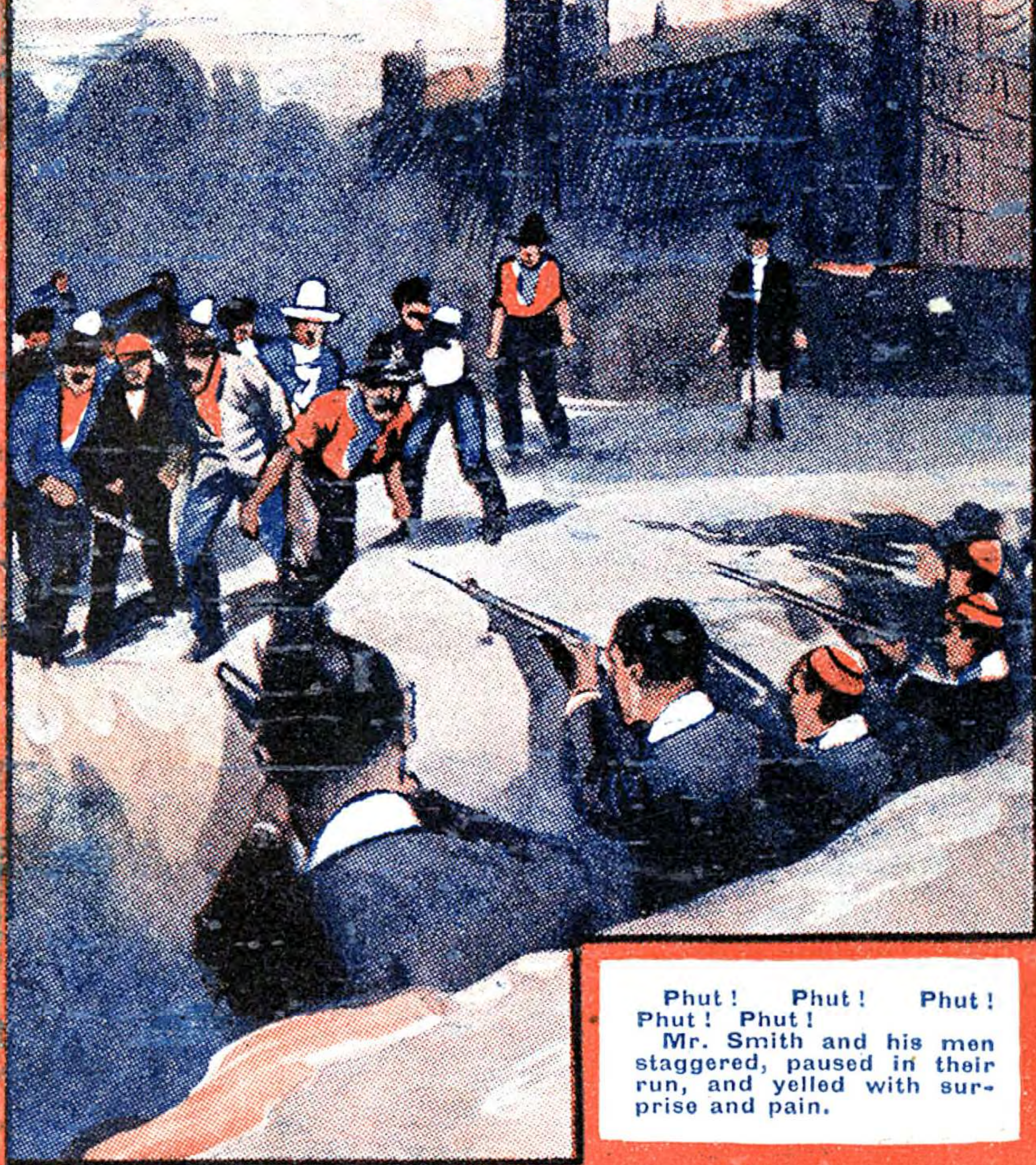


DON'T MISS THE GREAT "BARRING-OUT" STORIES NOW RUNNING!

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Phut! Phut! Phut!
Phut! Phut!

Mr. Smith and his men staggered, paused in their run, and yelled with surprise and pain.

A tense moment from This Week's exciting
"Barring - Out" story of St. Frank's:—

THE WAR AT ST. FRANK'S



"If you and your men care to earn ten shillings each, you may do so. All I require is that you bring these boys to the school as quickly as possible."

THE WAR AT ST. FRANKS!



For some days past the Remove, headed by Nipper, has been preparing for a state of war against the authority of Miss Trumble, the new lady Head at St. Frank's. In the dead of night trenches were dug in the fields near the school to accommodate the Juniors against a siege and a possible attack. Then an ultimatum was sent to the Headmistress demanding the return of Dr. Stafford and the other masters. But this only succeeded in infuriating Miss Trumble and increasing her determination to run the school in her own way. Her action has signified a declaration of war on the Juniors, who have now begun the "Barring Out" in grim earnest. Hired mercenaries are employed by Miss Trumble, and the story of the great struggle is admirably told in the

narrative below.

THE EDITOR.

(RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE TRENCHES!

EXCITEMENT ran high at St. Frank's. It was morning, bright and clear, and, according to all rule and regulations, the Remove ought to have been on the point of marching into the dining-hall for breakfast.

But the Remove was doing nothing of the sort.

Attired in the uniform of cadets, the juniors held a strong entrenched position just behind the playing fields. They were there in force—every member of the Remove to a man.

And the Remove was defying authority!

Goaded to a point of exasperation, the fellows, under my leadership, had decided that petticoat rule was impossible. And at last the great moment had arrived.

After days of preparation, war was now declared.

And Miss Jane Trumble, the self-appointed Headmistress of St. Frank's, was left to deal with the situation as best she could. It was

a difficult situation, too. For there were no masters in the old school. St. Frank's was entirely under the control of women.

And that, in fact, was the reason for the Remove rebellion.

Miss Trumble, the elderly spinster lady who had descended upon St. Frank's like an avalanche, had caused all the masters to resign within a few hours of her arrival.

She had her own ideas regarding how a big boys' school should be conducted. These ideas were somewhat weird and wonderful. And the masters, finding it impossible to agree with her, had taken the only course open to them.

Miss Trumble had proceeded to turn things upside down.

She had banned football; she had abolished punishment by the cane or birch, and she had instituted a most hateful system of bread and water diet for those who misbehaved themselves.

She had been particularly harsh with the Remove.

No doubt this was because the Remove had more spirit than any other Form—the Re-

move was composed of reliable, healthy youngsters, who were not willing to be treated like children.

For that was Miss Trumble's idea. She regarded the boys as infants, and wanted to treat them as such. She considered it far more reasonable to abolish half holidays, and to place delinquents on a bread and water diet than to give them a good old-fashioned caning.

Naturally, the Remove jibbed at this kind of thing. The fellows had shown their attitude in no uncertain manner—with the result that Miss Trumble had got her knife well into the chief junior Form.

After that the trouble had commenced.

In order to maintain discipline, the Headmistress had heaped all sorts of indignities upon the Remove, and when, finally, she deprived the juniors of their studies, on the top of a host of other punishments, the Remove had decided that life was not worth living.

And so the revolt had come.

For over a week we had prepared. And the cream of the whole thing was that we had made the bulk of these preparations right under Miss Trumble's nose. For the Cadet Corps had been busily engaged in manufacturing a complete and intricate form of trench works, encircling the stout old barn which stood at the junction of the two little meadows at the rear of Little Side.

This barn now formed the headquarters of the Remove army.

It was well protected—the trenches reached out in all directions, in exactly the same fashion as actual war defence works. We had not overlooked a thing. And quietly, in the night, we had taken up our position.

It was morning now, and Miss Trumble had just discovered that the Remove was absent from its usual haunts. A despatch-bearer had carried an ultimatum to the school. It was brief, but pointed. The Remove wanted the masters back again, and it would defy all Miss Trumble's authority until its demands were met.

Naturally, Miss Trumble had refused—we had expected nothing else. The despatch-bearer had managed to get back behind the lines, and now the Remove was quite intact.

Even Archie Glenthorne, the languid and genial ass of the Remove, was with us. He had thrown in his lot with the rest of the juniors, although he was not actually a cadet. But Archie was as determined as the others.

Anybody coming upon the scene suddenly would have been struck by its warlike aspect. There lay the system of trenches, winding in and out among the little gravel hillocks of the meadows. In the very centre stood the barn—an old-fashioned place, which had withstood the test of time. Its sides were of wood, and the roof was thatched. But, inside, it was thoroughly weather-proof, with an excellent loft which would serve for sleeping quarters.

Indeed, the Remove had brought all the

mattresses and bedding away from the school, so there would be no hardship when it came to taking rest. As for food, the storerooms had been raided, and large supplies were now tucked away in a corner of the barn, under the sole charge of Fatty Little. Fatty was the cook of the regiment, so to speak, and he revelled in his work.

In the clear morning light the trenches looked businesslike enough. Here and there cadets were walking up and down, on duty. A watch was kept constantly. And in the centre of the position lay the open space in front of the barn. It was crowded with cadets.

And Reginald Pitt, of Study E, was surrounded. He was the despatch bearer who had taken the ultimatum to Miss Trumble. And he had just been explaining how he had got away after delivering his message.

"It's all right, you chaps—war is declared!" he exclaimed. "We expected it, so there's no need to get excited."

"War?" yelled Handforth. "Well, we're ready!"

"Rather!"

"Let the enemy come!"

"Down with petticoat rule!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors yelled with enthusiasm.

"There's no need to carry on like that!" I grinned. "Some of you fellows seem to think we're in for a nice little picnic—but it won't be. If I'm any judge of character, Miss Trumble will show fight."

"All the better!" said Edward Oswald Handforth. "We can't start the fight—it wouldn't be right for us to begin on the women! But if they start on us we shall be justified in defending ourselves."

"Rather!"

"At the same time, we mustn't be too cocksure," I went on. "I think some of you have an idea that Miss Trumble will simply crumple up and collapse. You'd better get rid of that notion at once."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Armstrong. "She's only a woman! When she finds that we're determined, she'll knuckle under, and bring all the masters back. Just you wait and see!"

"She'll give in before night!" said Griffith.

"I don't give her beyond dinner time!" added Owen major.

I shook my head.

"If that's your idea, I'm sorry for you!" I said grimly. "Miss Trumble may be a woman, but she's got plenty of determination. By jingo! Haven't we had proof of it? And when she finds that we're up against her she'll hold out until the last minute."

"That won't be long in coming," said Marriott.

"Well, I'll give Miss Trumble a week," I said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can grin!" I went on. "But you can take it from me that the Headmistress

won't give in until she's tried every method of forcing us to surrender. Plenty of you have believed for a long time that the thing's going to be easy. It won't be easy. And the only way for us to win is to stick to our guns, through thick and thin!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Pitt.

Not many of the juniors thought that I was right. The majority of them had a firm impression that Miss Trumble would weakly grant our demands when she found that we were strongly entrenched. But I knew Miss Trumble to be a woman of strong character.

Personally, I had nothing against her. Under ordinary circumstances, she was probably a harmless lady. But she was like a square peg in a round hole as the Head of St. Frank's. She knew nothing about the control of boys, and her authority was insufferable.

That was why the Remove had revolted. It simply could not carry on under such conditions. It was very sorry, indeed, to lead a revolt against the ladies, but it had to be. It was the only way to show them that they were not suitable for the work.

And the Remove was not alone in detesting the peculiarities of petticoat rule. The whole of St. Frank's, including the Sixth, was heartily sick of Miss Trumble and her lady colleagues. All the fellows would be glad enough to see the masters back.

But the Remove was the only Form which had enough gumption to show actual fight.

And, after all, this was quite easy to understand. The fags were too young to undertake any such thing, and the seniors had their dignity to consider.

Of course, the Sixth couldn't do anything. The lordly Sixth had to suffer in silence. And the Fifth stood on their dignity even more than the Sixth. For them to revolt was quite out of the question. They were seniors—they could not think of anything so undignified.

Therefore it was left to the Remove to lead the way; it was left to the Remove to perform the actual work. And the Remove was doing it manfully. All the juniors considered themselves to be members of the chief Form at St. Frank's. There was something in this view. For it was always the Remove that did things.

Without a doubt, the Remove was doing something now!

CHAPTER II.

STICKING TO THEIR GUNS!



"ENEMY in sight!"

The hail came from one of the cadets in the front line trench. It was a loud hail, and all the other cadets became on the alert. The

"enemy" was an unknown quantity so far. We were an army fighting against nothing. We had taken up our positions, but there was no actual enemy to assail us. Accord-

ingly, everybody expected to see Miss Trumble.

She was the only enemy we knew so far.

And, sure enough, Miss Trumble was within sight. She was striding across Little Side, strongly supported by Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice. These latter ladies were the Housemistresses of the Ancient House and the College House respectively. They approached the position with firm steps.

"The entry of the gladiators!" grinned Reginald Pitt.

"You mean the Three Graces!" said De Valerie with a chuckle. "My hat! Come to think of it, they don't look very graceful, do they? Talk about a bony set! They're the limit!"

It could hardly be said with truth that the ladies were beautiful. Miss Trumble herself was big, angular, with a somewhat masculine cast of countenance. And, at the present moment, she was red with exertion and fury.

Miss Trumble, in fact, could hardly contain herself.

The whole thing was intolerable—outrageous! For these junior boys to defy her was tantamount to sacrilege. Her own children had had the audacity to defy her—openly. It was more than flesh and blood could stand.

And Miss Trumble meant to show these insolent, young puppies what was what! Never would she submit to such a thing.

She came on, hardly knowing what steps to take, but with a firm conviction that her very presence would instil terror into the hearts of these naughty children.

She really believed that she was capable of quelling the rebellion single-handed. Surely the boys would not dare to disobey her to her very face? The thought was horrifying.

Suddenly, Miss Trumble paused. Only a few yards in front of her lay the outer defence works—a front line trench which jutted out from the other trenches.

It was crowded with juniors, who were looking out boldly and with perfect confidence. The Remove had taken up its stand, and was not going to be scared by anything that Miss Trumble might say.

For myself, I was most anxious that there should be no unruliness. It was only fair to give Miss Trumble a chance to capitulate. And so, before any of the thoughtless juniors could start any shouting or hooting, I jumped out of the trenches, accompanied by three of my officers—Bob Christine, Reggie Pitt, and Cecil De Valerie.

We all stood at attention, and saluted.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" demanded Miss Trumble, her voice quivering with anger. "You wicked, wicked children! You will leave these meadows at once and come straight indoors."

"Did you receive our ultimatum, Miss Trumble?" I asked politely.

"Don't dare to question me, child!" shouted Miss Trumble hotly. "Your auda-

city is startling! The communication I received is now in ashes! I will have no dealings whatever with rebellious children!"

I bowed.

"In that case, ma'am, the interview may as well be closed," I said. "If you will have no dealings with us——"

"Silence!" screamed Miss Trumble. "I order you to form into line, and follow me back to the school!"

"I am sorry, Miss Trumble, we cannot obey!" I replied.

"You—you cannot obey!" stuttered Miss Trumble, nearly choking. "Good gracious me! This is terrible—terrible! Far worse than I thought! Who—who is the ringleader of this dreadful affair?"

"We are all in it together, ma'am," put in Pitt.

"I am the leader, Miss Trumble," I said quietly.

"Oh, indeed!" she snapped. "Then you will be the one to suffer, young man! I command you to come with me——"

"I should like you to fully understand, ma'am, that the Remove no longer recognises your authority," I interrupted. "Please do not imagine that we mean any disrespect. The Remove has no quarrel with you personally. We only disagree with the policy of women controlling a boys' school. In our opinion, it is not correct, and we cannot consent to continue under such conditions. We can only hope that you will understand our motives."

"Stop!" gasped Miss Trumble. "You—you are impertinent——"

"I am sorry that you should misunderstand so readily," I went on. "As I have just pointed out, the sole objections of the Remove are centred against women being in control—not against any ladies in particular. It would be just the same, Miss Trumble, if other ladies had been appointed. We object to the principle—not to the persons."

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt heartily. "Jolly well put, old son."

"Rather!" agreed Bob Christine. "That's just what we all believe, in a nutshell. It's not right that women should——"

"Not right!" broke in Miss Trumble, her voice shaking with fury. "Not right! You have the audacity to dictate to me! It is outrageous—it is unheard of! Such young children to presume like this is little short of monstrous! I will hear no more——"

"We thought it only right, ma'am, that you should know the exact truth," I continued. "We have taken up this stand, and we intend to stick to our guns until the old order of things at the school is resumed. We shall not return to our ordinary duties until the masters are brought back."

"Hear, hear!"

"We want Dr. Stafford back!"

"Hurrah!"

"And Mr. Lee—and Mr. Stockdale!"

"Three cheers for the masters!"

"Hurrah!"

The rebels could contain themselves no longer, and cheered with all the strength of their lungs.

