approvingly. "They belong to one of our men, Naylor, who is on the sick list at present. You look quite smart."

"The coat is very comfortable," the detective replied. "I'll play Naylor's part for to-night," he added, jestingly, little thinking that he was to have a chance to play it in earnest.

The men presently got into the boat, two at the oars, an officer in the bow, and the coxswain in the stern. Baines joined the latter, and followed the example of his companions by pulling his cap down and his coat-collar up; for the rain was beating in a smart drizzle. The night was dark, but there was no mist, and the river was weirdly fascinating in its solemn grandeur. The Custom House, with its electric lights, with the barges and Dutch eel-boats lying off the jetty, quickly fell behind. The patrol-boat sped on its course, now gliding on the open waterway, now steering a winding track between anchored shipping and sooty strings of colliers from the Tyne. A police-galley slipped up stream with a splashing of oars. The Tower Bridge loomed up and vanished. St Katherine's Docks were passed, then Wapping lay black ahead, and shortly afterwards the coxswain pointed to a glow of advancing lights in the distance.

"An incoming steamer," he said. "Watch sharp, men."

The oars were plied with fast strokes. The steamer took shape in the gloom, drew slowly near, and she had hardly moored, dropping anchor and cable, when the Customs boat slipped alongside the big hull. The officer in the bow caught a rope-ladder that dangled within reach.

"What vessel?" he hailed.

"The Zeeland, from Amsterdam," a voice shouted over the bulwark.

This was music to the detective's ear. He clambered up the ladder behind the officer and the coxswain, and was followed by one of the oarsmen. On deck all was politeness. The steward led the party to the cabin, and here was undoubtedly Dirk Maas, for he produced his samples of cigars, stated that his name was Klein, and that he was

a commercial traveller in the employ of Magdalenus and Company, and produced written credentials to that effect. But he was not a young man. He was at least thirty-five, strongly built, with a crafty, clean-shaven, unprepossessing countenance.

"So that's the young man who is to have a fresh chance?" reflected Baines. "He looks as if he needed it."

The detective, while careful to keep his face from the light and his cap over his eyes, pretended to be supervising the work of his companions, as if he was in charge of them. Nevertheless, he observed that he came for a good bit of furtive scrutiny from Maas, and he wondered if the fellow suspected him, which guess was far from the truth. There was not much to do on the Zeeland, after her cargo of tobacco, wines, and cocoa had been declared. A visit was made to the fore-castle, where the bunks and lockers of the crew were searched. The engineer's quarters, the engine-room, the coals in the bunkers stood a similar test. Then to the deck again, where Dirk Maas stood by the bulwark, his bundle of cigar-boxes in one hand; he was ready for departure.

"You'll take me ashore, I suppose?" he said in a low tone to the detective. He spoke with a note of confidence that Baines did not overlook, though he was far from understanding it.

"Yes, of course," he replied instantly.

The men swarmed down the ladder, and the presence of Magdalenus and Company's traveller occasioned no surprise or comment. The oars dipped, and the Zeeland fell astern as the return pull began, for this particular crew had finished their night's work, leaving the rest to other patrol-boats that were on the river. The tide was running up, and the journey was a short one. Dirk Maas stepped ashore on the Custom House jetty, bade the men a hearty good night, and walked away, briskly at first, then with a sauntering gait as he reached the far side of the quay. He did not turn round when Baines overtook him and drew alongside.

"I'm going to have a drink at the Silver Key yonder," said the detective. "Will you join me, mate?"

"Not to-night, Naylor; I'm in a bit of a hurry," was the reply. "You are Naylor, I've no doubt?"

"Yes, that's right," Baines answered, on the spur of the moment. What did this mean? he asked himself with a keen thrill of curiosity; he knew he had struck bottom.

"Of course, I'm a stranger to you," Maas went on, "but it's all right. You see Micholls is ill, and young Magdalenus is in Berlin, so they sent me instead. I know the ropes—"

With that, something clinked into the detective's hand, and when he looked at it carelessly he saw five golden sovereigns. With a word of thanks and a meaning nod, he slipped the money into his pocket.

The two had now emerged on Lower Thames Street, and Baines judged it likely that Pieter von Whele was watching from the public-house across the way.

"Well, if you won't have a drink——" he began hastily, hoping to sound his way.

"Not to-night," replied Maas. "You are off duty?"

"Yes."

"Then take me to the *Nomadic* as quick as you can; I suppose she lies at her usual mooring in the Pool, and sails early in the morning. I want to finish this business with Captain Lovibond, and get back to Amsterdam to-morrow. I daresay the boat is in the same place?"

his mind in the flash of a second, and as quickly he clutched at a saving inspiration.

It worked well at the start, and no Pieter von Whele came out of the Silver Key to muzzle the game; he was probably drinking hollands in the private bar. Maas was unsuspecting of the detective's lagging in the rear. He pressed slightly ahead as one who knows his way, bore eastward for a hundred yards without a word, and turned down a narrow passage between blank walls. At the bottom of it the river flowed, and here was a lonely wharf. Baines took the cue with alacrity, and scrambling down a stout ladder, he untied a skiff that was under the piles and drew it forth.



"You're not Tom Naylor!" he cried, with an oath. "He has a long scar across his cheek!"

"Yee, it is," was the bold answer.

"Then come along."

For an instant the detective's nerve nearly deserted him; then he determined to hold fast and trust to luck. He knew that he was on to a big thing, and he vaguely suspected what it was; in spite of his compact he must throw Von Whele to the winds, and he did not doubt that he was justified in doing so. As for the steamship *Nomadic*, he could find that easily enough. But where was the boat that Naylor evidently made use of? The above reflections went through

"Here you are," he whispered.

Maas descended to the boat, and Baines drove it into the current and plied the oars. They slipped rapidly away from the wharf, avoiding all anchored craft as they drifted down the dark river. There was little time to spare, and at first the detective failed to draw his companion. But when he produced a flask of brandy, and Maas had taken a deep pull at it, he soon became communicative and confidential. Baines put the links together as he listened and talked. Diamonds, Captain Lovibond, the *Nomadic*—one side of the case was growing clear. And

Naylor, whom the detective represented, was deep in the game.

But Maas suddenly tightened his lips, and by a ray of light from a lantern on a barge he leant a little forward and stared at his companion. He settled back carelessly. "Don't you change your clothes when you come off duty?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll do that when I return."

Maas nodded. He leisurely filled a pipe, struck a match, and ignited the tobacco, and then held the little flame forward and up in the air.

"You're not Tom Naylor!" he cried, with an oath. "He has a long scar across his cheek!"

"No, I'm not Naylor," Baines answered, with admirable coolness. "I happen to be a detective, and I must trouble you to come ashore with me."

As he spoke he reached for his revolver, which he had transferred when he changed coats. But before he could draw the weapon—he had under-estimated the temper of his man—Maas whipped a short cudgel, a Dutch life-preserver, from his pocket, and made a furious leap. Baines, springing up, received a stunning blow on the head. But he grappled with his enemy, and both fell.

A desperate struggle ensued. They tumbled from side to side, each trying to disarm the other, for in one hand the detective gripped his pistol. The boat was in a dark spot, under the shadow of a long line of barges. Baines was dizzy with pain, at a great disadvantage, therefore, and his cry for help was muffled by a muscular hand clapped to his mouth.

"I won't be taken!" snarled the enraged Dutchman. "Curse you—"

With a superhuman effort, Baines broke free and staggered to his feet, only to find that he had lost his pistol. Maas was up as quickly, confronting him. He aimed a heavy blow, the force of which was partly broken by his stumbling over a seat. But the life-preserver again landed on the detective's head, and falling backward on the gunwale, he slid into the water. He sank at once, and was carried a considerable distance by the current before he came to the surface. He was then invisible, close to the

black hull of a barge, and he had barely strength enough left to seize a piece of timber, lost from some vessel, that was floating by. He clung to it with both arms, and went drifting down the river in the deep shadow, what little sense of consciousness he had ebbing fast. Dirk Maas watched for a moment, then sat down with a shudder, and pulled with rapid strokes towards the far side of the barges.