Miss Trumble stood looking on, and listening, her anger growing with every moment that passed.

"I have heard your ridiculous statement!" she said passionately. "I absolutely refuse to listen further! If you do not follow me back to the school, I will have you turned out of these dirty ditches——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will sentence you to bread and water——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We have finished with bread and water for good!" yelled somebody. "And if you try to turn us out of here, you'll find it a pretty stiff job!"

"Rather!"

"Just have a shot at it, old lady!"

Miss Trumble nearly fainted. She had heard the words distinctly, and the insult was almost too much for her. She really did feel bad, and she decided that it was impossible for her to face this indignity any longer.

She turned, and walked away, vainly attempting to retain her dignity. And Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice, who had not said a word all the time, walked with her.

They had an idea that they were not very popular.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIXTH DON'T THINK SO!



THE Remove celebrated their initial victory with much cheering.

They regarded Miss Trumble's departure as a sign of weakness, and many fellows declared that she would knuckle under before many hours had passed. But one thing was certain.

The Headmistress would never be able to say that we had treated her with disrespect at the opening of the campaign. As politely as possible, I had placed the position before her.

"Well, that's that!" remarked Pitt. "There's no telling what she'll do, but I've a pretty keen idea we shan't be left in peace for long. However, we've got comfortable quarters here, and it'll take a bit to shift us out of Fort Resolute!"

"That's rather a good name!" I said. "We'll call it Fort Resolute from now onwards. And we'll stick to our principles throughout."

"Rather!"

"We've shown Miss Trumble that we're not afraid of her, and we'll let her see that we're determined," declared Bob Christine. "We've burned our boats now, my sons, and there's no drawing back."

"No fear!"

"Who's thinking about drawing back?" demanded Handforth. "I don't care if we have to hold out for weeks—it's better than lessons, anyway! This sort of life just suits me."

"It won't be like this all the time," I pointed out. "It's fine this morning, but

to-morrow it may be pouring with rain. And, rain or shine, the trenches have got to be manned. There's night duty, too. My sons, it won't be all honey, I can tell you."

"Oh, we'll take the rough with the smooth," said Armstrong. "We're quite prepared for it—we're not afraid of a little hardship. And we're fighting for a jolly good object."

"Rather!"

And then we had crowds of visitors. Fags came round by the dozen, and after that a number of Fifth-formers, headed by Chambers, strolled up and had a look at us in a fatherly kind of way.

Chambers was inclined to be severe.

"I don't know that I approve of this, you kids!" he said, frowning, as he stood on the edge of the trench. "It's undignified. It's not in keeping with the best traditions of the school."

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Chambers frowned more than ever.

"I didn't come here to be checked!" he said warmly.

"Well, nobody asked you to come!" said Pitt. "You're at liberty to go just as soon as you like, my son. This is a Remove stunt—it's got nothing to do with the Fifth."

"If the Fifth had any gumption, they'd join us!" said Handforth, with contempt. "But the Fifth hasn't got any giddy backbone! The Fifth is like a jelly that hasn't been allowed to stand long enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chambers went very red. He was quite a good fellow at heart, but he had an exaggerated idea of the importance of the Fifth—and an even more exaggerated idea of his own importance.

"You cheeky young sweeps!" he snapped. "This is what comes of being kind-hearted! I came along here to give you a few words of sympathy—and all I get is sauce! I'll soon—Hi! What the—Yaroooooh!"

Chambers gave a wild howl as the top of the trench crumpled up. He had been standing rather too near the edge, and the next moment he was precipitated to the bottom with a jar which shook every bone in his body.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chambers sat in the trench, and the trench proceeded to sit on Chambers. A large portion of it collapsed, and the unfortunate Fifth-former was smothered—in fact, nearly buried.

He struggled to his feet, smothered with moist gravel.

"You—you young rotters!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are we going to stand this?" demanded Handforth indignantly. "Are we going to let these fat-headed Fifth-formers come here, and bust up our trenches? Let's pitch him out!"

"On the ball!"

The juniors dashed at Chambers with a yell. And the next moment the pompous Fifth-former was hustled out of the trench, and sent reeling away over the grass. He

caught his foot in a big tuft, staggered, and then pitched over on his face. He picked himself up, and shook his fist.

"You—you young bounders!" he howled furiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Chambers, but we'd just like you to know that we don't welcome any interference," said Armstrong. "If you come back in a different mood, we'll give you a hearty welcome. But don't try to dictate. It doesn't suit your style of beauty!"

Chambers took himself off, breathing hard.

And, in the meantime, Miss Trumble was rapidly recovering from the first shock. And, instead of being appalled at the prospect, she became more and more determined to bring this rebellion to an end.

After all, only the juniors had defied her authority—and even then, only a section of the juniors. Was she to be defied by a mere handful? Never! And she had already devised a scheme in her active brain.

One thing was certain. It was quite out of the question for her to suffer another humiliation at the hands of the Remove. It was equally impossible for her to shift the juniors by force. But there were the prefects! It was the duty of the prefects to maintain authority.

So, back in the calm atmosphere of her own study, Miss Trumble rang the bell. She had composed herself by this time, and was feeling ready for the fray. When Tubbs arrived, she instructed him to tell every prefect in the school that he was required in the Headmistress' study at once.

Ten minutes later the prefects had answered the call.

They were all there, including Fenton and Morrow and Wilson and Carlile—and, in fact, the whole bunch. The prefects had a shrewd idea as to what was coming, and they were looking rather grim.

"Boys, I have no doubt that you know of the dreadful calamity which has befallen the school," said Miss Trumble. "A section of the junior boys have had the unparalleled audacity to defy my authority! They have left the school premises, and have taken possession of the barn at the back of the playing-grounds."

"We know all about it, madam," said Fenton.

"I was sure that you would, for it is quite impossible for anybody in the school to remain in ignorance of such an appalling thing," said Miss Trumble. "I have called you all together because I wish to talk to you seriously. You are hardly boys any longer—you are young men. And you hold positions of great authority in the school, being prefects. I now call upon you to help me in this emergency."

The prefects were silent.

"You must go outside at once, and if these junior boys refuse to obey your commands, you will bring them back by force," said Miss Trumble, with an air of finality.

"I am sorry, Miss Trumble, but we can-

not do that," said Fenton, who looked very uncomfortable.

Miss Trumble started.

"You cannot do it?" she repeated sharply.

"No."

"What do you mean?" asked the Headmistress. "Good gracious! Am I to understand that you are rebelling, too?"

"It is hardly fair to say that, Miss Trumble," replied Fenton. "But I don't think you quite understand the position——"

"Indeed!"

"I mean, it's not quite the thing to ask us to bring the juniors back by force," went on the captain of the school. "There is no question of the Sixth rebelling. When the Remove is in the school we naturally do our duty. As prefects, we try to maintain discipline, and keep order. But the Remove is now beyond our reach."

"Do not be so absurd!" snapped Miss Trumble. "These boys are only just behind the playing grounds—indeed, on the school property itself. I command you to go out there at once and bring them back."

"We can't do it, ma'am," growled Morrow.

The other prefects murmured their agreement.

"You cannot do it!" shouted Miss Trumble, her anger rising afresh. "How dare you? This is intolerable! How dare you disregard my instructions in this wilful manner?"

"That's quite wrong, madam," said Fenton firmly. "I should just like to point out the position, as we see it. It is our duty as prefects to enforce all the school regulations. We are ready to do that without being instructed, and without query. But we cannot with dignity agree to engage in a rough and tumble fight with these juniors."

Miss Trumble squared her jaw.

"You may call it what you wish, but I regard this attitude as sheer insolence!" she declared hotly. "I am amazed that you should get such ridiculous ideas into your heads. These children will not dare to show fight——"

"Oh, won't they?" put in Carlile. "You don't know them, ma'am! These Remove youngsters are pretty hot stuff. They've defied your authority, and they'll defy ours!"

"If we go there, it'll be like talking to a brick wall!" growled Wilson. "They won't take any notice of us. And if we try to use force, they'll show fight. And that wouldn't be a very nice thing, for St. Frank's, would it?"

"You see, madam, it's quite impossible," declared Fenton firmly. "Under no circumstances can we give these junior boys an opportunity of attacking us. It would be altogether bad for the school, and a deplorable exhibition in every way. I am afraid we must decline to assist."

CHAPTER IV.

NOTHING DOING!



MISS TRUMBLE glared at the prefects fiercely.

"I am amazed!"

she said, her voice cold and acid. "I am amazed that

you should dare to treat me in this way. I am disappointed, too. I did at least believe that my prefects would stand by me in this crisis."

The prefects looked uncomfortable.

"Hang it all, Miss Trumble, it's asking too much!" broke out Fenton. "If it would please you, we'll go to these boys, and ask them to come back. Of course, it'll be useless—I could tell you that straight away."

"Ask them!" shouted Miss Trumble. "Who are they, that they should be asked? You must go there and command them! And if they refuse, you must drag them away by force——"

"That's just it," interrupted Fenton. "We can't do it, madam. As I have said, we will attempt to point out to the youngsters that they are doing wrong, but further than that we cannot go. In fact, I think I am voicing the opinion of all prefects when I say that we shall absolutely refuse to adopt any forceful methods."

"Hear, hear!" said the prefects.

Miss Trumble pointed to the door.

"Go!" she commanded coldly. "I will have nothing more to do with you! I am disappointed and angered. But wait one moment! Fenton, you will see that the Sixth Form is at once collected together. None of you boys need appear. It is the other members of the Form that I desire to see. They will gather in their own classroom, and await my coming."

Fenton bowed.

"Very well, madam," he said quietly.

The prefects all passed out of the study. They were relieved to get out. In their hearts, they were in full agreement with the Remove. But they could not admit this, even one to another. For the Remove had defied authority, and that was an unpardonable sin. But the prefects were just as human as the juniors. And they, too, were thoroughly tired of being ruled by women. They would be glad to see the return of the masters.

But, of course, it was quite impossible for them to take any action on their own. That was why they were secretly in sympathy with the Remove, and why they secretly hoped that the Remove would win their fight. The seniors did not want to take any action against the juniors.

The Sixth was rather indignant when it heard of Miss Trumble's order.

Breakfast was just over, and they didn't care about being ordered into their Form-room as though they were a lot of unruly

fags. But the Headmistress's word was law, and had to be obeyed.

The Sixth Form gathered together.

And the seniors were busy talking about the situation when Miss Trumble swept into the room. There was a silence at once. The seniors regarded the Lady Head without approval.

"I am glad to see, my boys, that you have obeyed my instructions," said Miss Trumble. "Much to my regret, the prefects of St. Frank's have disappointed me."

The Sixth knew all about it, and approved of the prefect's stand.

"As you all know the prefects of this school are compelled, by the very nature of their position, to maintain discipline," went on Miss Trumble. "That is why prefects are appointed. Yet, in spite of my express wishes, these boys have declined to utilise the authority which is in their hands. I now call upon you to help me."

"In what way, ma'am?" asked one of the seniors.

"You are not prefects, and so, perhaps, you will not be hindered by any false sense of dignity," went on Miss Trumble. "I do not make any requests of you—I command you!"

"That's hardly the way to put us in a good humour, Miss Trumble."

"I am sorry that you should be so insolent!" snapped the Headmistress. "I am beginning to realise that you senior boys have a totally wrong impression of your own importance. In my opinion, you are old enough to be earning your own living, but that is beside the point. You will all follow me at once, and you will compel the Remove boys to return to the school."

Miss Trumble pointed to the door.

"Attention!" she commanded. "Form into line, and march out."

The Sixth didn't move.

"Did you hear me, boys?" demanded the Headmistress.

"We heard you all right, ma'am, but we must follow the example of the prefects," said one of the seniors quietly. "We think it's below our dignity to fight these juniors. It would look bad."

"Besides," said one of the others, "we couldn't do any good. These juniors are all dug in. We should only make ourselves look foolish by attempting to drive them out."

"We should make ourselves the laughing-stock of the school."

"Of course."

"It can't be done!"

The Sixth was quite determined, and allowed Miss Trumble to know its opinion with painful clearness. The Lady Head grew more angry than ever as she listened.

"Am I to be defied by the senior boys as well as the junior boys?" she demanded hotly. "I command you! Let there be no more of this nonsense! I order you to do my bidding!"

"We'll obey you in everything connected



Chambers gave a wild howl as the top of the trench crumpled up.

with the school, ma'am, but we can't do any fighting!"

"It wouldn't be right at all!"

Miss Trumble clenched her fists with helplessness.

"You—you cowards!" she shouted. "You miserable cowards! I thought better of you than this. I always believed that you would prove yourselves to be worthy of your traditions!"

"But you don't understand——"

"I understand fully and absolutely!" declared Miss Trumble hotly. "I can only regard your attitude as one of insubordination. In many ways, it is far worse than this absurd rebellion of the juniors. For you are older—you have more sense of responsibility."

"Look here, Miss Trumble—it isn't fair——"

"Silence!" she commanded. "I will not argue with you further. I am disgusted! As a punishment for this ridiculous insolence, every boy in this Form shall have no half-holiday for a period of four weeks! I will teach you that I am the mistress of this school!"

And Miss Trumble swept out, having allowed her temper to completely alienate the sympathies of the Sixth. If one or two of the seniors had felt sympathetic towards her in this trouble, they no longer did so. The whole Form felt warmed towards the Remove.

To tell the truth, the Headmistress had felt like screaming as she faced the Sixth Form. It was only by an effort of great

self-control that she had prevented herself from doing so."

And she had thought it wiser to get away, where she could be alone. It didn't matter what she did, there was no aid for her. The juniors would take no notice of her—and the seniors politely informed her that they could not be of any assistance.

She had never felt so impotent in her life.

And she went into her study, and slammed the door, and then proceeded to pace up and down. Not that this did much good. So far as she could see at present, the situation was growing worse every second.

If these rebels were squashed at once, very little harm would be done.

But if they retained their liberty for long they would get the idea that they held the upper hand. And then there would be no holding them. Something had to be done—quickly and decisively.

But what?

The Headmistress of St. Frank's was at a total loss.

CHAPTER V.

GROWING DESPERATE!



"WHAT shall I do—
what shall I do?"

Miss Trumble asked herself that question again and again as she walked up and down in the confines of her study.

She knew very well that her very position as Headmistress was at stake.

And something had to be thought of.

When she had taken over the control of the school she had deluded herself into believing that it would be easy, and that she would run St. Frank's in such a perfect manner that there would be complete harmony.

But, from the very first day, she had made discoveries. She had been realising more and more that a boys' school of the size of St. Frank's is not so easy to control as one would imagine.

Now and again she allowed herself to feel a slight sense of admiration for Dr. Malcolm Stafford, who for years had conducted St. Frank's in a perfectly calm and masterly way.

Then Miss Trumble would frown and put the thought away from her. Dr. Stafford had been harsh. He had made use of the cane and the birch. And such things, in the opinion of Miss Trumble, were signs of brutality and hooliganism. It was her ideal to run the school in a very different way.

But an ideal is never the same in practice as it is in theory.

This was what Miss Trumble was discovering. It was what she had never expected to discover. And it took her quite by surprise. She argued with herself that an ideal in theory ought to work out just as well in reality. She did not know that little things of this kind never pan out.

And now a crisis had arrived.

Owing to her conduct of the school—which she considered to be perfect—the boys of the Remove had rebelled. It was appalling in the extreme, and the only thing was to bring these boys to their senses.

Argument was useless. Appealing to their better nature was useless. And it was equally futile to command. These boys were in such a state of insubordination that force—and force alone—could bring them to their wits.

And, although Miss Trumble shuddered at the idea, she came to the conclusion that force had to be applied. But how? Where could she obtain the force?

The Sixth would not do anything, and it was equally certain that the Fifth would refuse. She supposed that it was a kind of loyalty among the boys. Absurd and ridiculous, of course, but such things had to be faced.

And what could the mistresses do?

Even supposing she took Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice and Miss Teezer, and all the others—what then? They would arrive at the rebel stronghold, and the unruly juniors would laugh at them. More horrifying still, they might even show fight.

The position was terrible, and Miss Trumble could not find any kind of solution. Intermixed with her anger there was a deep feeling of alarm. Defied by the juniors, defied by the seniors, her authority was becoming a farce.

That was the most terrible thought of all.

Just a little more of this sort of thing and she would lose her control. Her administration was failing! And it came upon her with full force that she must be strong now, or her attempt to rule St. Frank's would end in sheer disaster.

The idea of giving way to the boys never entered her head.

Such a thing, of course, was out of the question. It stood to reason that women would be able to control the school far better than men. That was what Miss Trumble believed, and no other opinion was of any value. She was right; she knew she was right, and she would never give in.

But—the problem came up once more—what could she do?

She paused, and stared out of the window. She gazed unseeingly across the Triangle, where numbers of fags were standing about in groups, eagerly discussing the dramatic situation.

The Triangle seemed very quiet and deserted this morning. The absence of the Remove made the old school seem empty and quiet. Miss Trumble saw nothing as she looked out.

Just over the wall lay the lane, the quiet country road which led from the village of Bellton and then on towards the moor. Over the top of the school wall appeared some moving vehicles.

At first Miss Trumble didn't even notice them.

Then, in a subconscious kind of way, it came to her that these vehicles were gipsy caravans. The fact was brought home to her because the vans came to a halt.

She could see all sorts of wickerwork baskets and chairs piled up round two or three of the caravans. And then a couple of gipsy women appeared in the gateway of the school.

This was rather too much for Miss Trumble in her present state. Her feelings were pent up, and she decided that she would give these gipsies a severe word. How dare they come bothering?

And then, suddenly, she started.

In a flash an idea had occurred to her—a daring, desperate idea which would never have come to her at any ordinary time. But just now she was overwrought. Something had to be done; it was impossible to let those boys defy her! And in such a state of mind Miss Trumble did not care a jot for appearances or anything else.

And this idea struck her as being a possible solution.

Without hesitating, without giving herself time to think of the advisability of such an action, she passed out of the room and hurried outside. There was a scuffle, as the fags scattered in all directions.

But Miss Trumble took no notice of these youngsters.

She passed straight outside into the road. Her one and only hope was that the people with this gipsy cavalcade were not all women and children. Surely there must be some men?

And she glowed with hope and triumph as she saw numbers of ill-clad male figures standing idly about the line of caravans.

There were far more than she had thought possible—ten, fifteen, yes, at least twenty! She hardly knew of any other gipsy crowd as large as this. It was as though Providence had come to her aid.

There were eight or nine big caravans, and it was evident that this encampment was a large one when it settled down. Numbers of children were running about; babies were squalling in some of the vans.

But it seemed to be the women who were doing all the work, except for those men who were attending to the horses. All the rest were smoking their pipes, and standing idly by.

Miss Trumble did not give herself time to change her mind.

She hurried forward—a somewhat impressive figure in her school gown and mortar-board. She came to a halt in front of three or four of the men, and eyed them up and down critically.

"Who is the chief man here?" she inquired sharply.

All the gipsies touched their caps, and one rather elderly man came forward, removing the pipe from his mouth.

"That'll be me, mam," he said respectfully. "Bill Smith—that's my name. If there's any chairs or sech-like that you'd need to buy—"

"I do not wish to purchase anything, thank you!" interrupted Miss Trumble. "But I should like to have a word with you in private, if I may. The matter is very important. At the same time, it will place money in your pockets if you are willing to do what I require."

Bill Smith looked at his companions wonderingly. Other men had come up now, and they were all listening. Taken all together, these fellows were not a very attractive looking bunch.

"Right you are, mam," said Bill Smith. "Anythink to oblige a lady. What is it you'll be wantin'?"

They went aside, on to the grass which bordered the road.

"I am the headmistress of this school!" exclaimed Miss Trumble curtly. "There is no necessity for me to go into any details, but a number of junior boys have had the audacity to rebel against my authority. They have made some ridiculous trenches in a meadow just behind the school, and refuse to move."

"The young varmint!" said Mr. Smith, removing his pipe.

"I find it quite impossible to get these boys to obey me," went on Miss Trumble. "If you and your men care to earn ten shillings each, you may do so. All I require is that you bring these boys to the school as quickly as possible."

Mr. Smith looked very interested now.

"Ten bob each, eh?" he said. "How long do you reckon it'll take to do the job?"

"Oh, a few minutes—only a few minutes!" said Miss Trumble impatiently.

"An' 'ow do you reckon we're to shift these 'ere kids?" asked the gipsy. "Jest go along an' grab 'old of 'em? Bring 'em in by their back 'air, so to speak?"

Miss Trumble shuddered.

"No, no, certainly not!" she exclaimed. "I will not countenance any violence. All you must do is to seize the boys and bring them, whether they like it or not. I shall not accompany you, for I cannot bear to see any roughness."

"And when do we get the ten bob each?" asked Mr. Smith.

"I will give it to you now!" replied Miss Trumble. "And if you are successful, I will give you another ten shillings each afterwards. But you must go at once—and you must remember that no violence is to be used."

She gave Mr. Smith full instructions, and within a few minutes all the details were arranged. The gipsies were grinning. So far as they could see, this was easy money, and no mistake?

But they didn't know the Remove

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE.



FORT RESOLUTE was quiet.

The rebels were feeling perfectly confident and happy. So far Miss Trumble had shown no sign of activity. It really seemed

as though she was nonplussed, and quite helpless.

Numbers of the juniors were chuckling gleefully, and they openly declared that Miss Trumble would soon send a message, telling them all to come back, with a promise that the masters would be at once reinstated.

"There's nothing in it!" said Armstrong. "When you get a person like Miss Trumble, you've only got to show a bit of strength, and they wither up. She's got no giddy power now!"

"Of course she hasn't," grinned Griffith.

"I'm afraid you chaps are going to get a bit of a shock before long," said Le Valerie. "Miss Trumble may be a woman, but she's not a weakling. And she won't throw up the sponge without a scrap first."

"Well, if I was in the habit of betting, I'd risk a couple of bob on it," said Armstrong. "Just wait until dinner-time."

The juniors were talking in one of the communication trenches, outside the entrance of a cosy little dug-out. There were several of these dotted about the trench system—cave-like places where the fellows could seek shelter in very cold or wet weather.

They were not needed this morning, but I had decided that it was better to be prepared for all emergencies. But fully half the rebels were of the opinion that we should be back—victorious—within no time.

And then, from the Eastern trench—the one which directly overlooked Little Side—came a shout of warning. Handforth was there, accompanied by Church and McClure.

The famous chums of Study D had been engaged in a little argument. They were on duty, guarding this particular section of the front-line trench. And they were all hungry, for breakfast had not yet been served. Things were in a bit of a muddle so far.

This, of course, was hardly to be wondered at, considering that we had only just started our camp life. It was not to be such a brief affair, in my opinion. In fact, if we were back at St. Frank's within a week, I should feel highly pleased.

Church was the first to notice anything unusual.

He happened to look over the trench-top, in the direction of the playing-fields. He did not expect to see anything, for by now all the other boys of St. Frank's were at lessons.

The bell had gone about five minutes earlier, and everything was quiet and still. But, to Church's astonishment, he saw a

crowd of rough-looking men hurrying across Little Side at the double.

To all intents and purposes they were gipsies—men in shabby, nondescript garb, most of them wearing scarves round their necks. They were approaching quickly, laughing and shouting at one another.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church. "Look out there!"

"I can't be bothered to look out now!" snapped Handforth. "I'm telling you chaps that all the arrangements are wrong! If I had been in command, I should have had breakfast over an hour ago—"

"You—you ass!" yelled Church. "We're being attacked!"

"Great pip!" shouted Handforth, staring over the trench. "So we are! Why the dickens didn't you say so before? Fifteen or twenty of 'em, too! But who are they?"

"Blessed if I know!" ejaculated McClure excitedly. "They look like gipsies, though!"

He turned, and waved his arms wildly as he jumped upon a block of stone. His signals were seen at the Fort, which was situated fully a hundred yards from the further trench.

"Look out!" roared McClure. "Enemy in sight! Rush the troops down! Man the trenches!"

His shout was heard by everybody.

But it was quite unnecessary after all, for I had seen the approach of this unexpected enemy before anybody else. I was standing against the barn, at a raised spot where it was possible to see round the meadows in all directions. And I saw these rough strangers approaching.

A thrill passed through me. Here was the first sign that Miss Trumble meant business. But although I had been expecting some activity, I had never believed it possible that the Headmistress of St. Frank's would descend to such a device as this.

She was actually having us attacked by a crowd of ruffians!

And I felt glad—I felt positively delighted. We couldn't fight the women—but there was no question about fighting this crowd. And I was perfectly confident that we should be able to defeat the enemy with the most supreme ease.

With our perfect system of trenches, and with all the rest of our defensive preparations, it would be a queer thing if we could not beat off an ill-organised attack such as this one promised to be.

"Man the trenches!" I commanded sharply. "Every fellow to his post! And don't forget that no firing must take place until the order is given. Remember to obey your officers!"

"Keep your hair on!" said Merrell. "We know what to do!"

"Perhaps so—but I don't want any disorganisation!" I retorted. "This affair is going to be conducted properly."

I rushed down the main communication trench to the first line of defence. Here I gave some other brisk orders, and within

three minutes the rebels were all spread out in fighting order.

It must not be imagined that our rear had been overlooked. A good few cadets were on duty in that section—although there was practically no possibility of an attack. But we could not afford to take any risks.

The gipsies were coming on with full confidence.

They had nearly reached the front line trench by now, and they could hardly see the juniors. Lying in our trenches, cool and expectant, we hardly showed ourselves above ground. And it really seemed to the crowd of men that they would have the easiest task of their lives.

When they were about ten yards away, I suddenly jumped up.

"Stop!" I shouted sharply.

Something in my tone caused the men to come to a halt, with the elderly Mr. Smith in advance of the others.

"None o' that, my lad!" he exclaimed. "I'd just like to give you a word o' warnin'. We've been ordered to take you kids back to the school. Now, if you like to come quiet, we ain't got no objection. It'll save a deal o' trouble, an' you won't be 'urt!"

"Go home!" roared the rebels.

"Yah! We're not afraid of you!"

"Come a bit nearer and you'll be sorry for yourselves!"

And there were yells of derisive laughter.

"It's rather queer that you should give me a warning!" I exclaimed. "That's what I want to give to you. If you advance another step we shall fire! So you'd better look out for yourselves!"

Mr. Smith looked startled.

"You'll do wot?" he asked blankly.

"They're only pea-shooters—but you'll know it!" I said grimly. "I thought it only fair to prepare you in advance. We've got no grudge against you men and we don't want to——"

"That's enough lip, kid!" snapped Mr. Smith. "Come on, mates—let's finish this 'ere business quick! Can't hang about 'ere all the mornin'!"

"It ain't likely!" said one of the others.

"Rush 'em!"

The gipsies evidently thought their task was much easier than it actually was. They gathered themselves together for a quick, rushing attack. And I saw that it was quite impossible to avoid strife.

"Get ready, men!" I shouted. "Now then—fire!"

"Over the top!" roared Pitt.

Phut! Phut! Phut! Phut! Phut!

All along the front line trench there were dozens of these soft, thudding sounds. And Mr. Smith and his men staggered, paused in their run, and yelled with surprise and pain.

For a perfect hail of peas poured upon them out of the trenches. The air seemed to be filled with the little pellets. They came from every side hissing through the air with stinging force.

"Hurrah!"

"Let 'em have it again!" I commanded.

"Another volley!"

Again there came that series of popping sounds to be immediately followed by the hiss of the speeding peas.

"That's the style!" yelled Handforth. "We'll teach these fatheads to come messing about here! By George! What do they think we're made of? Go it, you chaps!"

The attackers reeled.

So confident had they been, that they had never expected any serious opposition. They had believed that it was only necessary to dash in amongst us, and we should either take to our heels, or howl for mercy.

And there was something to be said for them.

Miss Trumble had led them to believe that we were a mere rabble of naughty children. It was, therefore, a stunning surprise to the gipsies to realise that we were a well-organised cadet corps, with defence works, weapons, and everything necessary for repelling any amount of determined attacks.

The gipsies staggered away, furious and astounded. Their hands and their faces were stinging from the effects of the pellets. And these pea-shooters of ours, let me say, were something special.

They had been purchased in secret during the week—and held in readiness for the war. They were not ordinary pea-shooters, but something far more elaborate.

In appearance they were something like air-guns, and the peas were released by means of a trigger. Each weapon had a magazine, capable of holding over a couple of hundred peas. The action was of the repeater type, and the peas could be fired off with great rapidity. Yet the weapons were quite harmless, and came within the category of toys.

But Mr. Smith and his friends did not consider them to be toys as they rubbed their smarting faces. Peas, when accurately aimed and delivered with force, are exceeding annoying. It requires determined men to advance in face of a hail of pellets from a battery of pea-shooters. That was why I had got these things in stock.

From our point of view, no weapons could be more suitable for this peaceful warfare of ours. The rebels roared with merriment as they watched the retreat of the attackers.

"Come again soon, won't you?" yelled Armstrong.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't forget to call the next time you're passing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Miss Trumble can't send anybody better than you, it's a pity!" roared Handforth contemptuously. "I say, you chaps—let's go over the top, and push these bounders into the next county!"

"Halt!" I commanded. "Nobody must leave the trenches!"

"Look here, you ass——" began Handforth.

"Nobody must leave the trenches!" I said grimly.

Handforth was about to speak, when he remembered himself. After all, I was commander-in-chief, and he was only a sergeant. And Handforth was liable to forget that at times. We were on duty now, and it was up to him to maintain discipline.

"Oh, all right!" he growled. "Do you hear that, my lads? Nobody must leave the trenches! If I catch any of you fatheads going over the top, I'll biff you!"

The gipsies had just recovered, and now they came to the full realisation that their work was not very easy. But they were not dismayed. They were determined to have another attempt.

And so, at a word from their leader, they dashed up—bending their heads down low, to avoid the storm of peas which burst upon them. And this time, owing to the precaution, they succeeded in getting to close quarters.

A minute later, the fight was going on in deadly earnest.

So swift was the rush of the enemy, that they were carried right up to the edge of the front line trench. And at such close range as this, the pea-shooters were of practically no use.

Hand-to-hand fighting followed.

Eight or nine of the gipsies wavered before they reached the trench. And that hesitation was fatal. Met by a perfect hail of peas, they found it impossible to withstand the onslaught.

Howling with pain, they rushed away, until they were well out of range. Here they paused, and obtained some measure of relief by shaking their fists in our direction and swearing volubly.

Fortunately, the commotion near at hand was so great that we did not hear many of the lurid remarks. For a battle was taking place right in the trench itself. About eight of Mr. Smith's men had jumped straight down into the trench—probably believing that their very presence would strike terror into our hearts. But the effect was exactly the opposite.

The juniors, thoroughly excited, were just ready for a scrap of this kind. They fell upon the enemy with relish. Handforth, indeed, was enjoying himself to the full.

"Come on, you rotters!" he roared. "I'll show you!"

Biff! Crash! Biff!

Handforth's fists were tremendously active. He aimed blow after blow at the surprised gipsies. One man went over with a wild howl. Handy having caught him a fearful crack on the jaw.

Another man received the full force of my knuckles on his nose. Pitt, De Valerie,

Christine, and a few more were hard at it with several other members of the enemy.

The gipsies were finding themselves in a bad way.

And, as soon as they realised that they had no hope, they commenced foul tactics. They kicked, they spat, and they performed every other obnoxious trick.

And then the rebels let themselves go.

"Pitch these blackguards out!" I shouted angrily. "They're not worth fighting!"

"The hooligans!" yelled Pitt. "Out with the whole lot!"

Kicking, cursing, and struggling, the gipsies were grasped. Half-a-dozen fellows attended to each man—so he had no chance of winning. They were hoisted to the top of the trench and pitched over. And as soon as they rose to their feet, still cursing, they received a hail of peas which sent them reeling back, with every cunce of fight knocked out of them.

And, over by the gateway of Little Side, Miss Trumble stood watching. At first she had believed that the rebels were about to be quelled. But now she knew the truth. This desperate venture of hers had failed. The gipsies had been pitched out, beaten.

"The fools—the fools!" exclaimed Miss Trumble, boiling with rage. "And those boys remain defiant! This is far more terrible than I had ever dreamed of! But I will never give in—never!"

And there was something in Miss Trumble's attitude which told that she was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER VII.

A LULL IN THE STORM.



"HURRAH!"

"Breakfast at last!"

Fatty Little, attired in a massive white apron, was standing at the door of Fort Resolute, ringing a hand-bell. It was an indication that he had prepared breakfast.

And there was an immediate rush to Headquarters.

But only half the rebels were allowed to attend the meal. The other half had to remain on duty, much to their disgust. I had arranged all this beforehand, so that the juniors knew exactly what to do. If I had left it until the last minute, confusion would have reigned. And there would have been a lot of squabbling, too.

The trenches had to remain manned, in case of another attack. That was far more important, in fact, than breakfast—although the majority of the juniors didn't look at it in this way.

Reggie Pitt grinned as he stood beside me in the front line trench.

"I'm blessed if I know what all these chaps would do without you, Nipper," he said. "This barring-out wouldn't last an hour! Everything depends upon the leader."

GET THE CHAMPION

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I reckon we're jolly lucky to have such a capable commanding officer."

"Don't be an ass," I said smiling. "If anything was to happen to me, there are plenty of others who could take command—and you are the one I should choose first of all, Reggie. But we mustn't hand out compliments to one another. What do you think of the morning's work?"

"Jolly good, so far," replied Pitt. "I'm surprised at Miss Trumble, setting a gang of rotten gipsies on to us. I should have thought that such a move would have been too degrading."