The rest, up to a certain point, is another story, and may be skimmed over briefly. Baines, helpless and fainting though he was, held to the timber until he was rescued below the Pool by a prowling waterman—a sort of Rogue Riderhood—who took him home on "spec." to a hovel near Limehouse, pulled him round in the course of a few hours, and was duly rewarded for his pains. The detective had a thick skull, and he was none the worse for his injuries. By this time the *Nomadic* had left the Thames, and he was certain that Maas had sailed with her for fear of being arrested for murder. That settled the scoundrel for the present—he was safe enough. Baines's first step, to find Von Whele, was a failure; for the Dutchman had disappeared from his London address. His second step was to interview Mr. Tom Naylor, of the Custom House, who wilted, confessed, and was taken into custody. Then the detective had recourse to the cable, and when the *Nomadic* reached New York ten days later—she was a slow cargo steamer—Dirk Maas and Captain Lovibond were promptly arrested, the former for attempted murder, and the latter on a charge of smuggling diamonds; stones to the value of five thousand pounds were found in his possession. Maas was extradited and brought back to England.

Justice was done. Maas and Naylor were punished according to their deserts, while Captain Lovibond lost his ship and was heavily fined in addition. The Diamond Dealers' Protective Association, grateful to Baines for what he had accomplished in their interests, rewarded him munificently. As for Magdalenus and Company, they had a severe lesson, not to speak of pecuniary loss, and they are not likely to burn their fingers again with smuggled diamonds.

THE END.

THE DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

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(Continued from page 14.)

to be absolutely exact—that is, to put the whole thing in a nutshell—what about it? It seems to me, talking as one chappie to another chappie, that something has got to be done!"

Miss Trumble breathed hard.

"Will you tell me why you came here?" she shouted shrilly.

Archie staggered.

"Pray, allow the old temper to simmer!" he exclaimed severely. "I mean to say, what's the idea? I was about to remark that Phipps—By the way, I gather that you know Phipps?"

"I do!"

"Well, that rather puts us on a decent sort of footing," went on Archie, leaning over the desk in a comfortable attitude. "You get the idea? I know Phipps, and you know Phipps—and Phipps knows us. So, in a way of speaking, we're what you might call pals! The whole bunch, what?"

"Boy! You are exasperating me to a very high pitch!" said Miss Trumble, rising to her feet. "I have had sufficient. You will go at once—"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "In fact, absolutely not twice! I trickled in here to put things straight—and at the present moment they're frightfully crooked. Now, about Phipps. Do I understand, old sportsman, that Phipps is to absolutely desert the young master?"

"What do you mean?"

"That is to say, do we agree, or not?" replied Archie. "Now, about Phipps. He's my man, don't you know—a priceless sort of cove, who does the most useful things. The way Phipps can serve up a cup of the old brew is rather startling. You know what I mean—the real, strength stuff, with about a seventy-five horse-power flavour. Tea don't you know—the real goods. When Phipps makes a cup of tea he wins about fifteen medals!"

"You are absolutely impossible!" exclaimed Miss Trumble. "Where did you learn this absurd style of speech, child?"

Archie looked round in astonishment.

"Dash it all, I thought we were alone!" he said mildly.

"I am talking to you, Glenthorne!" snapped Miss Trumble.

"What!" gasped Archie. "But, I mean to say—child! I thought some other cove had trickled in—some priceless bounder—"

"Will you never cease talking?" shouted the Headmistress furiously. "Do I understand that you have come here to discuss this man—this Phipps?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, we've been trying to get at that for the past ten minutes. But it's all serene. It seems that we are now fairly started on the right trend. Of course, Phipps stays with me—absolutely! I couldn't live without him!"

"In that case, my boy, I am very sorry for you!" said Miss Trumble. "It is my

belief that all boys should be treated kindly. I disapprove of violence in any form. I also disapprove of children being pampered."

"Pampered!" repeated Archie. "A somewhat harsh word, old dear. I mean to say, a kind of word that possesses a few sunny knobs!"

"Pampered!" insisted Miss Trumble curtly. "And it is a distinct sign of pampering for you to have this man attending to your every insignificant need! I will not allow it!"

"But, pray consider—"

"I have already considered, and my mind is made up," put in the lady. "There is no other boy in the school who has such a privilege. You shall not have this man to wait upon you hand and foot."

"I don't want to indulge in the old contradicting business, but a chappie simply must protest!" said Archie. "I will admit that Phipps does a frightful lot of useful things. But when it comes to a question of feet, absolutely not! I never allow Phipps to touch the old pedals!"

"I think you are the most ridiculous boy I have ever known!" declared Miss Trumble. "That is sufficient! I will not argue any longer. Phipps will cease to work for you from now onwards—"

"I trust that you will pardon a somewhat timely interjection!" put in Archie, holding up a finger. "Now there, as it were, I've got you! I mean to say, this is where I score large and juicy chunks of triumph! Who, as it were, pays the good old wage?"

"Boy, what do you mean?"

"Naturally, the whole thing is mundane!" said Archie. "In point of fact, it's bally sordid! A chappie never likes to go into questions of doubloons, and so forth."

"Doubloons?" repeated the Headmistress, staring.

"Absolutely! That is, specie—cash!" said Archie. "Who, I mean, pays Phipps the weekly dole that keeps body and soul together?"

"I really do not know why I am wasting my time with you!" snapped Miss Trumble. "Phipps is my butler—he is naturally paid by the school."

Archie smiled.

"Now that my dear lady is where I positively have you on the good old slab of toast!" he said. "Phipps is paid by me—absolutely! He is my valet, and in my employment. These things are dashed unpleasant to talk about, but his services, as butler are sort of thrown in as a kind of makeweight. The school gets him for nothing."

Miss Trumble was impressed at last.

"Is this true?" she asked sharply.

"A Glenthorne speaks nothing but the truth!" said Archie, with dignity.

The man was a fool not to tell me this!" said the Headmistress. "In future, of course, Phipps will be paid by the school—"

"Absolutely not!" declared Archie. "Pardon my bluntness, but that is frightfully steep! Verging on the perpendicular, in fact! Phipps is my man, and I won't release him! You can't come along and deliberately steal him, and things like that!"

Miss Trumble was silent for a few moments, and then she pointed to the door.

"You may go!" she said. "Phipps will leave the school in the morning. Since he is not on the staff, he has no business here. The matter is quite settled. Phipps will go!"

"But, dash it all——"

"That is enough!"

"Pray consider——"

"My child, you can leave me!" snapped Miss Trumble.

Archie attempted to argue, but in vain. And, finally, feeling hot and flustered and bewildered, he found himself out in the passage. He could hardly regard his interview as a very startling success.

With dragging footsteps, he went back to his own study. He groaned as he found that the apartment was empty. He badly wanted to talk with Phipps. He repeatedly rang the bell, but Phipps did not come.

So Archie collapsed upon the lounge, and stared glassily into the fire.

"This is a time when huge assortments of courage are required," he murmured. "The blow has fallen. I mean to say, I can understand how those poor chappies feel in books, when they lose all their bally fortunes at one swoop! It's a pretty ghastly feeling! I have an idea that I shall shrink, hour by hour, and day by day!"

And Archie closed his eyes, and pondered miserably over the situation.

After about twenty minutes, he suddenly sat up, and there was a startled look in his eyes.

"By gad, and by jove!" he ejaculated. "Perhaps the poor cove has gone already! That's why he didn't respond to the old ring!"

The door opened, and Phipps entered.

Archie leapt up with a glad cry.

"Phipps!" he exclaimed. "I mean to say, Phipps. A sort of warm feeling is buzzing through the old veins! So here you are, old lad! We've got to do something don't you know!"

"I am afraid there is nothing to be done, sir," interrupted Phipps gravely.

"But look here——"

"Miss Trumble summoned me ten minutes ago, sir, and I have been instructed to leave the school premises early in the morning. I must go, sir. There is nothing else for me to do."

Archie collapsed on the lounge.

"Kindly dash about, and produce a quantity of water!" he said feebly. "Life, Phipps, ceases to interest the young master. Within two days I shall be a shadow. And then, laddie—and then the end will come!"