"She'll think so, too—later on," I said quietly. "She must have got that idea on the spur of the moment, while she was in a boiling rage. I don't think we suffered a single casualty!"

"Nothing except a bruise or two," said De Valerie, coming up. "I'll guarantee Miss Trumble won't send those hooligans back again. And if she did, they wouldn't dare to attack us. I think they've had enough!"

"All the same, we shall have to be careful," I replied. "Don't forget that Miss Trumble will do anything within her power to drive us out to-day. It's the most critical time of all."

The other juniors were patrolling the trenches rather impatiently. They were thinking about the breakfast which Fatty Little had prepared. My own appetite was keen, but I was not eating until later on. All my thoughts were for the safety of the Fort.

In the barn itself the juniors were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Fatty had prepared quite an excellent breakfast. With two or three assistants—whom he ordered about just as he pleased—he had baked a huge batch of potatoes—by the simple process of building a bonfire outside, and putting the potatoes in the ashes.

He had provided biscuit sandwiches by the hundred. These were sought after more than anything else. There was ham on the go, too. And plenty of tins of sardines.

But Fatty Little was far from satisfied.

"Of course, you can't call this a proper meal!" he said apologetically. "It's only a pretence. Just wait until I get the oil stoves and the frying pans, and all the rest of it!"

"We're not grumbling, Fatty," said De Valerie.

"Rather not—you've done well!"

"Good for you, Cookie!"

Fatty looked pleased.

"I'm not particularly satisfied with the potatoes," he said. "They're jolly nice baked in that way, I know, but it's too rough-and-ready. I like to spread myself a bit more when it comes to cooking."

The chef of the Cadet Corps was labouring under great difficulties.

According to our original arrangements, the rebellion had not been scheduled to take place until the following morning. And by that time everything would have been in much better fettle.



Sure enough, Archie's valet had appeared loaded up with handbags, a couple of suitcases, and other paraphernalia.

For this evening a big batch of goods would be delivered from a local firm in Bannington. It had been arranged that these things should be sent after dark—and they would be brought straight to the boat-house, by the River Stowe. And this building was only a few hundred yards from Fort Resolute.

Archie Glenthorne was the fellow who had bought these goods.

Archie was generous to a degree, and he happened to have plenty of money. In fact, he was rolling in it, and he had insisted upon ordering a number of oil stoves, ovens, frying-pans, kettles, crockery, cutlery and plate, and all sorts of other things that would be of great use to us. After these had been delivered, cooking and feeding would be made easy.

But to-day we had to rough it.

Not that the fellows minded. It was, indeed, a bit of a novelty.

In the middle of breakfast, Archie Glenthorne appeared. He came from the loft upstairs—which was reached by means of a ladder attached to the wall. There was a big hole in the ceiling.

"What ho!" said Archie, as he came down. "In other words, dear old rebellious chappies, large slices of good-morning! I understand that several frightful battles have been taking place?"

"While you slept!" growled Handforth. "Slacker!"

Archie winced.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "I mean to say, slightly terse, what? I don't object to any of you chappies making a few personal remarks, but when it comes to being called a slacker. Well, I mean to say, it seems that a cove ought to display a large dose of indignation!"

De Valerie chuckled.

"You mustn't take any notice of Handy, old man," he said. "We don't call you a slacker. You're an ornament to the scenery, Archie. You give the whole place an appearance of tone."

"That's rather pricelessly put, don't you know!" said Archie beaming.

As a matter of fact, I wasn't very keen on Archie joining in the actual work of the camp. He had insisted upon being with us. As a member of the Remove, he simply had to be in the rebel party. But when it came to fighting, or any useful work, Archie was rather hopeless.

And so he was allowed to wander about just as he pleased—wearing one of his gorgeously-cut lounge suits. At St. Frank's he had been accustomed to his own luxurious study, but here he had no comforts at all. But Archie didn't grumble. It wasn't his way.

He wandered to the door of the barn, and gazed out upon the general scenery. It was rather cold, but the sun was shining with pleasant warmth, considering the time of the year. The fields looked green, and there was a general air of peace upon the countryside.

St. Frank's lay still and calm. The fellows were at lessons, and there were no shouts resounding from the Triangle. Archie breathed in the fresh air and expanded his lungs.

"This, as it were, is absolutely the life!" he observed. "I mean to say, vast loads of ozone, and all that sort of rot! The jolly old fresh air is buzzing about in platoons, don't you know?"

"I don't suppose we shall have it as fine as this always," said Armstrong.

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, we shall probably get a few doses of snow, not to mention rain and fog, and all the other members of the good old family. But the open air life for me! Every time, laddie, with large quantities of emphasis!"

"Won't you miss, Phipps?" grinned Owen major.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie, with a smile. "As a matter of fact, old bean, the optical department was just on the look-out for Phipps. The dear old cove ought to be appearing in the offing!"

"What!" gasped Armstrong. "Is Phipps coming here?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Dash it all! That is, dash it all! You can't mean to tell me, old can of fruit, that you expected me to exist without Phipps? Gadzooks! Absolutely impos. When it comes to living the good old simple life, a chappie simply must have Phipps dashing up and down, looking after this and that!"

"Well I'm blessed!" grinned Hubbard. "If that's not the limit! Actually having Phipps here to attend to his——"

"What-ho!" said Archie gaily. "Gaze into the misty and dreamy distance, old onions! Behold! The Phipps bird appears! Absolutely! I mean to say, Phipps himself, accompanied by sundry appendages."

The juniors gazed towards Little Side, and chuckled.

Sure enough, Archie's valet had appeared. He was well loaded up, too, carrying several handbags, a couple of suitcases, in addition to a number of smaller parcels. In fact, he was literally plastered with them. And Phipps was laboriously making his way over the rough ground.

But before he reached the front line trench, half a dozen cadets were out and surrounding him.

"Who goes there?" grinned Pitt.

"Friend, Master Pitt!" said Phipps solemnly.

"Pass, friend! 'Tis well!" said Reggie. "But may I ask what all these bags are? I don't want to be personal, but do you happen to be moving the entire Glenthorne establishment?"

"Just a few personal items for Master Archie, sir," said Phipps. "He requested me to bring four times this amount, but I found it quite impossible."

"Good old Archie!" chuckled Singleton. "It's a wonder he didn't have a lounge brought in, to say nothing of about a dozen cushions!"

"There's no telling, sir," said Phipps. "Master Archie has rather a partiality for comfort."

"Yes, I've noticed it," grinned Singleton.

Phipps passed on, with several juniors carrying the baggage. And it was now time for the other section of juniors to have their grub. There was a change over, and I was soon busy with the ham and the biscuits and the baked potatoes.

"Are you going to stay, Phipps?" I asked.

"I rather think that Master Archie desires my presence, sir."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Pray be sensible, Phipps. How do you suppose the young master is to exist, unless you rally round? I shall require you morning, noon, and night, laddie. The simple life is frightfully jolly, but it's liable to be somewhat strenuous."

And Archie strolled into the barn with

(Continued on page 15.)

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No. 12. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

Feb. 24, 1923



THE MANIAC OF BROXHAM GARDENS



This is the opening story of a grand new series dealing with the exploits of Mervyn Hume, the great newspaper sleuth of the "Daily Wire," illustrating the power of the Press co-operating with an expert crime journalist in the detection and suppression of crime. The author has himself been the crime investigator of a great London daily and writes with the conviction of personal experience.

By
S.
ROSSITER
SHEPHERD

BOOM, boom, boom!
The hour of midnight tolled slowly from the City clocks. But despite the lateness of the hour, Fleet Street still presented a scene of considerable animation.

On either side of the road stretching away up to the Strand stood numerous motor-vans, their engines panting and throbbing, awaiting the early editions of the great London dailies, which even now were on the machines.

And every now and then, from big gloomy buildings trembling to the thud and roar of giant presses and heavy machinery, dashed small boys as black as imps from the pit itself, bearing poles laden with empty beer-cans, which they returned with later, filled with steaming tea for the thirsty printers.

The great centre of newspapers had reached its busiest hour.

From the direction of the Strand two

small yellow lights blinked and winked in the middle of the road. There came the sharp honk honk of a hooter, and gradually the lights resolved themselves into the lamps of a taxicab tearing along at breakneck speed.

There was a grinding of brakes as the taxi stopped with a jerk outside the imposing offices of the "Daily Wire." A figure sprang out, thrust a note towards the driver, and slamming the taxi door with more force than was necessary, pushed open a big outer door marked "Editorial Only" and dashed along a stone-flagged passage to the lift.

The lift attendant, who had been dozing on a stool, awoke with a start and stared.

"Good heavens, Mr. Hume. What on earth's happened? Your collar is covered with blood, sir—and—and—"

"Cut the cackle and run me up, Jenkins. Come on, sharp's the word."

The liftman with difficulty contained his curiosity. He stepped into the cage beside

his passenger, slammed the gate, and sent the car whining up the shaft. It stopped on the third floor, where the passenger himself opened the gate and strode along a passage to the news editor's room.

Harvey Frost, the news editor of the "Wire," started up and eyed the figure that entered his sanctum in blank astonishment. For the usually immaculate crime expert of the "Wire" certainly presented an extraordinary spectacle. His face was scratched and bleeding, his hat and tie were missing altogether, while his jacket was torn almost to ribbons.

At that moment Mervyn Hume, Fleet Street's most brilliant crime investigator and the best-dressed sleuth in London was hardly recognisable. That he had been in the wars was apparent, and he did not seem to have had things all his own way.

"What the thump—" began Frost in amazement, but Hume cut him short.

"Has the last edition gone through yet?" he demanded, sinking into a chair.

"Not so far, but it is pretty near time. Why? What have you got?"

"I've got one of the most extraordinary stories we have had for a long time," said the crime expert, gently rubbing his damaged face. "Incidentally, I believe I've got a couple of ribs put out of point, too. You know I got the tip from one of my scouts that an attempt to enter a house in Broxham Gardens, Bayswater, would probably be made to-night?"

"Well, I put Detective-inspector Marsham wise to what I knew, and with a couple of plain clothes men we went along to watch the house. The owner, who was out of town for a few days, had been warned of what might happen, and he had left his keys with one of the men at the local police station, with instructions to enter the place and have a look round if anything of a suspicious nature occurred during his absence.

"We patrolled round and round the house, but not a soul came near. Then, from an upper window Marsham saw a flash of light as though someone had momentarily switched on an electric torch.

"One of the plain clothes men saw it, too, and Marsham concluded that someone must be on the prowl inside the place. But how they could possibly have got in with four of us patrolling round is a mystery I haven't yet solved.

"Marsham decided we ought to enter, and since he had collected the key from the station, we were able to do so without kicking up any row. We left one of the men on guard inside the porch, with instructions to lam into anybody who might try to get away.

"We had reached the third floor, when I detected a faint sizz, sizz coming from a room on our right.

"That's the room where we saw the light," whispered Marsham, tugging at my arm. "And there's someone inside, too. Do you see that light coming from the crack between the door and the floor?" And there, sure

enough, was a faint bluish light which seemed to flicker and dance, while the sizzling noise continued steadily.

"Marsham got frightfully excited. 'There are three of us,' he said, 'and if we burst into the room we can bag whoever is there before they have time to start any tricks. Wait until I give the signal and then charge the door.'"

Mervyn Hume helped himself to one of Frost's cigarettes, and then continued:

"Well, old Marsham gave the signal, and we piled on top of that door for all we were worth. That door was never meant to stand such treatment. And it didn't. It went down with a crash, and the three of us landed inside the room on our hands and knees.

"It was pretty dark, mark you, but as soon as we got to our feet—and that didn't take long when we didn't know who or what was in the room—we spotted the mysterious prowler standing across the other side of the apartment before a small but substantial steel safe.

"The curious sizzling noise we had heard had ceased, and so had the flickering of that bluish light. But by the curious odour that permeated the room, I guessed pretty well that it had been caused by an oxy-acetylene outfit which could have been extinguished only a second or so before.

"We made out the figure at the safe with some difficulty, but believe me, Frost, when it moved there was something distinctly uncanny about it. The fellow, whoever he was, didn't speak a word. He just turned and raised his arm as though daring us to advance.

"I think he was the biggest man I have ever seen. He seemed to stand at least seven or even eight feet high, and his shoulders were as broad and powerful looking as those of an ox. I couldn't see his face very well, but I believe he wore a mask of some sort.

"The game's up, my friend," said Marsham, advancing into the room, "and it will be better for you if you come quietly." But this huge fellow simply turned and glared at us. I tell you, Frost, I could see his eyes gleaming in the dark with a sort of orange-coloured glow. It was uncanny!

"Well, if you are going to give any trouble that's your look-out," went on Marsham, walking towards the safe. "Come on, you fellows, give me a hand."

"The other man who had accompanied us followed Marsham across the room, and I trailed up in his rear.

"I tried to switch the lights on, but they were apparently not in working order, so we had to manage as best we could. But by the pale light of the moon streaming in at the big windows I saw Marsham go up to the man we had surprised.

"I arrest you—" he began, when there was a terrific roar, followed by a heavy thud. Something struck me in the pit of the

stomach and collapsed on the floor at my feet. It was Marsham!

"My heavens," he groaned, "the fellow's got the strength of about ten fully-grown men." And, judging by the way he had picked up poor old Marsham and literally flung him across the room, I should say that was just the bare truth.

"Well, as you know, Frost, although I am rather slim, I am pretty useful in a rough-and-tumble. When I had helped to drag Marsham to his feet I signalled to the other man to give me a hand. I meant to get that big fellow or know the reason why.

"We both advanced together at the same time, telling the fellow that he was only making trouble for himself by resisting. But not a word did he speak. He just waited for us to come on, those weird, glowing eyes of his following us round like those of some giant cat.

"I got fed-up with that silence business and made a dash at him. I intended putting a ju-jitsu grip on him. But before I could do so I felt myself going up, up, up, and then down swiftly and suddenly. Something yellow seemed to dance before my eyes, and I realised that I was somewhere across the opposite side of the room to where I was a few seconds before.

"This big fellow seemed to go mad then. If he didn't speak, he made up for his silence by action. And, by Jove, there was plenty of that. He barged across the room at us, and grabbed Marsham under one arm and myself under the other.

"We both fought like fury, but despite all that we were as powerless as a couple of newly-born children against our opponent. Marsham got his head struck against the wall, and when this fellow dropped us I tried to do what I could for him.

"Meanwhile, our friend the burglar was getting really busy. He picked up every article of furniture he could lay his hands on and flung it across the room in a sort of blind fury. He smashed every window there was, pulled the light fittings from the ceiling and the walls, and flung them at us.

"But, Frost, the strength of that man was amazing! It seemed pretty obvious to us at the time that we were dealing with a madman. Marsham pulled out a truncheon he had brought with him, and taking careful aim sent it whirling across the room. It caught our burglar friend dead on the temple, and even from where we were we could hear the sickening thud of the hard wood smashing the flesh.

"Any ordinary man would have dropped like a log. But not so this one. He gave a peculiar little grunt of pain. Then with a roar like some wild animal he put his long arms round the safe and tugged at it.

And, Frost, we distinctly heard the rending of the wooden floor as that part of it which was fastened to the bottom of the safe came away. The fellow having got the safe free, grunted again and raised it to his shoulders.

"Imagine that, man. It would have taken about three men like you or I to just move it. But this fellow actually lifted it up on to his shoulders.

"Look out!" I cried to Marsham. "He's going to throw it at us. For Heaven's sake move, man!"

"Marsham dashed to the door of the room and out on to the landing, the other man and myself following. We got clear just in time. We heard the big fellow inside lumbering round and round, bellowing and roaring alternately like a child and a beast. There followed a terrific sound of splintering wood and then a dull thud outside the house like something heavy striking the ground.

"It's the safe!" yelled Marsham, who was staring into the room over the debris of the door. "He's thrown it out of the window!" I looked over his shoulder. It was true enough. The safe was no longer in the room, and the burglar was still standing by the window gazing down.

"But before we could make any move he suddenly sprang out on to the ledge, and the next moment he had vanished! The window was about forty feet from the ground, but when I looked out there was no sign of him.

"Marsham and his man stared at each other too dumbfounded for words. 'If I couldn't see that safe down below with my own eyes,' he said at length, 'I wouldn't have believed such a thing possible. Why, the weight must be terrific. Yet the fellow just flung it about like a small sack of coke.'

"He must be a strong man gone mad and escaped from a circus," suggested the other. But Marsham was of the opinion that he was a bit of a magician, too. And, judging by the way he vanished from the window, I am inclined to agree.

"Anyhow, he escaped, and what with our heads still bruised and bleeding with the manhandling he had given us, we were in no condition to follow him. Besides, we didn't know where he had gone."

Mervyn Hume paused for breath.

"Well, that's the story, Frost," he said at length. "And the evidence of it is the state of the room where it occurred, and that heavy steel safe which, for the simple reason that we couldn't move it, still remains in the front garden of that house where our friend the burglar hurled it.

"Marsham has posted a man over it, and in the morning I intend having a look at it to see whether I can get any sort of clue as to this mysterious burglar's identity from it."

Harvey Frost, who had listened to the crime investigator's story, too engrossed to interrupt with questions, simply whistled.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, having overcome his astonishment somewhat. "That's a good story and no mistake. And I suppose that explains the pretty condition you are in, Hume?"

Mervyn Hume nodded.

Harvey Frost pushed over a pad of copy-paper, and Mervyn Hume extracted a fountain-pen from his vest pocket. There followed a steady scratch, scratch, as with lightning rapidity he reeled off a graphic description of the extraordinary affair he had just described to the news editor.

When it was finished he thrust it into an envelope and sent it to the printers.

"It's a curious yarn," he said. "And there are several points about it I have not cleared up. How did the man get into the house unobserved when four of us were patrolling round it?"

"What is the secret of his enormous strength, and where did he go to when he disappeared out of the window? There's just a few teasers to get on with, and there are plenty more equally puzzling."

And with that Mervyn Hume borrowed a hat from a rack in the news editor's room, bade him good-night, and left for his chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before Mervyn Hume rose the next morning. And after bathing and dressing, the keen young crime investigator left his chambers with more the appearance of a rather foolish young man about town than a quick-witted newspaper sleuth.

For it would be difficult to say whether Hume excelled more as a journalist than a sleuth, or vice versa. But certain it was he had no equal in Fleet Street as a writer, while there were few if any men at the Yard who could touch him in criminal investigation.

Mervyn Hume arrived at his office still puzzling over the affair of the previous night. He made straight for his private room, an apartment, the walls of which were lined with various works on criminology, and sank into the easy-chair.

A scented cigarette dangled from his lips, filling the air with its fragrance. And those who knew the great crime investigator best knew also that when he indulged in this seeming weakness that his brain was working at more than ordinary pressure.

But he had not been seated long before the door burst open and a red-headed youth thrust his cranium round the portal and grinned.

"Mornin' Mr. 'Ume! Bin fighting the cat again? I see yer face is in a narsty mess this morning."

A large chunk of india-rubber, deftly flung by the crime investigator, caught the red-headed youth squarely in the left eye. He ducked, let off a wild yell and bobbed up again with a red eyelid and a big grin.

"Can't kill me, Mr. 'Ume," he said. "But seriously, sir, you 'ad a 'ot time of it larst night, according to all accounts. Wish I'd bin with yer, Mr. 'Ume."

And the red-headed youth sighed regretfully.

"Well, you might have been if you hadn't been away with a cold," smiled Hume. "But

what's brought you to this room, Nunky? I thought you had orders—"

"I know, Mr. 'Ume," interrupted the red-headed one, whose proper nomenclature was, curiously enough, William Whitehead, but who was more generally known to the staff of the "Wire" as Nunky. "But if you'll come and 'ave a look at the tape, sir, there's somesink coming through on it that I thought might interest you—and if it does, perhaps you might take me along with ya, Mr. 'Ume."

Mervyn Hume threw his cigarette into the grate, and followed the boy into the big news room. The constant traffic in and out of reporters, the whirring of telephone-bells, and the incessant clack, clack-clack-clack of the tape-machines, made conversation difficult.

But Hume had no difficulty in locating the particular machine Nunky had referred to. He picked up the long, narrow strip of white paper it had already ticked out, and quickly ran his eye over it.

"Time 10 a.m.," he read. "The body of an elderly Hindoo was discovered by the police at 32, Broxham Gardens, Bayswater, this morning in a terribly mutilated condition. There is little doubt that the man, whose name was Bundarith Lal, a native of Calcutta was murdered. . . ."

The message broke off uncompleted at this point, and Mervyn Hume turned to Nunky who was standing near. "It doesn't seem to be much," he said. "But since I have got to go down that way in connection with last night's case, we may as well go along and see what has happened. Curious this, too, should be in Broxham Gardens."

And with that Mervyn Hume left the office, closely followed by Nunky. He emerged into Fleet Street, where he hailed a passing taxi and instructed the driver to put them down at Broxham Gardens.

Arrived at the scene of the tragedy, Hume dismissed the cab and ascended the steps leading to the house of death. A plain clothes man, who was on duty inside the hall, saluted smartly as he recognised the great newspaper sleuth.

After a few words of greeting Hume obtained permission to view the corpse, and left the office boy in the hall until he should return. The plain clothes man had assured him that nobody else was about the house, so he anticipated being able to make his investigations without interruption.

Hume found the room where the murdered Hindoo lay and, as he entered, he paused on the threshold and emitted a low whistle of surprise. For the room certainly presented an extraordinary spectacle.

It was completely wrecked!

The pictures were torn from the walls, heavy Indian vases lay smashed upon the floor, while what had once been tables and chairs lay in splintered fragments in every corner of the apartment. Hardly an article of furniture remained whole, and not one single pane of glass remained in the windows.

But Hume took little heed of this. Across the far side of the room, on a couch where it had been placed by the police, was the remains of what had once been Bundarith Lal, covered by a white sheet.

Mervyn Hume examined the poor remains with interest, endless questions chasing themselves through his now keenly alert brain. For the body of the elderly Hindoo was torn and ripped as though he had been in combat with some maddened lion or tiger, rather than anything else.

The crime investigator straightened himself and once again surveyed the wrecked room. His keen, rapier-like glances taking in the heavy grand piano which had been turned over on its side, and from which one of the massive carved legs had been torn.

"Looks as though a gang must have entered and deliberately smashed the place up," he thought. "It hardly seems possible

There was something vaguely familiar about the individual, and at the same time something that struck Hume in the momentary glance he obtained as distinctly sinister.

He dashed to the door and craned his head in the direction of the stairs up which the mysterious figure had vanished, shouting at the top of his voice for him to stop. But he might just as well have shouted to a stone wall for all the notice that was taken of his commands.



Before Hume could prevent him the mysterious Samsonian burglar reached the window sill and leapt out into the night.

Hume saw the tweed-clad figure pause for a moment, heard the sound of splintering wood, and dodged back just in time to avoid one of the wooden bannisters which was hurled at him with no inconsiderable force.

There came a wild roar from below as Nunky and the plain clothes man, attracted by the sound of the first crash, came tearing up the stairs, each grasping a weapon of assault. And, judging by the look on the red-headed boy's face, he meant business of the hard and hitting sort.

"I don't know who the thump could have been knocking around the place," panted the plain clothes man as he drew level with Hume. "but I'm certain when we first broke in and searched there was no one here. Quickly, Mr. Hume, he's getting out of the fanlight!"

The policeman was right. For even as the little party took the stairs three at a time, they saw the figure in tweeds crouch for a moment, spring into the air like a giant cat,

that one man could have made such a mess on his own. By Jove, though. I wonder——"

Crash!

There came the sound of falling furniture, followed by the soft pad, pad of running feet from one of the other rooms. Mervyn Hume swung round and faced the door. The plain clothes man in the hall below had assured him that there was no one but himself in the house. Who then——"

As the reporter was turning these things rapidly over in his mind, a figure attired in some sort of dark tweeds flashed by the open door of the room in which he was standing.

and clutch the framework of an open fanlight that led to the roof.

"My hat!" gasped Nunky. "The chap must be a blessed acrobat. We shan't be able to reach to there without a pair of steps." A remark that was true, for the fanlight was certainly six feet from the ground, if not more.

Hume and Nunky, who were the first up the stairs, arrived on the small landing at the top just in time to see the tweed-clad figure vanish, slamming the fanlight behind him. There came a clatter of falling slates as he made his way over the roof.

Mervyn Hume followed a few moments later, with Nunky and the plainclothes man bringing up the rear.

Over the slates dashed the pursuing trio, regardless of danger to life and limb; regardless, too, of the rapidly collecting crowd that was watching them curiously from the gardens below, intent only on capturing the mysterious prowler from the house of the dead.

They were hot on the track now, only a few yards separating them from their quarry, who was making directly for the edge of the roof at the side of the house.

"We've got him now," shouted the plain clothes man triumphantly. "He can't go any further or he'll fall off the blessed roof into the gardens. Come on, Mr. Hume, this—Great Scott!"

The Scotland Yard man broke off short and stared with wide-open eyes at the figure in tweeds. For, instead of resigning himself to capture or falling off the roof, as the Yard man had seemed to anticipate, their quarry had made a wild spring—a hopeless, suicidal one, so it would have seemed—from the eaves to a point about four feet away, where a number of telegraph wires crossed from over the house.

Then, hand over hand, the wires swaying gently beneath his weight, the figure progressed, leaving the three pursuers staring in amazement at his broad back from their vantage point behind a chimney stack.

Already, followed by the plain clothes man, Mervyn Hume was making his way back to the fanlight through which they had emerged on to the roof. His one idea for the present was to get inside the house and to the ground below as soon as possible.

But when he eventually emerged into the Gardens themselves, he found that the figure had disappeared from the wires as well as from view.

After a few inquiries, Hume learned that his quarry had dropped from the telegraph wires on to the roof of an empty house, standing just at the rear of Broxham Gardens.

The crime investigator lost no time in locating the house, and with a skeleton-key he unlocked the front door and entered. The sound of loud and heavy groaning attracted the party to the top floor, where in a room, the means of ingress indicated by an open

fanlight, they found the tweed-clad figure writhing on the floor.

"Come on, my friend," began Hume grimly, advancing into the room. "The game's up. I——"

A hoarse roar cut him short, and, as the figure who was evidently injured in some way turned, Mervyn Hume found himself staring into the glowing eyes and hairy face of a—gorilla!

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the Yard man. "A—a gorilla!"

"Yes, and dressed like a man, too," added Mervyn Hume grimly. "There's a lot of jiggery pokery about this, and I think I've got an idea what it is. Anyhow, I'll tell you later."

The cornered animal glared angrily at the men and the boy, but its injuries were such that it could not rise from the floor—a fact that was just as well for Mervyn Hume and Co.

"Better not touch the brute," said Hume, backing towards the door. "He's broken his leg, I think, and it's certain he won't be able to get away. Come on, out of it, and I will fasten the door."

This was soon done, and leaving the plainclothes man on guard outside, Hume returned to the house of the murdered Hindoo, where he telephoned to the Zoo authorities and, quickly explaining the position, asked them to send along a van so that the wounded beast could be removed to a place of safety.

"What's the next move, Mr. Hume?" asked Nunky, when the crime investigator had rung off.

"I was thinking," replied Hume slowly. "I suppose you read my story in the 'Wire' this morning?"

"Not 'arf, Mr. 'Hume. About the fight with that 'Ackinsmidt cove you mean, sir?"

Hume nodded.

"But wot's it got to do wiv this little business, sir?"

"My dear Nunky," drawled the crime investigator, "apart from the fact that that little business, as you call it, occurred in these very gardens—Broxham Gardens, they are called—there were a number of features about it that are almost identical with those of the present affair.

"For instance, in the house last night the furniture was smashed about—heavy pieces that neither you, nor I, nor both of us, could move. Yet they were treated as though they had been of no more weight than toys from a doll's house.

"That, my dear red-headed one, indicates quite obviously that the burglar was a very strong person. So far so good. Well, another point is, that although four of us were patrolling round the house for some hours we saw no one enter it. Yet, later, we discovered someone working on the safe in one of the rooms. How did that person get there?"

"The only possible way was via the roof. That much is obvious. I discovered later

that a fanlight at the top of the house had been opened, if further corroboration is needed. Now that burglar got away in a very mysterious manner. You will remember, he jumped from the window of the room we were in and vanished.

"Well, my idea is that when he jumped, he jumped into the branches of a rather large tree growing in the front of the house. That would explain why we could not see him on the ground——"

"Never mind about working it all out, Mr. 'Ume," interrupted Nunky excitedly. "I think I can guess wot you are getting at. Tell me wot it is."

Mervyn Hume smiled and paused while the red-headed office boy waited expectantly.

"Well, Nunky," said the great newspaper sleuth, speaking more to himself than to the boy. "In a few words, it is my belief that the mysterious Samsonian burglar we fought in the dark last night was no other than our friend the gorilla."

Nunky gasped.

"Evidently a trained beast," went on Hume, speaking with a slight drawl, as was his wont when in deep thought, "and extremely useful for entering houses by way of the roof. Indeed, I have discovered along the leads outside the fanlight at the top of this house, a distinct trail such as would be made by a person of considerable weight—or a giant ape."

"But even a trained ape like they have in travelling shows and on the stage couldn't do all the fings this ere one did," protested the office boy. "Could it, Mr. 'Ume?"

"Not in the ordinary way, Nunky, not in the ordinary way," agreed Mervyn Hume, fumbling in his pocket. "But I think this little diary, which so far I have only glanced cursorily at, will give us the final key to the mystery."

"I extracted it from the dead Hindoo's clothing when I made my first examination of the body. It was placed in a secret pocket, which explains why the police did not discover it."

Mervyn Hume opened the little leather-bound book and closely scrutinised the microscopic writing in it. It was written in Hindustani, a language of which Hume had a very useful working knowledge.

"Yes," he murmured, "a very interesting record of a number of robberies that have recently occurred in the district. More than that, as I anticipated, it is also a very interesting record of the occult as practised in the East."

Hume straightened himself and replaced the diary in his pocket.

"Nunky," he said. "That ape, already trained to wear men's clothes, carried out these burglaries under the influence of—hypnotism!"

"Hypnotism!" echoed the boy.

"Precisely. But eventually the Hindoo lost his power over the beast, and then it was that it went amok with results we now know. Bundarith Lal met his death at the hands of the poor beast whom he had used to carry out his criminal schemes by means of his mystic and uncanny power."

Nunky stared open-mouthed at the great crime investigator.

"Mr. 'Ume," he said, "I've 'eard of such things before; but I never thought they 'appened in real life. You've got it this time, sir, and no mistake."

"I believe I have," agreed Mervyn Hume, bracing himself up. "And now back to the office to write up the story, my lad. I'm sorry there was no fight for you, but I think what I have told you will keep your thoughts occupied for a while."

And Mervyn Hume proved a good prophet. It did.

THE END.

The further Adventures of MERVYN HUME, the Great Newspaper Sleuth, will be published Next week in another Grand Complete Story, entitled:—

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MAHRATTA FORTRESS

CARFAX BAINES

AT the blast of a bugle the massive gates were thrown open, and the little cavalcade went clattering up the steep, winding road of paved stone, which at first mounted between towering walls with watch-towers on the battlemented tops, and then ran under the projecting fronts of houses, fantastically and beautifully carved, from the windows of which many a swarthy face peeped furtively and curiously. The air felt cool and fresh here, and it was a welcome change after the hot and dusty ride over the plain from the distant railway-station. The bells that tinkled on the trappings of the elephant, and the jingling of the chain armour that sheathed the bodies of the fierce Mahratta horsemen made pleasing and soothing music. From the height of the gorgeously fitted howdah Carfax Baines looked down on the elephant's swaying sides, on the masses of people who now began to line the narrow footways, salaaming obsequiously as their lord and master passed. He marvelled at the superb architecture right and left, and when the rock fortress of Rohilkund loomed dizzily in front of him, he seemed to have been transported a century or two back into the romantic history of India.

"Your Highness is to be envied," he said, turning to his companion. "The magnificence of kings and emperors pales before this."

"The black hand of evil lies heavy upon it all," was the grave reply.

The Rajah Jehundar Shaw, whose deceased father had been known as the friend of the English, spoke truly. He was a fine-looking man of between fifty and sixty, an ideal type of the Mahratta chieftain; his wealth was enormous, and his veneer of modern culture and polish was due to extensive travels in Europe. But a curse rested upon him, and was fast destroying his nerves and constitution, though his grim, dark features, with the white moustache drooping over the firm mouth, hid his secret well.

"Your reputation and skill have been made known to me," he added. "You will remove this canker that is sapping my life?"

"I will do all that lies in my power, your Highness," Baines replied.

More than that he dared not say. From

what he already knew of the matter, he judged that he would have no easy task—that his wits would be matched by the most subtle of Oriental cunning. He had just brought to a successful finish his work in the great sedition and bribery case, to unravel which the Government had sent him out to Calcutta; when he was summoned to Rohilkund, in the far North-West, by the pressing desire of Jehundar Shaw. But the real purpose of his visit was a jealously guarded secret, and he knew that the people, as they gazed at him seated in the howdah beside their lord, supposed him to be a high and honoured official.

The fortress of Rohilkund, built on the summit of a great rock mountain that rose precipitately from the plains, was aptly called the Gibraltar of India. A steep and narrow road, cut out of the granite, was the only means of access. The spacious court bristled with cannon and soldiery, but the building was furnished inside with all the luxuries and splendour that money can buy. Baines was installed in a suite of rooms fit for a king, and after a plunge in a marble bath and a change of cool linen, he dined with his host.