And Archie closed his eyes, moaning slightly.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY TO BED.



"WELL, upon the whole, we haven't got very much to grumble about."

I remarked as I sat in Study C with Tregellis-West and Watson. "We thought things were going to be a lot worse."

"But this is only the first day," said Tommy. "And what about football? Miss Trumble has forbidden that; put the ban up completely. Of course, there'll be ructions when the next match is due."

"Begad, rather!" said Sir Montie, shaking his head.

"Well, yes!" I said, thoughtfully. "But I don't know whether we can take that seriously. Don't forget that Miss Trumble was a bit excited at the time. And you can be quite sure that Fenton will talk to her like a dutch uncle. I don't think she'll dare to stop football."

"She'll dare anything!" growled Watson. "As for these other women teachers, they won't last more than a week! They're only fit to teach infants! I'm fed up with things already."

"We've only got to exercise a little patience, and we shall be all right," I declared. "Fenton gave us some good advice. We've got to take it, too. He's a first-class prefect——"

The door burst open abruptly.

"Are we going to stand it?" roared a violent voice.

Handforth strode in, red and furious.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "What on earth——"

"Are we going to put up with it?" snorted Handforth fiercely. "You're the Captain of the Remove, and I've come to you for your opinion! And you're sitting there as though you don't care a toss!"

Behind Handforth the passage was crowded with Removites.

"What's the matter now?" I asked. "What's all the excitement about?"

"Haven't you heard?" shouted Pitt from outside.

"I've heard lots of things——"

"About the alteration in bed-time!" roared Handy.

"No, I haven't heard anything," I said. "I've been in the study, here, for the last hour——"

"A fine skipper—I don't think!" sneered Handforth. "You don't know a giddy thing! I don't care what you say. I'm going to

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kick up a fuss! You can call it a joke if you like, but I don't!"

I looked at all the juniors curiously.

"Well, what about bedtime?" I asked. Reggie Pitt pushed forward.

"Of course, nine-thirty is our usual time," he said—"and early enough, too! Miss Trumble seems to think differently. She's given orders that we're to be upstairs in the dormitory by eight o'clock sharp!"

"By when?" I asked blankly.

"Eight o'clock sharp!" repeated Pitt. "That means no supper, and the best part of the evening gone! It's twenty minutes to eight already! How do you like petticoat rule now?"

"Is this honour bright, or are you pulling my leg?" I asked gravely.

"Honour bright!"

"Why, it's monstrous!" I declared. "We're not infants! Up to bed at eight o'clock! Who ever heard of such rubbish?"

Handforth grunted.

"Well, I'm glad to see that you appreciated the seriousness of the position!" he exclaimed. "And now what are you going to do? If you think that I'm going to bed at eight o'clock, you've made a pretty big bloomer!"

"It's no good going on like that, Handy," I said quietly. "If the order's been made, we've got to obey it."

"What!"

"We've got to obey it!"

"You—you backboneless bounder!" said Handforth tartly. "You leader without a spine! What do you call yourself? Make me skipper, and I'll soon bring about a change!"

I smiled.

"As a matter of fact, Handy, I feel just the same way," I said. "But we can't always act in accordance with our feelings. It isn't wise—it isn't good policy at all. There's no sense in being impulsive and reckless. This thing needs some careful thought."

"Exactly," agreed Pitt. "Good man, Nipper! Now, you chaps, perhaps you will understand why Nipper is such a good Form Captain? He's not one of these spectacular fellows, but by Jove, he does keep his head! When it comes to anything serious, he's as cool as ice!"

"Thanks," I grinned, "but I wasn't asking for bouquets!"

"This is all rot!" growled Handforth. "If you felt the same as I did, you'd get up a revolt—"

"Haven't I told you a dozen times that the time isn't ripe for a revolt?" I broke in. "My dear chap, we've got to have cast-iron justification before we rebel against the school rules—so that public opinion will be in our favour if the truth comes out. If we revolted under the present circumstances we shouldn't have a leg to stand on."

"Nipper's right!" said Somerton.

"If I wasn't right, I wouldn't be talking

in this way," I continued. "You chaps can trust me to do something pretty drastic when the right time comes. But you won't get me making a ghastly bloomer by acting before the time's ripe. And now, about this eight o'clock nonsense. Is it really official?"

"Posted on the board, and everything!" said Jack Grey. "A notice, signed by Miss Trumble herself."

"And what reason does she give?"

"Oh, some rot about sleep being good for the young!" snorted Jack. "Did you ever hear anything like it? Children ought to be in bed for twelve hours! What utter piffle! She thinks she's being kind, I suppose—so we can't very well condemn her."

"Oh, can't we?" said Handforth gruffly. "She's an interfering busybody! I don't care what you say! And this is just the thin end of the wedge, my sons. Mark my words! This is just the first step! If we tamely submit to it, she'll make all sorts of other alterations."

"Well, we'll go to bed, anyway," I said quietly.

"At eight o'clock?"

"Yes," I replied. "But that doesn't mean to say we're going to sleep. We'll go up to the dormitory, according to this new rule. We can jaw then, and if we want to make any new plans, we can make them—in peace, without any fear of interruption."

"That's rather a good idea," said De Valerie. "You've got a scheme, then?"

"Yes, a bit of one," I replied. "My sons, there's going to be something doing! You can't accuse me of letting you down in the leadership!"

"Right you are, Nipper—we trust you all right."

"Rather!"

I was very pleased to find that the fellows had plenty of confidence in me. And the Remove resigned itself to the new order, and prepared for bed just before eight o'clock.

It seemed a ridiculous hour, for at this time nobody was sleepy, and there was very little prospect of us peacefully going off into dreamland. Even at the ordinary bedtime the majority of the juniors were very reluctant to get down between the sheets.

So I could well imagine that there would be a little trouble this time. It was up to me to keep the fellows in check, and stop them from doing anything foolish or impulsive. No good would come of anything like that.

"Of course, Miss Trumble's idea is that the order is for our good," I remarked. "She seems to think that we don't get enough sleep. And she probably believes that after a few days of this we shall be quite accustomed to the early hour, and will be able to go to sleep all right."

"She's wrong," growled Tommy Watson.

"Of course she is," I said. "Her ideas are a bit eccentric in every kind of way—"

and we've got to suffer. Still, it can't last long."

"We won't let it last long," declared Reggie Pitt firmly.

Then Morrow came along, with a curious grin on his face. Morrow was always popular.

"Hard luck, you kids!" he exclaimed. "You have my sympathy. But look here, you'd better not get up to any tricks in the dormitory."

"You can trust us to be good little boys, Morrow," I said innocently.

The prefect grinned even more, and soon afterwards he escorted the Remove upstairs. By now, the juniors had got over their exasperation, and were treating the affair as something of a joke.

"I'm jolly glad to see that you've taken the thing sensibly," observed Morrow, as he stood at the door. "Well, good-night, my sons."

"Good-evening!" growled Handforth.

"Well, it is evening, rather than night," chuckled Morrow. "I sha'n't come back again—"

"Good!"

"So thoughtful of you, Morrow!"

"And I trust you youngsters to keep quiet," went on the prefect. "For your own sake, you'd better do that. Don't make a fuss—and don't get japing. Keep quiet, and you'll be all serene."

Morrow nodded, and went—having told us by his attitude we were at liberty to do just what we liked, providing we didn't create a disturbance.

Nobody thought of undressing.

"Now, Nipper—what about it?" demanded Handforth grimly.

"What about what?"

"You're the leader—what's the first move?" asked Handforth. "You needn't think we're going to bed now. If you haven't got any wheezes, I have. Now, I propose that we—"

"Dry up, Handy!"

"I propose that we drape a lot of sheets round us, and buzz down to Miss Trumble's study," went on Handforth. "We'll jump in on her, and scare her out of her wits! How's that?"

"Rotten!"

"Ghastly!"

Handforth glared as these candid opinions were voiced.

"Why, you—you silly jossers—"

"Peace—peace!" I broke in gently. "We don't want to have any squabbles now. And there won't be any japing either. There's something more important."

"What's that?" inquired De Valerie.

"Grub!" I said briefly.

"Hear, hear!" roared Fatty Little, with hearty emphasis.

"Grub!" I repeated. "Do you think we're going to get into bed without any supper? Not likely. Perhaps Miss Trumble has got an idea that she can economise by sending us to bed early. But this

evening, at any rate, it'll prove to be a very expensive experiment. We're going to feed like lords!"

"How do you make that out?" asked Reggie Pitt.

The Remove was very interested now. Food, after all, was a very important matter. And to go to bed without supper was something of a disaster—especially as this was to be a nightly practice.

"How do you reckon we can get any grub?" put in Grey.

"I'll tell you," I replied. "Possibly you fellows didn't think of it—but I did. Before we came upstairs, I buzzed round to the domestic quarters and got into the store-room."

"How?" asked Jerry Dodd wonderingly.

"Oh, I made some excuse to Mrs. Poulter, and borrowed the key," I grinned. "No, I didn't pinch any grub—no time then. But I unlatched the window. Do your brains begin to work now?"

"I say, that was jolly cute of you!" exclaimed Singleton, with approval. "You unlatched the window—eh? Good man!"

"So I want about five volunteers," I continued. "We'll slip out of one of these windows—the rest of you can lower us by knotted sheets. It won't take us long to bring up a good supply of foodstuff. And then, children, we'll have a nice little feed."

The fellows were enthusiastic.

"What did I tell you?" chuckled Pitt. "Didn't I say that Nipper was always ready with something? Now, Handy, what have you got to say?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I thought of exactly the same idea," replied Handforth calmly. "But just when I was going to get busy on the scheme, we had to come upstairs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was laughed into silence—and I did not choose him as one of the volunteers. The leader of Study D was not a very silent fellow. He couldn't be trusted for such secret work.

I needn't go into any details about the raid.

It's quite enough for me to say that we exceeded our most sanguine hopes. Having got into the store-room, we found enough food there to supply an army. And we returned laden with a whole cooked ham, loaves of bread, tins of sardines, half a cheese, tins of biscuits, and cakes galore. We brought enough stuff to provide the Ancient House section of the Remove with a regular feast.

Before nine o'clock struck we were in the middle of the fun. Reggie Pitt was carving ham like an expert, and Church and McClure were cutting up loaves of bread as fast as they could manage it. Most of the other fellows were eating. Fatty Little, in fact, had started almost before we were in the window.

And the Remove was happy. We felt

that we had scored heavily over Miss Trumble. She had sent us to bed early, but we were enjoying luxuries for supper which never came our way. Probably there would be a reckoning after the feast, but that was a detail for the future. There was no sense in worrying over troubles that might come. The time to worry was when they arrived.

"I wonder how those College House bounders are getting on?" grinned De Valerie, as he sampled the sardines. "I'll bet they didn't have enough sense to get up a wheeze like this."

"There's no telling——"

I broke off abruptly, for at that moment a step sounded outside the door, and then the handle was tried. Everybody stood or sat stockstill, and all jaws had ceased motion.

"Who on earth locked this door?" came a voice from outside.

"Fenton!" breathed Church, with a gulp.

I looked round quickly. The whole dormitory was smothered with food. We had taken the precaution to lock the door, but we had never really believed that we should be disturbed. Morrow had said that he wouldn't return. We hadn't thought of Fenton!

"Quick!" hissed somebody. "Shove all the grub under the beds——"

"No!" I broke in. "We'll open the door."

"What!" gasped Somerton. "Fenny will skin us——"

"Open this door, you young sweeps!" came Fenton's voice, from outside.

I walked sharply across to the door, turned the key, and stood aside. Fenton of the Sixth strode in. He got about three paces, and then came to an abrupt halt. His eyes opened wide as he saw the unusual condition of the dormitory.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed blankly.

There was utter silence.

"Well, what does this mean?" demanded Fenton, after a moment. "You young bounders, what have you been up to Nipper, perhaps you can provide some sort of an explanation?"

I looked at Fenton calmly.

"Is any explanation needed?" I said.

"No, I don't think so," he replied. "By the way, does anybody else know about this—this feast?"

"Nobody—not a soul," I said.

Fenton turned to the door, his eyes twinkling.

"Well, I don't know anything about it, either!" he exclaimed. "Remember, I haven't seen you youngsters to-night!"

He walked out, and closed the door after him. The Remove drew a deep breath, and stared at the closed door with blank astonishment.

"By Jove," I said softly. "What a brick!"



But Willy was something like his elder brother. He was impulsive. He raised the jug, and dashed its contents into Miss Trumble's face.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JOYS OF NET-BALL!



CURIOSLY enough, we had been fully expecting that all sorts of inquiries would be made. Possibly the goods from the store-room had not yet been missed. We felt, however, that we had scored.

Morning lessons were rather more tame than usual.

There seemed to be a lack of ideas. Very few jokes or japes were indulged in. And Miss Teezer went through the customary routine with only one or two variations. The Remove chafed the whole time—for Miss Teezer would insist upon treating the fellows as though they were little children.

The only consolation was that lessons were not quite so hard. Miss Teezer was not such a task-master as Mr. Crowell. But, for all this, we should have loved to see the Form-master back at his desk.

By the time afternoon lessons arrived most of the fellows were becoming half-resigned. They gloomily declared that the new order of things had come to stay, and that we should never get the masters back again.

And then, about half an hour after work had commenced, Miss Trumble entered the Form-room. The Remove sat up. They had an idea that something interesting was

about to happen. Practically all the juniors regarded Miss Trumble with a kind of withering contempt. Of respect, they had none.

"I am glad to see, Miss Teezer, that your children are quiet and obedient," exclaimed the Headmistress, as she beamed upon the Remove. "We are proving that gentle methods are the best. Violence in any form tends to brutalise the young."

"Quite so, Miss Trumble," said the Form-mistress, nodding.

Miss Trumble turned to the Remove.

"Now, children, I have a little surprise for you," she said, with one of her famous smiles. "Strictly speaking, you ought to be at lessons now—but I intend to take you out into the playground."

"Oh, help!" murmured Pitt. "Exercise!"

"As you all know, my boys, I have forbidden football because the game is rough and cruel," went on Miss Trumble. "It is a game fit for nobody but hooligans. In future, therefore, you shall play netball."

"Netball!" gasped the Remove, in one voice.

"But—but netball's a girl's game, ma'am!" protested Pitt.

"It's what they play in infants' schools!" snorted Handforth.

"Do not be so absurd, my little man!" exclaimed Miss Trumble severely. "Netball is by no means a game for children of the smaller size—it is played by young ladies."

"But we ain't young ladies!" shouted somebody.

"No, I will agree," said Miss Trumble. "But netball is a game that should be played by boys and girls alike. For years I have advocated netball in our public schools—but nobody has ever taken my advice. Now I have an opportunity of enforcing the game. It may not be favourable to you at the moment, but when you have thoroughly mastered the rules, you will agree that netball is the finest form of outdoor exercise."

"What about playing other schools, ma'am?" asked Watson. "At football, we play Redcliffe and Helmford and the Grammar School and——"

"In time, these other establishments will adopt netball as the standard game," said Miss Trumble. "But St. Frank's shall lead the way—St. Frank's shall be the pioneer. You will obtain just as much exercise at this game as you would at football. But there is no roughness—no violence."

"It's as tame as skittles!" growled Handforth.

"You will all form up into a double line and march to the dormitory!" went on Miss Trumble. "I have decided to teach you all, so that the most proficient can be singled out, and thus the teams formed."

"Attention!"

The Remove were marched out of the

Form-room in a double line. Some of the fellows were inclined to be indignant, but the majority rather liked the idea. After all, it was a good joke.

And, strictly speaking, this was an afternoon for lessons. And anything was better than lessons—even net-ball! The juniors were determined to make a hopeless mess of the game—just to show Miss Trumble that it wouldn't do.

The Headmistress marched us up to the dormitory and stood aside.