The evening was on the threshold of night, and the red sun was just sinking to the horizon, when the detective was escorted by Jehundar Shaw to the latter's private apartments, which were two in number and of comparatively small size. They were in the north end of the palace, and the walls were of enormous thickness. Both were sumptuously furnished, and a heavy door led from the other part of the building to the sitting-room, which communicated with the bed-chamber beyond; the latter had no other means of access or exit.

"This is the accursed abode of mystery," said the Rajah, with a weary sigh.

He produced a key, and opened a safe that was built into the wall. The door swung on its hinges, and Baines saw a sight that made him catch his breath and gasp. The space was half-filled with treasure—gold and silver plate, heaps of golden coins, and lidless caskets overflowing with glittering jewels of every variety and size. It was a Golconda of wealth.

"Only by that door can these two rooms

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

be entered," the Rajah went on, impressively. "Each night it is locked and barred on the inner side—you see how well it is secured—and on the outer side half a dozen of my most trusty retainers keep watch. The key to the safe never leaves me, and it is beneath my pillow while I sleep. Yet under these conditions two pieces of plate were stolen from the safe a year ago; that was the first robbery."

"Was it committed at night?" asked the detective.

"I believed not," was the reply, "so each morning and evening I look at my treasures. A month later more plate and a casket of jewels were taken. Since then the safe has been robbed five times, and always at night. In the morning I found the door still locked and barred, the guards at their post. Under ordinary circumstances a cunning Oriental could easily stupefy me with some drug and remove the key. But it is absolutely impossible for any person to enter these rooms."

"Yet some one must have done so."

"Then it was a supernatural visitation, and not due to any human agency. Do I suspect anybody? No; whom is there to suspect?"

"The windows," suggested Baines.

"Look for yourself," replied the Rajah, with a shrug of the shoulders.

The detective did so, and his head swam with giddiness. There was a window to each room, and from the edge of the balconies—the palace was built on the edge of the cliff—there was a sheer drop of one hundred and fifty feet to the deep waters of the Chumbul River, a tributary of the Jumna. Plains and jungle, villages and ruined temples, stretched beyond for leagues and leagues to the far hills on the horizon.

"The windows are quite out of the question," said Baines.

"Yes; unless the thief had wings," the Rajah replied. He paced the floor half a dozen times. "I have not told you the worst," he exclaimed, abruptly. "At the beginning of last month a bed was made in this outer room for Todar Sing, an old and trusted servant. He slept here night after night, and all was well. A fortnight ago, when I woke in the morning, he had disappeared. But how? The door was locked and barred on the inner side."

"And the treasure?"

"Two pieces of plate and a roll of gold were missing; the safe had been opened."

"And you never found Todar Sing?"

"Not a trace of him."

"He might have fallen from the window."

"I had the river dragged, the palace and the town searched."

"Any robbery since then?"

"No; nor is it time yet," the Rajah replied. "They seem to occur about once a month."

Baines felt a cold chill run down his spine.

"It is a strange affair," he said.

"It is fiendish—beyond explanation. Do

you wonder, Baines Sahib, that my life is a burden to me—that I no longer take pleasure in anything? See how my hand shakes; I have no nerves left. It is not the loss of the treasure that distresses me, for I have other riches in abundance. I cannot sleep at nights; I dread this invisible presence that enters in spite of locks and bars. Rid me of it—give me back my peace and happiness—and what you ask shall be yours."

"Your Highness may be assured," replied the detective, "that I will spare no pains to get to the bottom of this mystery. I am no believer in the supernatural; there must be a solution to it."

"Then find it, and as quickly as possible."

"I warn your Highness that it may be a work of time."

The detective spoke gravely, for he knew that the problem would be hard to solve. While the light lasted he made a minute examination of both rooms—walls, floors, and ceilings, locks and bars—and asked a hundred and one questions of the Rajah, the answers to some of which he entered in his note-book.

The next morning, while smoking his pipe in the courtyard, he met Captain Ellison, an English officer who was drill-instructor to the Rajah's troops. It was at his suggestion that Baines was summoned from Calcutta. The two were old friends, and they greeted each other warmly.

"Picked up a clue yet?" the captain asked, when the mysterious thefts had been briefly discussed.

"Not yet," Baines replied. "I have cracked a good many hard nuts in my time"—he lowered his voice—"but this promises to be the most difficult of all. It is an uncanny affair."

"It is devilish—that's my word for it," declared the captain.

"I'll find the thief, if it takes a year," vowed the detective.

He lounged about for the rest of the day, thinking hard and consuming much tobacco, and the following morning he woke to learn that another robbery had been committed during the night. Gold and jewels were missing from the safe, and the Rajah had slept through it all, finding the door secured as usual when he rose. And on the heels of this came another startling piece of news. That same afternoon, while riding through the native bazaars of the town, the Rajah saw exposed for sale on the booth of a merchant a jewelled dagger that was his own property—that had been missing from his safe for some months.

Here was a clue at last. The merchant was brought in custody to the palace and questioned by Jehundar Shaw and the detective. The fellow swore that he had purchased the dagger from a dealer in armour and weapons

who lived at Furzabad, ten miles distant. Baines went there at once and proved the truth of the merchant's story. The Furzabad man had bought the dagger from a native, but the description he gave of the seller—whom he declared to be a stranger in those parts—did not coincide with any person connected with the Rajah's household, and it was very far from fitting the vanished Todar Sing.

"You must find this rogue," said Jehundar Shaw. "He is the keeper of the secret."

But Baines failed to discover him, though he paid several visits to Furzabad during the ensuing week. He turned his energies in various other directions as well. He had the run of the palace, and he cultivated the acquaintance of some of the oldest retainers and soldiers. He strolled about the native bazaars of the town, and frequently, disguised as a Hindoo fakir, he was away for half of the night. It seemed, however, that his labours were fruitless, for neither the Rajah nor Captain Ellison could get a word of encouragement from him.

Thus the week slipped away, and there came a morning when the detective sought the seclusion of the palace library, a place that held a strong interest for him. He was pacing up and down with a vexed and gloomy expression, his pipe between his teeth, when a carved chest of teak-wood attracted his attention. He hauled it from its dark corner and lifted the lid. It was filled with musty-smelling manuscripts, and the first one that he picked up and examined aroused his curiosity. It was legibly written in Hindustani—a language that he was master of—and sitting down in a window seat, he pored over the document for two hours, then returned it to the chest. At tiffin he ate very little, and was in a more absent and thoughtful mood than usual.

"I have a request to make," he said abruptly to his host. "With your permission I will sleep in your Highness's bed-chamber to-night, and you will occupy the outer room."

"You have a reason for this?" asked Jehundar Shaw.

"I have, your Highness. I can say no more at present."

"It shall be as you wish," the Rajah replied. "It is about the time for another theft. That the evil-gifted rogue may appear to you, Baines Sahib, is my earnest prayer."

It was the hour of midnight in the lofty fortress of Rohilcund, and the silvery crescent of the moon was stealing up from the dusky horizon beyond the parched plains. A bronze lamp burnt dimly in the Rajah's bedchamber, where Baines lay awake and dressed on the gold and ivory couch. In the outer room there was a similar lamp, and here Jehundar Shaw tossed and murmured

in his sleep, with the key to the treasure-safe beneath his pillow.

For a long time the detective waited, listening to the song of a nightingale in the palace gardens, or to the distant footsteps of the Mahratta sentries going their rounds. At length he rose, and, approaching the doorway between the two rooms, he drew aside the heavy curtains; the sound of deep and regular breathing satisfied him that Jehundar Shaw was in a profound slumber.

He dropped the curtains and withdrew. He hesitated for a moment, then approached a huge framed picture that apparently fitted into the wall, half-way from the floor to the ceiling, on the side of the room at right angles to the window. It was a painting in oils of the great-grandfather of the present Rajah, and represented the old Rohilcund lord in warlike dress, with his left hand resting on a sword.

Baines tapped the canvas with his knuckles, and shook his head; he might have been striking a block of stone. Next, for the space of five minutes, he pressed his hand over the picture. Touching the hilt of the sword, he felt a slight knob or projection. He bore hard against it. There was a creaking noise, and suddenly frame and portrait swung inward on invisible hinges, revealing a black opening, from which streamed a current of fresh air. The massive thickness of this secret door readily explained why it had given no hollow sound when tapped.

The discovery was a thrilling one to the detective, because it meant that he had the clue to the mystery in his grasp. His eyes gleamed with pardonable triumph. He listened for a moment to the breathing of the sleeper in the next apartment, and then, taking the bronze lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other, he boldly entered the yawning hole. The flickering yellow light guided him down a winding staircase that was built inside the six-foot wall of the fortress. He went on and on, till he thought that the steps would never end. But they brought him at last to a level passage, wide and high enough for three men to walk abreast. He saw that it was no longer walled by masonry, but was cut out of solid rock; he realised that he was underneath the fortress in the heart of the great cliff that towered above the river.

A luminous glow caught his eye, and at the same instant he fancied he heard a gliding noise. He was not sure of that, but he judged it wisest to extinguish the lamp. He put it on the floor and groped along the passage till it made a sharp turn. He crept around this, and saw what he had more than half expected to find—an irregular-shaped opening that admitted the night air and the moonlight. Pistol in hand, he advanced, forgetting the imagined noise of a moment before. The passage now sloped upward pretty steeply, and on reaching the mouth of it he was confronted by a natural

parapet about four feet high; the projecting roof overhead nearly met the top of this, so that there was little or nothing to reveal the opening in the cliff from the outer side.

Baines cautiously put his head over the parapet and looked down. On the moonlit surface of the Chumbul, which was about forty feet below him, he saw a small boat resting in the shadow of the rock, with a man sitting motionless in the stern. The next instant he discovered a rope dangling from a pinnacle of stone at his elbow, and he had scarcely realised the ominous meaning of this and the danger that threatened him, when he heard light footsteps close behind him.

He swung around so quickly that the revolver struck the parapet and fell from his grasp. There was no time to recover it, for looming over him, with a glittering knife upraised, was a tall, slim, clean-shaven native, scantily clad in a single garment. In a trice the detective grabbed at and seized the up-lifted arm, thereby escaping immediate death. The two grappled in the wide mouth of the passage, swaying to and fro, and neither making any outcry.

"The Feringhi dies!" snarled the Hindoo, his eyes aflame with rage.

"It will be you or I, Todar Sing," gasped Baines.

With that they fell, and the struggle entered on a new phase. They were pretty evenly matched, but the Hindoo was as wiry as a panther, and his greased body gave him an advantage. He could not use the knife, however, nor could he break the detective's hold on his arm. They slipped a little farther back, and then began to roll over and over down the sloping passage. They stopped at the level, and for a moment they fought with desperate fury, panting hard for breath. Then, exerting all his strength, Baines partly lifted his antagonist and dropped him heavily. The Hindoo's head struck the wall, and his tenacious grasp relaxed.

The detective released himself, and when he had lit a match a glance showed him that Todar Sing was stunned and unconscious. He hastened to the mouth of the passage, and saw that the boat was moving off, its occupant having doubtless taken the alarm. He returned to the Hindoo, and went on with the intention of getting his lamp. But he had advanced less than a dozen steps, when he was startled by a ruddy flash of light that suddenly danced on the stone floor ahead of him. What did it mean? Was another enemy approaching?

Footsteps warned Baines that it was too late for retreat. He shrank against the wall as closely as possible; his heart was beating loudly, and he shivered without knowing what he was afraid of. A second or two passed as he looked towards the angle of the passage, and then a white, ghostly figure appeared. It was Jehundar Shaw,

clad in his embroidered night blouse and pyjamas, holding in one hand a lamp, and in the other—a golden goblet studded with jewels. He stepped with measured tread, as if he knew the way well; there was a vacant stare in his wide-open eyes.

All at once the astounding truth flashed upon the detective. Here was the missing link in his chain of theories, which until now had puzzled and mystified him. Jehundar Shaw was walking in his sleep!

Yes, there was no doubt of it. The Rajah passed close enough to touch Baines, but did not see him. He stopped just by the prostrate Hindoo, and the light of the lamp shone on a cavity in the wall, where lay a glittering heap of gold and jewels. He deposited the goblet beside these and turned round. The next instant the detective slipped the lamp out of his hand and touched him on the arm.

That broke the spell, and Jehundar Shaw was awake. He uttered a sharp cry of terror and surprise, made a movement as if to draw a weapon, and then sprang furiously at Baines, who sprang back a few paces.

"Be not alarmed, your Highness," he said, calmly and loudly.

"Baines Sahib!" cried the Rajah. "In the name of Mahadera, where am I?"

With a few words the detective reassured him, and, having accomplished that, he briefly told the story of his adventures, describing what he had seen and done.

"Yonder is the treasure which your Highness put there a week ago and to-night," he concluded, "and I know where to look for the rest."

The Rajah stared about him—at the gold and jewels in the rock-cleft; Baines' triumphant countenance illuminated by the lamp; the senseless body of Todar Sing. The light of understanding dawned in his bewildered eyes, but only to a partial degree.

"It is true, then?" he exclaimed. "I am a sleepwalker?"

"Yes, your Highness. You stole your own property. Do I infer that you were ignorant of this habit of somnambulism?"

"Yes, of late. I thought I was cured. But some years ago I was addicted to it. In the year of the great Mutiny, when I was a mere child, I visited this passage under thrilling circumstances. My father, as you know, was true to the English, but he feared that his retainers would turn against him. There was danger on one night of July, 1857, and my father and I brought the portable treasure in this place and hid it until the peril was past. I believed that the secret entrance was from the floor below, and not from my own rooms, else I should long ago have found a clue to the mystery. Forty years is a long time, and it is natural that I should have retained but a slight recollection. That it should all have returned to

me unconsciously, and that in my sleep I should have repeated many times the experience of that distant night, is one of those physiological things that cannot be explained. But it had its origin, I believe, a year ago, when I was discussing the Mutiny with an English officer who was my guest."

"That is the only theory," assented the detective.

"But what about Todar Sing?"

"I will tell you what I think," replied Baines. "On the night of his disappearance he saw you enter the passage. He followed

the valuables they carried off will be found in the brother-in-law's possession."

"He shall be apprehended at once!" exclaimed the Rajah. "Come, Baines Sahib! I am more than grateful to you; a weighty burden is off my mind, and I shall enjoy life again."

The servants of the palace were aroused, and Todar Sing recovered consciousness to find himself in a dungeon; before daylight he shared it with his brother-in-law, in whose house the stolen treasure was dug up under the floor.



He had scarcely realised the ominous meaning of this and the danger which threatened him, when he heard light footsteps close behind him.

you to the spot where you had been storing the treasure from the safe, and when you returned to your chamber—you must have closed the door on him and made him a prisoner—he saw his opportunity. Instead of revealing his discovery to you, he dropped from the cliff into the river and swam ashore. He knew that he was supposed to be dead, and he kept up that delusion. He shaved off his beard, and made himself known only to his brother-in-law, who became his confederate in crime. They must have made several visits to this passage, gaining access from the river, and I have no doubt that

It may be said in conclusion that the detective's theory was confirmed by Todar Sing's confession.

Baines returned to England the richer by a large sum of money and a present of a valuable diamond. Todar Sing and his accomplice are paying the penalty for their crimes, and his Highness Jehundar Shaw enjoys life as he used to do in the days before the Black Shadow fell upon his peace and contentment.

THE END.

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(Continued from page 14.)

Phipps, and they both disappeared upstairs—or, to be more exact, up the ladder.

"Well, so far, there's been nothing particularly exciting," said Handforth. "I'm disappointed. I was hoping for a really good scrap."

"What about the tussle with the gipsies?"

"That?" sneered Handforth. "Call that a scrap? Why, before we had a chance to slosh 'em, they'd gone! Still, I'm jolly glad that Miss Trumble has shown fight. It's just what I wanted."

"It's what we expected, anyway," I put in. "And it's a certain indication that she won't knuckle under so very quickly. It doesn't pay to be too confident—and we mustn't think that we're on velvet. Unless we keep constantly on the alert, we shall be in a bad position."

"Nipper's right," said Pitt. "There's nothing like keeping on the alert. Some of the fellows, I know, wouldn't care a farthing about keeping watch. And we mustn't forget that if we're driven out of this position, we shall never be able to recover it."

"That's exactly my argument," I said. "Once we're out, we shall be out for good, and we might as well give up all hope. Because we shall be homeless, and our only course will be to give in."

"Or else go home by the first train," said

De Valerie. "I wouldn't go back to St. Frank's anyhow."

The juniors continued discussing the situation. But I did not let them talk for long. As soon as breakfast was fully over, there was a good deal of work to be done.

Trenches had to be strengthened here and there, alterations had to be made at certain points. And we had to consider the question of ammunition. The pea-shooters were very effective, but we needed something else.

"I've got an idea, and it may come in handy," I said slowly, as I stood outside the barn. "You know that old fire-engine?"

"Fire-engine?" said Pitt.