"I will give you ten minutes to change!" she said. "You will find your playing suits all ready on your respective beds. Don them, and then collect in the playground. And remember, children, no noisy demonstration!"

She walked off, and the juniors crowded into the dormitory. Christine and Co., and the other Removites belonging to the College House, had, of course, gone over to their own side.

We entered the dormitory and stared at the beds.

"Help!" gurgled Pitt. "What's this? Gaze, O my faithful comrades! Am I colour blind, or am I seeing red?"

There, on the beds, were the "playing suits." They consisted of serge knickers, with straps at the knee, and jerseys. They were of a brilliant red all over, and on the breast of each jersey the school crest had been sewn. The costumes were certainly attractive, but rather too conspicuous.

"Oh, my hat!" grinned De Valerie. "What a lark!"

"I'm not going to put these silly things on!" snapped Handforth. "Not likely! Everybody will howl at us!"

"Of course they will, but that doesn't matter," said Reggie.

"Doesn't matter?"

"Of course not!" chuckled Pitt. "We're only obeying orders—these suits ain't of our own choice. And, after all, there's something rather humorous about the whole business."

"Let's do it properly," I agreed. "We'll dress up in these freak things, go down, and have a shot at net-ball! There's no need for you fellows to get impatient. If we only look at this in the right light we can get some fun out of it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Nipper's right."

And the Remove commenced changing. Apparently, Miss Trumble was very determined. She had even gone to the length of having these suits especially made. Her ideal, it appeared, was to form permanent net-ball teams.

Of course, the thing was ridiculous.

To begin with, the Remove would never stand it. For it is essentially a game for girls, and the fellows would rebel rather than submit.

But there was certainly no harm in having a shot at it just for fun. Miss Trumble

would get all the bigger shock when she found out the real attitude of the juniors.

"Great Scott!" said Church. "I wonder if she's ordered suits like these for the Sixth?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You bet she has!" said Somerton. "And the Fifth, too! She's dotty enough for anything!"

The Remove was soon ready, and they were a somewhat startling collection by the time they passed out of the dormitory.

Archie Glenthorne, of course, took no part in the affair. Utterly reckless of the consequences, he had gone off to his own study, hoping that he would not be missed.

For Archie was miserable.

Phipps had gone, and life without Phipps was hollow and almost unendurable. Indeed, Archie seemed to be pining away. He was listless and lacking in energy—even more than usual.

His only consolation was that he could go to the telephone, occasionally, and have a few words with his faithful valet, who was at Glenthorne Manor, near Bannington. But talking with Phipps over the 'phone was very poor consolation. Archie needed the man every hour.

The genial ass of St. Frank's had been doing his utmost to think of some scheme. But his brain refused to work properly. But there was a grim look in his eyes, and if there was any possibility at all, he meant to have Phipps back.

And while he lounged in his own study, pondering over the terrible problem, the Remove was being marched off to Little Side by the determined Miss Trumble. She had now been joined by Miss Babbidge, the Housemistress of the Ancient House. This lady, of course, was taking Nelson Lee's place. She was a rather pitiful substitute.

Miss Babbidge was a net-ball expert. What she didn't know about the game was not worth learning. And she had come along in the capacity of instructress. Miss Babbidge was nearly as angular as Miss Trumble. She possessed a sharp nose, like a beak, and round shoulders. When she walked, her feet pointed outwards, in opposite directions.

As Pitt whispered to Grey, one of Miss Babbidge's feet pointed north, and the other pointed south. It was rather remarkable that she could play net-ball at all. Perhaps she couldn't. There's many a games instructor who has got past the actual playing.

The effect of the Remove on Little Side was startling.

It was a clear, bright afternoon, and the grass looked green and fresh. And the red suits glared out against this background in a manner which seemed to hit one in the eye.

To our surprise, we found that other preparations had been made. Two poles had been erected, one on either side of the pitch. At the top of each pole there was a

kind of big ring, with a net attached to it. And the grass had been marked in an unfamiliar fashion.

"This looks lively!" murmured Pitt. "Are we supposed to jump into those giddy nets?"

"You ass!" chuckled Grey. "We've got to pitch the ball in there!"

The ball proved to be an interesting object, for it very closely resembled an ordinary football. We gazed longingly at the goal posts on Big Side, and we were dying for some real sport.

Miss Babbidge looked round.

"Now, children, attend to me!" she exclaimed. "I will go into all the rules of the game."

"Go ahead, miss!"

"We're all listening, miss!"

"Splendid!" said Miss Babbidge. "After I have explained the rules I will then give you a practical demonstration."

"Hear, hear!"

"I will show you how the ball must be placed——"

"Hear, hear!"

"You must not keep interrupting in this way!" said the Headmistress severely.

"Now, you see in my hands the ball. This is the object which must be thrown about the field of play by means of the hand."

"Can't we head it?" asked Watson.

"I will come to that presently," said Miss Babbidge. "Now listen attentively, because these details are most important."

And she proceeded to go into the mysteries of net-ball in earnest. Nobody paid much attention, for the simple reason that the fellows were quite keen upon getting to work.

Their idea was to seize the ball at the first opportunity and use it in their own way. In fact, they had a dark and sinister design in mind. They meant to play football, and they would risk the wrath of Miss Babbidge and Miss Trumble. It would be easy enough to explain that they hadn't got the hang of the rules. It would be a rag-time affair, but there would be sport in it.

CHAPTER VII.

WILLY ON THE JOB!



AND while the Remove was learning the joys of net-ball, two smallish figures emerged from the Ancient House. They paused on the steps and gazed out towards Little

Side.

"Great jumping crocodiles!" said one of the figures. "Look over there! What are those things—lobsters?"

This intelligent remark was made by Chubby Heath, of the Third. His companion was Willy Handforth. And Willy grinned.

"My son, this is Providence!" he said softly.

"What do you mean, ass?"

"Gaze!" said Willy. "If we go back into the Form-room without taking advantage of this opportunity we shall deserve all sorts of bad things. This is a chance in a thousand."

Willy seemed very brisk and alert. And this was somewhat curious, because only five minutes earlier he had been practically on the point of expiring. At least, he had said so.

Without any apparent reason, Willy had come over faint in the Form-room. He had made extraordinary sounds, and had half collapsed in his seat. And Miss Nixon, the mistress of the Third, had become quite alarmed.

Willy assured her that all he required was a breath of fresh air—some fumes of the fire had got into his throat. But he could not possibly manage to stagger outside unassisted.

So Chubby Heath went with him, gently assisting the unfortunate fag out into the corridor. They were to take the fresh air for five minutes, to see if it had any good effect.

Curiously enough, the effect was instantaneous.

The very moment Willy and Chubby got round the corner of the corridor the faintness dropped from Willy like a cloak. He pulled himself away from his chum's grasp and grinned.

"How was that?" he asked.

"You—you awful spoofer!" said Chubby indignantly. "Why, I thought you were bad towards the last! What the dickens is the idea?"

Willy gazed at his chum pityingly.

"And you've always told me that you've got a memory!" he scoffed. "Isn't this Mrs. Hake's day for making those special mince pies of hers? And ain't they ten times as good hot—just out of the oven?"

"By jingo, yes!" said Chubby.

"By the time lessons are over, the giddy mince pies are cold!" went on Willy. "We're going to grab some now—all smoking hot! Come on! We can scoff down about half-a-dozen in five minutes."

Thus the two fags reached the Ancient House doorway, only to find their thoughts completely diverted. Willy, at least, allowed the mince-pies to sink into oblivion. But Chubby wasn't quite so resigned.

"Look here!" he growled. "What's all this rot about Providence? We're going to Mrs. Hake's shop to get some mince pies—"

"No, we're not!" interrupted Willy. "There's something else to be done—something far more important!"

He pointed.

"Do you see those Bolsheviks?" he went on.

"Those which?" gasped Heath.

"Oh, don't be dense," snapped Willy. "Those Reds! If they're anything else but red I'm blind! They're the Remove chaps, and the poor bounders are being taught how to play a new game."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know!" snorted Willy. "I can see, can't I? It's net-ball, I believe! Look at those poles, with the nets at the top! Haven't you seen girls playing net-ball? It's about the silliest, soppiest rot that was ever invented!"