"Yes," I replied. "The school fire-engine. We had a new one installed about three months ago. The old one was put out in a garage, and left up in the corner."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Pitt. "It's a beastly old-fashioned affair, and worked by hand—"

"Yes, but it's just the one we want," I said. "It's in perfect order, too, complete with enormous lengths of hose. Now, as you know, that engine can get its supply of water from any stream. And we've got a splendid stream just at the corner of the meadow—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Pitt, his eyes gleaming. "What a stunning wheeze! What

a great notion! It's marvellous how you get 'em, Nipper!"

"Don't be silly—there's nothing in it," I replied. "We're jolly lucky to have the fire-engine so handy. But you see the idea? If we can get hold of that thing, we can fix it up permanently, with a feed-pipe close to the river. I think there are about three hoses, and we can put these in different sections of the outer defences. Within one minute, we can get the whole thing working—half a dozen chaps can do the pumping with ease."

"Gorgeous!" said Bob Christine enthusiastically. "Then if we have another attack, we can get the hoses going, and drench the enemy! Miles better than pea-shooters, any day! I'll bet the hoses will keep the rotters back better than anything. Once they're drenched, they'll never stick it."

The fellows were so enthusiastic that they wanted to dash off right away. But I advised them to wait until the evening. It was hardly likely that there would be another attack during daylight. And it would be far better for us to make our raid on the garage after darkness had fallen.

We were still talking about the scheme, and making arrangements, when a smallish figure appeared in the distance. It came jauntily on, and Handforth frowned darkly.

"My minor!" he growled. "Now, what the dickens does that young ass want here?"

CHAPTER VIII.

HANDFORTH MINOR APPROVES!



WILLY HANDFORTH paused as he arrived at the front line trench.

He stood looking on with a critical air. Then he jumped down into the trench, stuck his hands in his pockets, and strolled along.

He passed down the communication trenches as though he owned them, and finally emerged in front of Fort Resolute.

"Not so bad!" he remarked graciously.

"Awfully kind of you, my son," I exclaimed. "Is there any improvement that you could suggest?"

"Of course," said Willy. "For example, this trench to the left is a bit too narrow. It's a communication trench, don't forget, and ought to be wide enough for the chaps to dash up and down quickly. That corner's a bit awkward, too. It ought to be altered."

"You cheeky young sweep!" said De Valerie.

I chuckled.

"He's got some sense, anyway," I remarked. "I'd already decided to widen that trench—and that corner is wrong. It strikes me that Handforth minor ought to be with us."

"There's no telling," said Willy. "One never knows."

Edward Oswald came up. For about a minute he had been standing quite still, glaring at his young brother fixedly, apparently thinking that Willy would wither on the spot. But Willy was quite unaffected. Now he looked at his major, and gave a cool nod.

"What ho, Ted!" he said. "You didn't wash your neck this morning!"

"You—you cheeky young bounder——"

"Oh, don't start!" said Willy. "There's a giddy smudge round your chin as big as two! But still, that can't be helped. Living under difficulties, eh? Well, I must say you look nice and comfy."

"My hat!" said Handforth, glaring. "I've a dashed good mind to give you a good hiding! You walk in here as though you own the giddy place, and calmly proceed to give your opinions! Who wants 'em? Clear out, before you get kicked out! You're not a rebel!"

Willy glanced up at the sky.

"Looks like being fine, too," he remarked casually. "That's a big advantage, when you're living out in the open like this!"

"I'm talking to you!" hooted Handforth.

"Eh?" said Willy, with a frown. "Oh, do be quiet, Ted! You know, your voice seems to be getting worse lately! I think you must have got a sore throat."

Handforth gulped.

"You—you——"

He paused, quite unable to express himself. Somehow or other, Handforth always got into this condition of helplessness in the presence of his younger brother. There was something about Willy that exasperated Edward Oswald to a point of distraction.

"As I was saying," went on Willy. "Fine weather is very important. Camping out is jolly good, but in the pouring rain it's inclined to get monotonous. Now, I suggest——"

"Nobody wants to hear what you suggest!" snapped Handforth, finding his voice at last. "Look here, my lad, I'm just about fed up with you! Do you hear me?"

"They can probably hear you in the village!" said Willy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cheeky bounder!" bellowed Handforth. "I was just congratulating myself that I'd got rid of you for a bit. I thought I should have some peace! And I'm not here five minutes before you come butting in!"

"We all have our troubles in this life," said Willy calmly. "And don't forget what pater said about that habit of yours, Ted. Five minutes! You've been here for hours and hours——"

"I don't care if I've been here for weeks!" roared Handforth. "I'm not going to stand this! Look here, Nipper!" he

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snorted, turning to me. "You're commander-in-chief! Are you going to let this giddy fag walk in just as he likes?"

I looked at Willy severely, and winked.

"This is very serious!" I said gravely. "In fact, I think we need a court-martial! You've no right to be behind the lines, my lad! You're a cheeky young sweep for coming here—and if you don't clear off within three minutes I'll have you thrown off the battle ground!"

"Oh, will you?" roared Handforth warmly. "If you think you can talk to my young brother like that, you've made a mistake!"

"What?" I gasped.

"It's a pity if a chap's brother can't come and see him!" said Handforth bitterly. "Willy comes here, and all you can do is to order him away! It's absolutely rotten of you!"

"But you wanted him to go!" I said faintly.

Willy sighed.

"What's the good of taking any notice of Ted?" he asked. "I gave it up long ago. He's always like that—can't help it, poor chap. Says one thing one minute, and another the next! He never ought to have come to St. Frank's!"

"Why not?" grinned Pitt.

"Colney Hatch was nearer!" replied Willy calmly.

With the deftness of long practice, he dodged just in the nick of time. Handforth blundered past, having aimed a fearful swipe at his minor. He gave a fiendish yell when he found that he couldn't pull up in time. The next moment he sprawled headlong to the bottom of a sunken gully.

"Ted's feeling frisky!" said Willy, with a chuckle. "It's marvellous, the way he likes throwing himself about. Well, you chaps, I think I'll be going. I don't mind admitting that everything is jolly good."

"In fact, you approve?" I asked.

"Rather!" replied Handforth minor. "These trenches are ripping. In fact, everything's so nice, that I've half a mind to come and join the crowd. I'll think about it, and let you know later."

"That's awfully generous of you!" I said deferentially. "But I'm afraid your brother might have a few objections to make."

"Of course, I expect that," said Willy. "Ted always objects to everything. The poor chap can't help it, you know—just one of his little habits. By the way, we all approve of this wheeze."

"Who's we?" asked Pitt.

"Why, the Third, of course," replied Handforth minor, keeping a wary eye on his elder brother, who had just picked himself up. "We've been holding a long confab about it, and we've decided that you've done the right thing."

Reggie Pitt heaved a sigh.

"Well, that's taken a load off my mind!" he said with relief. "It's jolly good to know that the Third approves of us! I shouldn't have slept a wink if the Third had been against this rebellion!"

"Of course, it makes a difference," said Willy. "If you know the other chaps are with you, it gives you better heart—more appetite for the battle, as it were. As a matter of fact, the Third's getting fed up. What would you say if we trotted along and joined you?"

"We shouldn't say much—but we should do a lot!" I replied grimly. "None of those tricks, young 'un! The Remove stands or falls over this affair—and the Third doesn't enter into it."

"That's the worst of being in the Remove," said Willy with a sniff. "You chaps get so jolly high and mighty! But look here!" he added darkly, "don't be surprised to see me come back soon!"

"I should be surprised if you didn't!" said Bob Christine.

"For good, I mean!" exclaimed Handforth minor, as he walked off. "Queer things happen, you know, and it's quite likely that I shall throw in my lot with you. The more the merrier, you know. I'm always willing to help a good cause."

He walked off, and proceeded to go round the trenches like a visiting general, uttering comments here, and giving free criticism there. Finally, he was obliged to leave somewhat hurriedly.

The Removites were a long suffering crowd, but Willy's calm air of condescension was rather too much for them. It was only by a masterly display of strategy that the hero of the Third escaped intact. As he departed, he was hastened on his way by a shower of peas.

He turned and grinned.

"You can't aim for nuts!" he jeered. "If I had one of those pea-shooters, I'd soon show you how to use it! Just wait until I'm a rebel—I've got some ripping ideas for ammunition! I'm making experiments now. Before long I shall have a special brand of poison gas ready."

And Willy marched off, highly pleased with himself. He didn't feel pleased a moment later, for he suddenly found himself face to face with Miss Trumble. And the expression on her face was not pleasant.

CHAPTER IX.

ROUGH ON WILLY!



THE leading light of the Third instinctively knew that danger was near. But he didn't show it in his demeanour. He raised his cap politely, and passed on, bursting into a cheery whistle.

"Child!" exclaimed Miss Trumble sharply. Willy continued to walk on.

"Stop at once, you naughty boy!" shouted the Headmistress.

Willy paused and looked round.

"Talking to me, ma'am?" he asked, in surprise. "I thought there were some children about here—"

"Don't dare to bandy words with me," interrupted Miss Trumble acidly. "Where have you been?"

Willy waved his hand vaguely.

"Oh, just round about," he said. "The river's looking pretty decent this morning, ma'am. A bit full, but that's only to be expected in February."

"How dare you?" demanded Miss Trumble hotly. "Do not attempt to deceive me! You have been with those wretched boys in the barn!"

"What wretched boys, ma'am?" asked Willy. "The only wretched boys I know are in the school. But that's only to be expected. Those Remove chaps are as cheerful as flies in a jam-pot. All smiles, and chock full of good cheer. Of course, they're having a bit of enjoyment for a change."

Miss Trumble breathed hard. She could hardly think that Willy was deliberately goading her. There was something about the fag that was extremely guileless. He looked so innocent, and spoke so breezily. One would hardly have expected that butter would melt in his mouth.

"I am determined that no Third Form boys shall have any communication whatever with the unhappy and misguided children who have defied my authority!" exclaimed Miss Trumble sourly. "You have just come from that barn. Answer me, child! Have you or have you not?"

"Well, you said so, ma'am," replied Willy.

"Do you admit it?"

"Of course I do," said Handforth minor. "Where's the harm? I only just popped in to say 'Good-morning' and have a look round. I say, ma'am, you ought to have a squint yourself! They're beautifully fixed up, you know. Tons of grub, and plenty of comfort—"

"I'm horrified!" snapped Miss Trumble. "That a boy of your tender years should use such atrocious slang is utterly appalling!"

"Who's been using slang?" asked Willy indignantly. "Great pip! I didn't say a word of slang, ma'am!"

"That is enough!" said the Headmistress, seizing Willy firmly by the arm. "I mean to make an example of you. I will teach you to talk with those young wretches! I am furious!"

Willy thought it wise to keep his own counsel.

He debated with himself whether he should make a sudden dive, and dodge away. It would be quite easy, of course—but what about the after consequences? They were likely to be serious, although there was always the possibility of joining the rebels if things got too hot.

This was a great consolation to Willy. The fact that the Remove had objections was a mere nothing to him. If he made up his mind to join the rebels, he would join them.

That was a foregone conclusion. When Willy Handforth was, really determined, nothing short of an earthquake would deter

him. He was one of the most self-willed juniors in the whole of St. Frank's. And he possessed enough cool cheek to supply a dozen ordinary fellows.

He decided that he would await developments.

And he meekly accompanied Miss Trumble across Little Side, and was marched indoors. Many sympathetic glances were bestowed upon him as he was taken into the Ancient House.

Chubby Heath and Owen minor, his own particular chums, gazed at him in an alarmed way. The whole Third had been forbidden to go near the rebels. But Willy had insisted upon making the visit.

This was the result.

As Willy passed indoors, he pointed up the face of the Ancient House to a certain window. But he did this with his hand behind him, so that Miss Trumble should not see. But Chubby Heath and Owen minor saw. Whether Willy was capable of thought-reading or not, he was very near the mark.

For he pointed to the window of the punishment room. He had an instinctive feeling that he was booked with a through ticket for that apartment. Something in Miss Trumble's attitude told him so.

And he was right.

Upstairs he was marched, and straight into the punishment-room he went. Miss Trumble looked at him maliciously as she stood by the door. She was breathing hard—mainly because she had hurried upstairs.

"Now, child, I shall make you suffer for your wilful disobedience," she said harshly. "I intend to keep you here for one week—in solitary confinement."

"That will be nice!" murmured Willy.

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing much, ma'am."

"Solitary confinement!" repeated Miss Trumble impressively.

"Yes, I heard that the first time!" said Willy, in a resigned voice.

"Furthermore, your sole food will consist of bread and water!" declared Miss Trumble. "Perhaps that will be a lesson to you! I shall take care that all the other boys in your Form know of your fate. They will not be as disobedient!"

Willy did not seem very appalled.

"Don't you think it's a bit rough, ma'am?" he asked. "I mean, I didn't do much, did I?" he asked. "And bread and water for a week is a bit stiff—particularly with solitary confinement thrown in as a make-weight."

"Child, you are incorrigible!" snorted Miss Trumble furiously. "Your insolence is past all bearing. If I remain here, I shall strike you!"

She passed out of the room, and slammed the door. Miss Trumble turned the key in the lock with savage relish.

In her heart she knew well enough that she was treating the fag with undeserved severity. But she was unable to touch the rebels, and so she was venting her spite on this Third-former.

As for Willy, he sat on the edge of the table, and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Bread and water for a week!" he murmured. "I don't think! Solitary confinement! I don't think, either! My only hat! We're going back to the giddy Middle Ages! It's a wonder she didn't talk about molten lead! She'll be shoving me on the rack next!"

Willy tried to remain calm, but he had to admit to himself that he was alarmed. It was all very well to be cool and collected. But facts had to be faced. And the punishment-room was a solid fact.

The door was of solid oak, and the lock was one that even a junior of Willy's ingenuity could not pick. Of course, it would be quite easy to get out of the window and slither down the ivy.

But, unfortunately, there was no ivy immediately below this window. A further drawback was the fact that there were several nasty iron bars in front of the window. Willy gazed at them with dwindling hopes.

"Of course, it's absolutely impossible!" he told himself. "Bread and water for a week? Not likely! Why, I'll bore a hole through the floor first! That's not a bad idea, either. I've got a good pocket-knife, with a corkscrew in it. I might be able to wangle something——"

He paused, as a crack sounded on the window.

He crossed the little room, opened the window, and gazed out. Down in the Triangle, Chubby Heath and Owen minor were gazing upwards. They caught sight of Willy, and waved.

"You've caught a nice packet now, you ass!" called Chubby. "I'll bet you've got it in the neck!"

"Bread and water for a week!" said Willy. "You'd better order a coffin for me! I shan't last beyond next Monday!"

He turned away, for an idea had come to him. And he didn't want to waste any time over getting it clear. A moment later his eyes were gleaming, and he gave a low chuckle.

Willy Handforth was not beaten yet!

CHAPTER X.

REBELS TO THE RESCUE!



CHUBBY HEATH was very anxious.

He had only had about two words with Willy, and the latter had suddenly vanished.

Chubby was not to know that Willy's mighty brain was getting busy. He had horrible suspicions that Miss Trumble had caught Willy at the window, and that that unfortunate junior was now being conveyed to some inner apartment, where he would be hidden away from human ken.

And then, a moment later, Willy appeared.



Willy raised his cap politely and passed on, bursting into a cheery whistle.

He didn't look very unhappy. He grinned as he gazed down between the bars.

"Anybody looking?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," said Chubby.

"Fathead! You're not anybody," snapped Willy. "I mean, any of the female population?"

"I don't think so——"

"Good!" called down Handforth minor. "Catch!"

"What? I didn't quite hear——"

Chubby gasped as something came whizzing down from above. It came so swiftly that Chubby had no time to dodge. Willy's aim was accurate, and the next minute Chubby Heath roared. He rubbed his head in acute pain.

"You—you dangerous ass!" he gasped. "You might have brained me!"

"Impossible!" said Willy. "Don't make a fuss over nothing! It was only my pocket-knife!"

Chubby felt dazed. There was a big bump on his head, and this was not all all surprising. If Willy's pocket-knife had caught him squarely, he would have been half stunned. But Handforth minor was careless like that. He was quite capable of throwing a brick.

"Don't stand there like a loon!" he blazed.

"There's a note tied round that knife. Run like the dickens to the old barn, and give that note to my major."

Chubby and Owen minor were startled.

"But—but we can't go there!" said Owen minor, in alarm.

"You scared funks!" snapped Willy. "Do you mean to say you won't do a thing like that for a pal? Here am I, condemned to a frightful ordeal, and you can't help to rescue me! Buzz off, or I'll punch you into a pulp when I get out!"

Chubby Heath considered. Willy was quite capable of doing the punching, and he would certainly make things hot for his chums if they did not do his bidding. Besides, it suddenly occurred to Heath that time was valuable. They might be spotted at any minute. He picked up the pocket-knife and slipped it into his trousers.

"You needn't be afraid," said Willy, from above. "You can easily dodge round past the pavilion. Make a detour, and nobody will guess where you're going. Buck up!"