Willy apparently had a poor idea of net-ball.

"Yes, but what's it got to do with us?" demanded Chubby. "I'm sorry for the poor chaps, but we can't show ourselves. There's Miss Babbidge out there—and she'll pounce on us like a giddy elephant!"

"Elephants don't pounce!" said Willy. "And there's no need to show ourselves, either. Come with me, my cherub! Come with me, and I'll show you something! I've taken pity on the Remove crowd, and I'd like to do them a good turn."

"How?"

"By putting a stop to this net-ball rot!" replied Willy. "All we've got to do is to create a diversion, and the trick's done. And I know exactly how we can get to work. Come on!"

The two fags scuttled across the Triangle like a couple of rabbits in a hurry. They vanished into the shrubbery, dodged round the monastery ruins, and then found themselves just behind Little Side.

There was a thick hedge here, so there was no danger of them being seen. Arriving at the corner, they turned, and then found themselves in a large meadow which adjoined the playing fields.

The meadow was empty, save for one solitary occupant.

"There it is!" said Willy, with a grin.

"There's what?"

"The diversion!" said Handforth minor. Chubby Heath stared at the occupant of the meadow.

"That—that old bull?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"You bet!"

"But—but what can that bull do?"

"Nothing—it's about two hundred years old, and couldn't toss a pancake!" said Willy calmly. "Of course, I wouldn't dream of turning a dangerous bull loose in a field crowded with red chaps. A bit too risky. But Methuselah couldn't harm a kitten. He's nearly a calf again!"

"You—you dotty ass!"

"That old bull is in his second childhood!" declared Willy. "But he looks all right—he looks dangerous enough. And when he's turned loose, I'll bet the two old girls will shriek like a couple of factory whistles! My lad, you're going to see some fun!"

ANSWERS
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Chubby Heath grinned at last.

"You are a one!" he said admiringly. "I've never known such a bounder for ideas! I couldn't think of a thing like that!"

"Of course you couldn't!" said Willy. "You need brains to think with!"

"You—you—"

"Oh, don't stop to argue now!" interrupted Willy. "If you begin any of your rot, my son, I'll dot you one."

They climbed over the low fence, and proceeded along the meadow until they came to a gate. This gate led directly into Little Side. Willy didn't know exactly why it was there, but that didn't matter. It was very handy. It only had to be opened, and the bull driven through, and the trick was done.

As a commencement, the two fags opened the gate.

"Now, what about the bull?" asked Chubby. "It's all very well to make plans, but it's a bit more difficult to put them into execution. I heard somebody say that in a lecture!"

"I thought it was a bit too steep for you!" said Willy. "Now, we shall have to buck up, or we sha'n't have time for those mince pies! Stand ready! It only needs a bit of good generalship."

By this time the Removites were getting rather fed up. Miss Babbidge was something like the famous brook—she seemed to go on for ever. It was all very well to learn the rules, but the fellows didn't want to hear them five times over. They were becoming restive.

Willy was more successful than he had expected.

He went round behind the bull, and proceeded to act like a maniac. He waved his arms, danced about, and made extraordinary noises.

"Shoo!" he exclaimed. "Shoo! Go on, you beast!"

The bull was apparently in the middle of a rather late lunch. He paused in his placid chewing, turned his head, and regarded Willy with a pair of bleary sort of eyes. He blinked, and swished his tail.

"Sauce!" said Willy. "Shoo!"

The bull went on chewing again, and Willy grew somewhat impatient. He went up close, and delivered a hearty slap upon Methuselah's rear quarters. This somewhat upset the old fellow's dignity.

He gave one leap round, lowered his head, and started pawing with his front hoofs.

"My hat!" said Chubby Heath. "He seems pretty lively now!"

"That's only swank!" said Willy. "I'll tell you what—you run like mad towards that gate, and dodge at the last minute. He'll run after you, and dash straight through into Little Side."

"Rats!" said Chubby. "You do the running. It's your idea!"

Willy grunted, and proceeded to carry out his own scheme. And, undoubtedly, the

bull was beginning to take an active interest in the whole affair. If Willy hadn't been so confident, Chubby would have half suspected that the bull was quite a dangerous animal.

For hardly had Handforth minor commenced running when the bull gave one tremendous snort, and started off in pursuit. He covered the ground with thunderous strides, emitting a bellow of rage. Chubby Heath stood there, looking aghast.

"Well I'm blessed!" he muttered. "Fancy an old bull being as lively as that! Well, anyway, he hasn't got any horns! It would be rather a pity if Willy got gored to bits!"

Willy, in the meantime, was running like mad. It was necessary. For, to tell the absolute truth, Willy was becoming filled with alarm. The bull was acting his part too thoroughly for the fag's liking.

He thundered along so fiercely that Willy was half afraid that he wasn't quite so harmless, after all. But Handforth minor had got a good start. He reached the gateway just in time.

Then, with the agility of a fox, he dodged aside.

The bull thundered on, shot through the gateway, and was in Little Side. Willy, panting hard, closed the gate with a slam.

"My goodness!" he panted. "That was a near thing!"

Doubts seized him. Was the bull an aged one, or not? Judging by its performance, it was as active as a two-year-old. And Willy was not rendered any more confident by the appearance of a gentleman in corduroy trousers at the other end of the meadow. This gentleman was shouting and waving his hands.

"This," said Willy, "is where we fade away!"

And the two fags gave one last look at the bull, and fled. That last glance was not very promising. For the bull was standing just within the playing fields, tossing his head, and lashing about in a most dangerous looking fashion. Without question, he was enraged.

Then, just over the space of green, he caught sight of a large number of red objects—glaring red objects. The bull's temper became even more incensed.

This was rather too much!

He had been insulted already—he had been fooled by an insignificant fag—and now, on top of that, he found himself in a place where there was a large display of the colour he detested more than any other.

Methuselah tossed his head, gave one tremendous bellow, and charged.

And it was that fierce bellow which reached the ears of the Remove.

Just at the moment, we were preparing to begin the game. Miss Babbidge had finished her long-winded discourse. But she had hardly placed the ball on the ground when the bellow sounded.

We looked round and stared

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Pitt. "Look what's coming!"

"It's—it's a bull!" ejaculated Tommy Watson. "He looks pretty wild, too!"

"I don't wonder at it," I put in. "Bulls don't like red—and there's plenty of red here! We'd better be wary."

Miss Babbidge was holding her heart wildly.

"Save me!" she screamed.

"We—we must all flee!" shouted Miss Trumble, in a palpitating voice. "This—this dreadful animal will kill us! Children—children! Run for your lives!"

"Help! Help!" shrieked Miss Babbidge.

"It's all right, ma'am—you get into the Triangle as quickly as you can," I said sharply. "The bull won't follow you—he'll come for us. It's the red he doesn't like. And you'd better hurry, too!"

But both Miss Babbidge and Miss Trumble had lost their heads.

"Help!" they screamed.

And they rushed about this way and that, hardly knowing what to do. And the Removites, in spite of the presence of the enraged bull, could not help feeling slightly contemptuous.

Here was a striking example of petticoat rule!

CHAPTER VIII.

HANDFORTH TAKES THE TOSS!



METHUSELAH, for some reason or another, came to an abrupt halt when he was about twenty feet away, and stood there lashing his tail violently, and moving his head vigorously up and down.

Perhaps he was rather puzzled. There were so many red objects that he didn't know which one to go for. It certainly was rather bewildering, and he could hardly be blamed for halting to take stock of things.

Miss Trumble and Miss Babbidge, highly agitated and nervous, had recovered from their momentary fright. And now they were racing towards the Triangle, escorted by a number of the Removites.

"I think we'd better clear off, too, my sons!" I said. "I don't like the look of this bull—he's pretty wild. There's no sense in taking any risks with a bull. How he got here is a puzzle."

"Look out!" gasped Watson. "He's coming!"

"By jove, so he is!"

The bull had made up his mind, and he suddenly started a fierce dash in the direction of Pitt and De Valerie, and one or two others. They tore away for safety. And the bull abruptly changed his direction.

He went for another set of flying juniors. And, in the meantime, Handforth was gazing at the whole scene with scorn. There was an expression of indignation, too, on his rugged features.

"You fatheads!" he shouted. "I'll show you how to deal with a bull!"

Church and McClure grabbed at him.

"Quick—let's get into the Triangle!" gasped Church.

"It's dangerous here!" added McClure.

"Rot!"

"But—but the bull!" said Church wildly. "It's coming this way——"

"Let it come!" retorted Handforth. "Do you think I'm afraid of it? Why, he's as old as Adam! He's been in that meadow for weeks, and he wouldn't harm a rabbit! I'll turn him off!"

"Oh, you fathead——"

"I'll turn him off!" repeated Handforth. "Like his confounded nerve, coming on Little Side like this! It won't take me two minutes to drive him out, and put him back in the meadow. Just you watch!"

Church and McClure were rather pale.

"You'll get killed, you reckless chump!" panted McClure. "Don't go, Handy! Let's escape while we're safe!"

"Rats!"

Handforth turned, and deliberately walked towards the bull—who had swung round again, and was still undecided. Methuselah, in fact, was bellowing furiously, exasperated beyond measure.

By this time practically all the juniors had succeeded in getting off the field. They were rather grateful to the bull for having wasted so much time. He had allowed them to get into safety with comparative ease.

But Handforth still remained. In fact, he was the only one left. It was only natural, therefore, that he should devote all his attention to Edward Oswald. The other fellows assumed that Handforth was following.

But Handforth didn't follow.

"You blessed funks!" he shouted. "There's nothing to be afraid of! This bull's an old pal of ours! I'll soon show you how to deal with him."

Just at that moment the gentleman in the corduroy trousers appeared at the opposite end of Little Side. He was waving his arms more wildly than ever. Handforth looked at him curiously.

In the meantime, the bull had come to a firm decision.

"Hi!" roared the man in corduroys. "Get ye out of it, young gent! That there bull's a young 'un! He's rare fierce, too! You'd best 'op it while you're safe!"

"What!" roared Handforth. "He's been in that meadow for weeks——"

"He ain't the same bull, young gent!" yelled the man. "This 'ere's a regular demon! He'll half-kill you if you don't shift—— My heye! That's done it, and no mistake!"

For the bull had lowered his head, and was dashing at Handforth.

There was no question about that dash. It was something definite and absolutely positive. The bull had a fixed intention this time—all his doubts were cast aside.

Previously, he had had a large number of

red figures to charge at. But all these red figures except one had vanished off the field. Handforth, in fact, was the bull's last chance. He either had to go for Handforth or nobody. So, naturally, he went for Handforth. Methuselah wasn't going to be swindled altogether. Strictly speaking, he wasn't Methuselah, but that's only a detail.



"Well, here we all are!" he observed genially. "What-ho! Greetings, fair lady! Archie has come to chat!"
Miss Trumble looked at him coldly.

Handforth, like an ass, didn't seem to realise his danger. He stood there, staring at the bull in a fascinated kind of way. The knowledge that the animal was not the harmless old crock that had occupied the meadow for weeks was just sinking in.

And while it was sinking in, Handy's danger increased.

"Great pip!" he gasped faintly. "I—I'd better bunk!"

It was just like Handforth to come to this conclusion when it was too late. All the other juniors, in the meantime, were in a position of safety. They had naturally assumed that Handforth was following, and it was only at the last moment that Edward Oswald's peril was realised.

Looking back, I saw him standing quite still in the middle of Little Side, with the bull charging at full speed. And the other juniors instinctively held their breath.

"Run, Handy—run!" yelled Church and McClure.

"Bunk, you fathead!"

"Don't stand there like a dummy!"

Miss Trumble and Miss Babbidge, their own danger over, had partially recovered, and they gazed over the playing-field with growing horror. Here was the makings of a terrible tragedy.

Handforth knew it, too. It seemed to dawn upon him that he was to be the central character in the tragedy, too. Excitement was all very well—Handy lived for it—but this was rather too personal to be entertaining. And now it was too late to flee.

The bull was right on him—a snorting, thundering mass of hoofs and bone and flesh. There was only one thing to be done—and Handforth did it. He jumped aside

in one tremendous bound, uttering a fiendish yell as he did so. He actually felt the bull scraping him as he jumped.

Then Handforth whizzed for safety.

He didn't wait to see what had happened to the bull. He knew that it was turning, and the tremendous bellow it uttered proved that it was on the track once more. Handforth cast all dignity to the winds, and hoped against hope that he would be able to reach the hedge in time. He had spotted a small gap, and he was making for it at express speed.

"Go it, Handy!"

"Buck up—he's gaining on you!"

"Faster, old man—put your beef into it!"

Handforth used every ounce of his energy. He could hear the bull thundering behind. It seemed as though the whole earth was shaking, and Handy had a horrible feeling that nothing could save him.

He wasn't far wrong!

We, who were watching, were able to judge with perfect accuracy. And we could now see that Handforth had no earthly chance. The bull was gaining on him so rapidly that it was a matter of sheer impossibility for the junior to reach the gap in time.

"Dodge, Handy!" yelled Church wildly.

"You'll never do it!"

But Handforth didn't hear. The thundering gallop of the bull in his rear drowned all other sounds. Of course, he had nobody

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to blame but himself. If he had liked, he could have escaped with all the rest of us.

"My goodness!" ejaculated Pitt. "He'll be badly hurt!"

"Seems like it!" I said anxiously. "Oh, what an idiot! Why didn't he——"

"Oh!" sobbed Church. "Look. He's—he's——"

Church broke off, horrified. And there was a tense, sudden hush among all the others. For the bull had actually reached Handforth, and the latter had not dodged. The fatal moment had come.

With his head lowered, and going at full speed, the bull caught Handforth in the rear. It was a matter of infinite relief that the animal possessed no horns—otherwise the affair would have been a tragedy.

Even as it was, Handy's position was grave.

He was lifted off his feet, and then the bull, bellowing fiercely, tossed Handforth into the air like a shuttlecock. It was a ghastly moment. Up went the junior, his arms and legs waving wildly. And he descended on the other side of the hedge, vanishing from our view.

"Oh, he's killed—he's killed!" said McClure faintly.

"I wouldn't say that, but it'll be a marvellous thing if he's not smashed about!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt. "My hat! Thank goodness, he came down on the other side of the hedge!"

"Rather!" I agreed. "The bull would have pounced on him in a flash if he'd descended this side. Quick! We'll rush round to help the poor chap."

Everybody was wild with anxiety. The man in corduroys was rushing across Little Side with a big stick and a halter, in readiness to capture the infuriated animal. He had a pretty difficult task.

But we didn't concern ourselves with him or the bull. Handy was out of harm's way—but what had happened to him?

He had landed in a little secluded patch of ground near the shrubbery. So it was only a short distance for us to go. We rushed along at full speed, the ladies following.

Church and McClure were the first on the spot. There, lying still and silent, was Edward Oswald Handforth. He sprawled in the grass on his back, his legs hunched up, his arms outstretched.

"Handy!" panted Church, in a choking voice.

He threw himself down beside his chum. And Handforth opened his eyes, and looked at Church in a dreamy kind of way. McClure was there, too. Both the juniors tried to raise their injured chief.

"Don't—don't forget to buy some decent flowers!" muttered Handforth, in a faint whisper. "You can have my bike, Church. It's all right—don't make a fuss—it was my own fault. But I sha'n't last long!"

"Handy!" breathed McClare. "You—you're not dying!"

"I ought to know what I'm doing!" exclaimed Handforth weakly. "Of course, I'm dying! I'm smashed all up! I can feel about six ribs hanging loose! My right leg is smashed in four pieces. Good-bye, you chaps—"

"He's dying!" wailed Church.

By this time all the rest of us had arrived, and we collected round him in a big circle.

"There's no need to make such a fuss!" growled Handforth. "Can't I die in peace now without you fatheads staring at me? I sha'n't last more than ten minutes! If I had a fountain-pen, I'd make a will!"

"Dry up, Handy!" said Pitt severely.

Just then Miss Trumble came pushing through.

"My poor, poor child!" she exclaimed anxiously. "Are you hurt? Oh, are you badly hurt?"

"Hurt!" said Handforth, with contempt. "Oh, no! Not a bit! I simply love being tossed by a bull! As a matter of fact, I'm dying! I can feel it coming on—"

"This is dreadful—dreadful!" said Miss Trumble tearfully. "My boys! Please lift this unfortunate playmate of yours, and carry him to the school sanatorium. He must be put to bed, and I will fetch the doctor, and everything will be done for his comfort."

"Right you are, ma'am."

"We'll take him indoors, Miss Trumble!"

"Gently does it, you chaps—don't shake him too much!"

We advanced upon Handforth to render aid.

"Stand back! Stand back!" snapped Handy. "Look here! I'm not going into the beastly sanatorium! I hate the place! I'd rather die out here, in the grass!"

"He's delirious!" said Church fearfully. "They always talk rot when they're delirious—"

Biff!

Considering that Handforth was dying, he still possessed quite a useful punch. Church found this out, for he went over with a gasp of surprise and joy. He didn't mind that punch. The very fact that Handy could deliver it proved that he was a long way from dying.

"I'm talking rot, am I?" snapped Handy, jumping to his feet, and glaring round. "And as for going into the sanny—there's nothing doing! I—I'm feeling better now!"

"Those bones of yours have set pretty quickly!" said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Although we could hardly believe it at first, the simple truth was that Handforth had met with no serious injury at all. He was bruised in several places, but there was nothing else wrong with him.

Miss Trumble insisted upon him going into the sanatorium, and Handforth insisted upon doing nothing of the kind. In the end he had to go—much to his disgust. But he didn't stay there long. At the first opportunity he slipped out, and joined the other fellows.

The incident had proved that petticoat rule was not ready in an emergency. If masters instead of mistresses had been on the field at the time of the bull's appearance, Handforth would never have been tossed.

And, before long, we were to have several other striking examples of the futility of feminine control over a great public school. In fact, things became so bad that excited talk of a coming rebellion was soon in the air. If the Remove was goaded sufficiently, it would fail to see the humorous point of view.

And then the trouble would come.

As a matter of fact, it did—but that's another story!

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

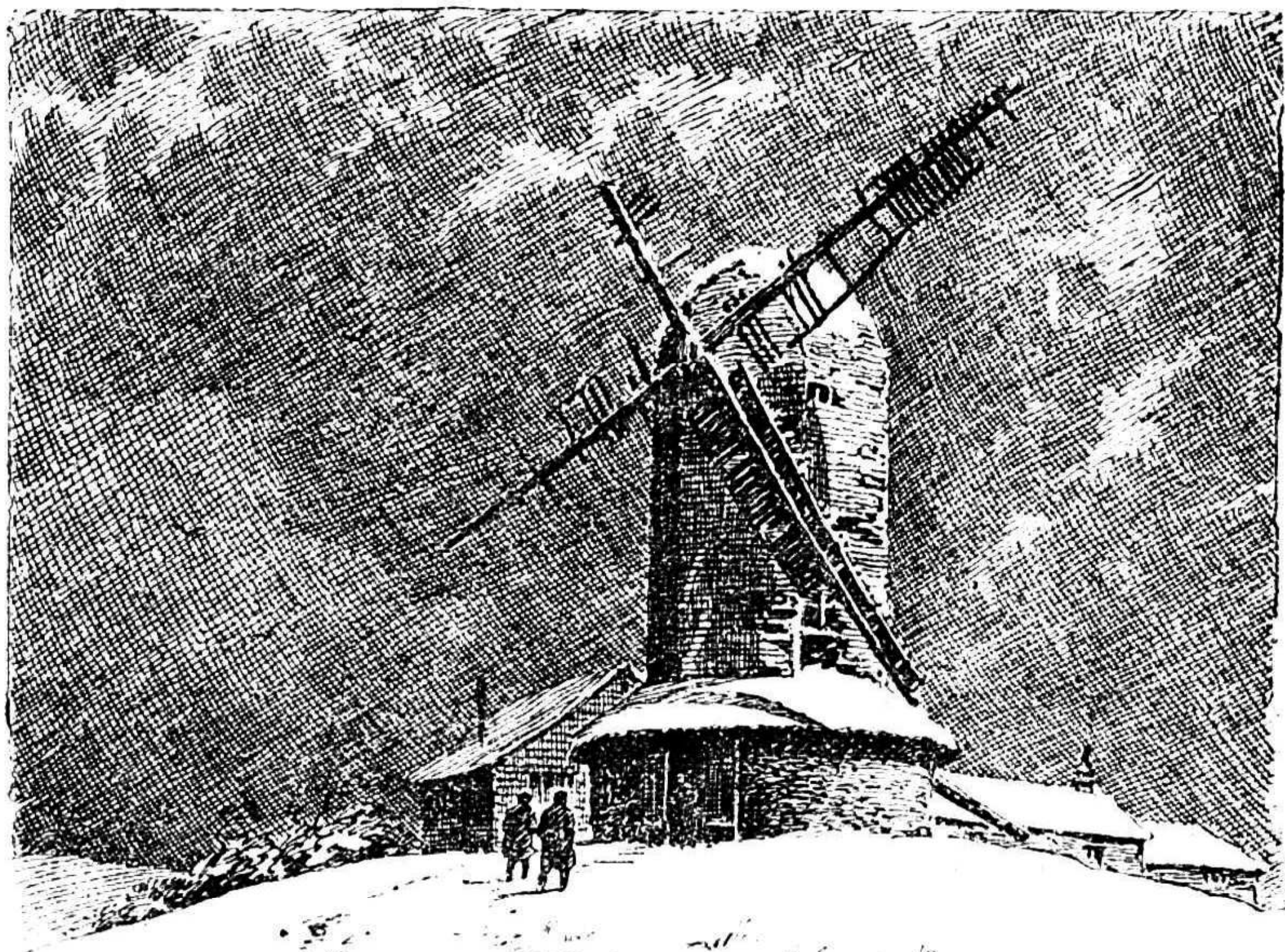
My dear readers.—The novelty of feminine rule at St. Frank's provided the boys with endless fun and amusement for the first week, as you have seen in the above story. But fun on a bread and water diet was not likely to last very long. The juniors began to feel that Miss Trumble's absurd innovations called for more serious action than playing the fool. There was only one thing to do, and that was to band themselves together and revolt. It was no easy matter, particularly as they were dealing with women, and they had to think of the good name of the school. The difficult task of secretly organising a "Barring-Out" will fall to the lot of Nipper, and in next week's story, "GOADED TO REVOLT!" the

leader of the Remove will throw down the glove to Miss Trumble.

The result of last week's Story Voting Competition will be published in about three week's from now.

There will appear two more complete detective stories in "The Detective Story Section" next week. "THE STRING OF PEARLS!" is the title of one of them and is a real life detective romance of Scotland Yard. The other, "THE CASE OF THE VANISHED GRAND DUKE!" is another remarkable story of the celebrated detective, Carfax Baines. Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



The
Old Mill

:: THE OLD MILL ::

BANNINGTON MOOR

At last I have found space to publish another of our artist's clever sketches of interesting spots in the locality of St. Frank's, which are mentioned over and over again in our stories. It is some weeks since the last of this series appeared, and I have had so many letters from readers asking when this feature was to be continued, that I have taken this first opportunity of assuring them that I have not forgotten all about it.

The Old Mill on Bannington Moor, represented in the above sketch, is a picturesque landmark that has existed as long as St. Frank's can remember. It is now a disused

ruin, and has not been in working order for many, many years. In fact, it is supposed to be haunted, but the stories relating to it are so numerous and varied that one can place very little credence on any of them. But apart from village gossip, the Old Mill undoubtedly has a history, and what that history is had better be left to Nipper to tell in one of his future narratives.

Old readers will remember that the Bannington Mill has figured in many of the St. Frank's stories, and I hope, will appear as often again in the future.

THE EDITOR. ★

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