"But what's the idea?"

"Don't ask silly questions. Buzz off!"

Chubby Heath made up his mind, and turned to go.

"Hold on!" called down Willy. "Don't go and swop that pocket-knife with somebody! I'll skin you if you lose it! It's worth every penny of a bob!"

Chubby hurried off, and it was just as well he did so, because Miss Babbidge came out a moment later. She had a suspicion that something wrong was going on. But she found no sign of it outside.

Owen minor was whistling—rather nervously, perhaps—but there was nothing else happening in the Triangle. If Miss Babbidge had come out earlier the whole plan might have gone wrong.

Chubby Heath sped like lightning.

He had two reasons for going quickly. Firstly, he was anxious about Willy; and, secondly, the sooner he got back the less chance there was of being spotted. Chubby was thinking of his own skin as well as Willy's. By a piece of sheer luck, Handforth was in the front line trench as Chubby came running up. And Handforth frowned.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed. "I'm blessed if there's not another of those fags coming along! I'll jolly soon tell him off—"

"It's Heath," put in Church. "He looks pretty excited, too. I'll bet something's happened to your minor."

"I hope it has," said Handforth gruffly.

But he seemed a bit anxious as Chubby Heath came to the edge of the trench, and bent down.

"Quick!" panted the fag. "Your minor's been collared by Miss Trumble, and shoved in the punishment-room! He chucked this note down, and asked me to bring it to you. Here you are!"

Chubby unwrapped the note from the pocket-knife, and tossed it to Handforth. Then he turned, and sped away.

"Hold on, you young ass!" snapped Handforth. "I want a word—"

But Chubby was running like mad. He had an awful fear that Miss Trumble would spot him, too. And if that happened, he would also find himself in the punishment-room, with a similar sentence. It was enough to make any fellow hurry.

Fortunately, Chubby was not seen by any of the mistresses, and he got back to the Triangle in record time. And Handforth, in the meantime, was unrolling the piece of paper with a grim expression on his face.

"You ought to be feeling very happy now," remarked Church. "Your minor's in the punishment-room, and he won't trouble you any more."

Handforth glared.

"You callous rotter!" he snorted. "If anything has happened to young Bill, I'm jolly well going to help him. We wouldn't put up with Miss Trumble's rot, and there's no reason why he should."

Handforth had unfolded the paper by this time, and he looked at it. It was only a scrap, and it contained a few brief words, horribly scrawled in pencil. They ran as follows:

"Help! Sentenced to bread and water for a week! Solitary confinement as well! It's up to you to get busy! Yank me out of this, for goodness sake.—Willy."

Handforth's eyes blazed.

"Great pip!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of it? That—that woman's awful! She's shoved young Bill into the punishment-room, and sentenced him to solitary confinement and bread and water for a week!"

The other juniors near by were aghast.

"I say, that's thick, if you like!" exclaimed De Valerie, with a whistle. "For a week, you know! She's done that just out of spite—just because Willy came and spoke with us!"

"That's about the size of it," agreed Singleton. "She can't do anything to us, and so she's making the fags suffer. Hard lines on Willy. Poor kid! Bread and water for a week!"

Handforth looked round excitedly.

"Are we going to stand it?" he roared.

"We?" repeated De Valerie. "It's nothing to do with us—"

"You—you miserable bounders!" bellowed Handforth. "You unfeeling rotters! Here's my minor being starved to death, and all you can do is to jaw! Something's got to be done!"

"If you can suggest anything—"

"Of course I can, you babbling lunatic!" snapped Handforth. "We've got to get up a raiding-party, and rescue him. See? We'll get him out of the punishment-room, and then he can snap his fingers at Miss Trumble!"

Pitt came up, looking interested.

"And what'll be the good of that?" he asked. "Your minor would only be put

into the punishment-room again, and then his sentence will probably be a fortnight instead of a week."

Handforth looked at him witheringly.

"You brainless fathead!" he exclaimed. "When we get Willy out of the punishment-room, we'll bring him back with us. He'll join the rebels. After all, he's my minor, and——"

"But a little while ago you were saying that——"

"Never mind what I was saying a little while ago," snorted Handforth. "Are we going to stay here, eating the fat of the land, while my minor starves to death in solitary confinement?"

"What's the excitement here?" I asked, arriving on the spot.

I was quickly informed.

And I took a serious view of the affair.

"I'm inclined to agree with Handforth," I said at length. "I think we ought to do something for the kid. Don't forget he came here to see us, and then gets this harsh punishment."

"But that's not our fault," argued Hubbard.

"Of course it's not our fault," I agreed. "But I rather like Willy—he's a cheeky young bounder, but you can't help liking him. And if we have one more in the party, it won't make much difference."

"It'll be the thin end of the wedge," said De Valerie. "We don't want the whole Third crowding on us."

"I don't think that'll happen," I said. "Mind you, if Willy hadn't appealed to us to help him, I wouldn't feel inclined to do anything. But it would seem rather a dirty trick if we ignored his call for help. He sent this message particularly to us—and we're going to do what we can."

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily. "I always said you were the right chap in the right place, Nipper. Now, I suggest that half a dozen of us get one of the ladders, and rush it up to the Ancient House. It won't take us two minutes to get in the window of the punishment-room——"

"After oozing through the iron bars, I suppose?" I asked.

"My hat! I'd forgotten the bars!"

"There's a much better way than that," I said. "Look here, it's all in a day's work. We'll simply get up a raiding-party—say, a dozen of us. We'll march to the school, go straight upstairs, smash the door of the punishment-room, and take Willy out with us."

"Phew!" whistled Pitt. "That'll be a bit of nerve!"

"Well, it'll show Miss Trumble that we're not standing any nonsense," I said grimly. "It'll show her that we don't agree with this rotten bread and water business. Come on! We'll do it at once—no time like the present!"

Within a minute, the raiding party was formed. It included Handforth and Co. and De Valerie and Jack Grey, and a few others. I left Reginald Pitt in sole charge of the

Fort, and advised him to keep well on the alert.

Then we started off.

On the way, we picked up a broken piece of a heavy pole—about six feet in length. This would come in very handy later on. We marched straight across Little Side, into the Triangle, and found it deserted.

"They're having dinner!" I remarked. "That's good, you know. We shall probably get indoors without being spotted. Now, you chaps, we've got to rush it. Sharp's the word!"

At the double, we dashed into the Ancient House. We tore across the lobby, raced up the stairs, and arrived at the punishment-room within a minute. All the rebels were flushed and excited.

There was something very thrilling about this raid. We were coming right into the heart of the enemy's camp—and so far we had not met a soul. But now we were compelled to give notification of our presence.

"Get ready!" I commanded. "Are you in there, young Handforth?"

"Large as life!" came Willy's voice.

"Right—stand clear of the door!" I shouted. "Now then—let 'er go!"

Wielded by Handforth and Co., and De Valerie, the big chunk of wood was brought back, and then sent heavily against the strong oaken door.

Crash!

There was one splintering smash, and the door burst open, the lock completely wrecked. That single powerful drive had been enough. In a moment, Willy was out, excited, but grinning.

"Good men!" he said approvingly. "I knew I could rely on you!"

"You young fathead!" said Handforth severely. "Giving us all this trouble! You ought to be——"

"Cave!" shouted one of the rebels. "Enemy in sight!"

I shouted out an order, and a moment later we all formed into line, with Willy in the middle of us. Then we marched down the stairs. In the lobby, we found Miss Trumble, absolutely white with fury.

"Stop!" she shouted hoarsely. "You young villains! What is the meaning of this? Boy! Come to my side at once!" she added, with shrill excitement, as she caught sight of Willy.

"Sorry, old dear, but it can't be did!" said Willy disrespectfully.

He waved his hand, and we passed outside—leaving Miss Trumble fairly screaming with rage and helplessness. And ten minutes later we were back in the trenches, having carried out the raid with complete success.

"Thanks muchly!" said Willy. "That was jolly decent, you know. But what did I tell you? Didn't I say that I should join the gang? You've jolly well got to keep me now—because if I go back I shall get skinned alive!"

"All right, kid!" I chuckled. "I think you deserve to be with us!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE NIGHT ALARM.



EVENING descended upon Fort Resolute. The rest of the day had passed very quietly, with no sign from Miss Trumble. We had been absolutely ignored during the afternoon. Nobody had come near us, and there had been no indication of a fresh attack.

And now Fatty little was preparing tea—a kind of temporary meal, for he meant to make something special after the goods had arrived from Bannington. Several fellows had been told off to be at the boat-house in readiness.

They were there almost as soon as darkness had fallen.

Archie was quite certain that the firm would keep their word. He had given very definite instructions, and he had paid for everything in advance. It was almost impossible for the firm to fail.

And, sure enough, darkness had hardly descended when the goods arrived.

A big van came along the towing-path. This was not generally intended for vehicular traffic, but it was quite large enough for the purpose. And at this time of the year the river side was deserted. There was very little fear of anybody at the school getting to know what was taking place.

"Good business!" exclaimed Pitt, who was in charge of the cadet party. "Now we shall be all right. Look here, you fellows, as the goods are taken out of the van, they've got to be carried up to the Fort. No time to be lost, either."

Archie Glenthorne was hovering near by, and he was looking rather anxious for some reason.

"Which will you have first, young gents?" asked the carmen. "I've got a bit of heavy stuff at the back. The big lounge will want a bit of carrying, too. And so will the easy chair——"

"Lounge—easy chair?" said Pitt, staring. "There must be a mistake! We didn't order any furniture!"

"Absolutely!" put in Archie, stepping forward.

"What!"

"The fact is, laddies, just a little comfort for the good old bones, what?" explained Archie, rather confused. "I mean to say, the jolly old van was coming along, so I thought it didn't matter, don't you know. Rather a priceless scheme to be exact. Or don't you think so?"

Pitt gazed at him in wonder.

"Well I'm blessed!" he ejaculated. "You're the limit, Archie. Easy-chairs and lounges! Of course, we can't grumble—you paid for all the stuff!"

"I mean to say, that's absolutely ridic." said Archie hastily. "I mean, with regard to the settling up stuff. If you chappies object to the lounge material, I'll bung it straight back by the van. I mean to say, I don't want to cause any——"

"That's all right, Archie," chuckled Pitt. "We'll forgive you. You can't do without comfort, can you? Right you are, carman—let's have it out. We'll take it as it comes."

And the goods were unloaded.

Working in the darkness, the juniors conveyed all the things along the towing path, and then across the meadow to the Fort. And after an hour's work, the last batch had been brought in.

Fatty Little was particularly delighted, for the bulk of the goods were for his use. He declared that he would be able to prepare the most glorious dishes with so many advantages. And, certainly, Archie had spent his money lavishly, providing us with everything necessary.

As for Archie Glenthorne, he was in his element. Somehow or other, the lounge and the easy chair were carried up into the loft, to say nothing of a large number of soft, downy cushions. And before long, Archie was sprawling out in real comfort.

He lay on the lounge, with cushions all round him, and a cheerful oil-stove just near by imparted a genial warmth to the whole place. There was not much "roughing it" where Archie was concerned. He was enjoying practically all the comforts that he had been permitted at St. Frank's.

And Phipps was there, too—ready to do anything that Archie wanted. It was hardly to be wondered at that Archie didn't care whether the rebels remained in Fort Resolute or not. He was quite content to stay on for weeks, if necessary.

While all this was being attended to, the trenches were manned by the bulk of the rebels. I did not allow any relaxation of vigilance. Indeed, now that darkness had fallen, it was doubly important to keep a strict watch.

Eight o'clock came, and still everything was quiet and still.

At this hour Fatty had prepared supper—a really sumptuous meal, with home-made bread, and cakes, and all manner of nice things. Fatty had soon made use of the stoves and the utensils.

The rebels partook of the food in batches, not more than a dozen at a time. All the rest were obliged to remain on duty.

For I had a sort of idea that Miss Trumble would attempt some game to-night. I thought it hardly possible that she would allow the hours of darkness to pass without making another attempt to drive us from our stronghold.

But it seemed that I was mistaken.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

Nine o'clock came, and then ten o'clock. And still there was no sign whatever of any attack. The school lights began to go out, one after the other. Everything was very quiet, and very still, and, although I sent scouts out in two or three directions, they came back to report that everything was normal. There were no indications of activity.

"It seems that we've been on the alert for nothing, then," remarked Pitt, as he stood with me in one of the trenches. "Still, it was just as well to be on the safe side."

"It's not too late, even now," I pointed out. "I'm beginning to think that nothing will happen, but we can't be certain. Some of the fellows would like to go to bed—"

"Yes, and leave about half a dozen on guard!" growled Handforth. "That would be a fat lot of good, wouldn't it? Of course, I think it's a dotty idea to expect any attack to-night. Miss Trumble wouldn't do anything like that. She's whacked."

"No, she isn't!" I declared. "Miss Trumble is a long way from being whacked. This morning she was beside herself with rage, and hardly knew what she was doing. But she's had time to cool down since then. There'll be something more determined about her next move—"

"I wonder what that flickering light can be over there?" put in Pitt thoughtfully.

"What light?"

"Can't you see—"

"By jingo!" I interrupted. "Yes, rather! And it gave a jump, just then. It can't be a bonfire at this time of night. I must say it looks a bit significant."

"It's right in the middle of the school, too!" said Pitt eagerly. "Look! It seems to me that the flickers are bang in the middle of the Ancient House. My hat! It can't be possible that—"

He broke off, leaving his thoughts unspoken.

And we all continued to watch those strange flickers. They came from the centre of the Ancient House, or just behind it. It was very difficult to see which. And, as we continued to stare, all the other rebels were attracted. They came hurrying down the trenches, excited and wondering.

"It's a fire!" declared Armstrong. "The school's on fire!"

"Great Scott!"

"That's one of the results of having women in charge!" snorted Griffith. "I'll bet the whole giddy school's burnt down! That'll be a nice thing, won't it? All our trouble for nothing, and—"

"I say, what about that old fire engine?" put in Pitt. "If it's in working order we might be able to lend a hand! And every little helps, you know, when a house is on fire."

"Don't be in such a hurry," I put in, still staring at the flicker. "I'm not absolutely certain—"

"Great Scott! Look at that!" shouted Church.

Suddenly, the flicker had become a lurid glare. It seemed as though flames had shot upwards with sudden violence. There was no mistaking the appearance of the thing.

And then, as though to finally convince us, large columns of smoke arose—dense, thick clouds, accompanied by myriads of sparks. The glare which lit the sky was so great that the whole of the school buildings were outlined against the conflagration.

"Listen!" exclaimed Church tensely.

Somehow the juniors managed to keep quiet. And, across the meadows, came the sound of shrieking—and then screams for help. By this time the rebels were seething with excitement.

"We've got to do something!" shouted Armstrong. "The school's on fire! Let's all dash up and see what we can do! Come on!"

"Rather!"

"Somebody had better buzz to the village and tell the fire brigade—"

"Let's get to the school first!"

"My hat! Look at the sparks now!"

"It's the Ancient House!" said Bob Christie. "Well, thank goodness it's not on our side—"

"You fathead!" snorted Handforth. "It wouldn't matter a jot if your mouldy old rabbit-hutch was burnt down! It's the Ancient House that's on fire!"

"The flames are getting bigger and bigger!"

Armstrong jumped out of the trench, and commenced to run across the meadow. It was the signal for a general stampede. Dozens of other juniors followed his example. Pitt was just about to leap up when I laid a hand on his arm.

"We'd better not all go!" I said quietly. "Fire or no fire, we can't leave the Fort deserted."

Pitt stared.

"But Miss Trumble won't try any tricks now, with the school on fire!" he ejaculated. "I believe in being cautious, Nipper, but—"

"I'm not satisfied," I interrupted grimly. "It was no good trying to stop the chaps, they were too excited to listen. But I'm not satisfied!"

Reggie Pitt paused and looked at me, startled.

"Miss Trumble is pretty clever, and she's capable of any kind of dodge!" I said. "This doesn't look like one, but you can't always judge by appearances. Montie! I say, Montie!"

I stopped Tregellis-West just in time. Watson and De Valerie also stayed behind. But practically all the others, headed by Handforth and Armstrong, had gone dashing across Little Side towards the school.

And they all tore into the Triangle in a big, excited crowd. The glare was now tremendous, but on this side there was no sign of the actual fire.

"It's round the back!" panted Armstrong. "Come on!"

They dashed madly round the rear, shooting past the corner of the College House, and at last coming to a point where they could see round the domestic quarters, and right into the big rear courtyard.

And then Armstrong, and several others, came to an abrupt halt, staring hard. There, right in the middle of the great yard, was an enormous bonfire—a vast pile of faggots and boxes and all sorts of rubbish. Old Cuttle, the porter, and two of the under-gardeners, were attending to it. And Miss Babbidge was looking on attentively.

"Great Scott!" shouted Armstrong. "It's only a bonfire!"

Bob Christine turned pale.

"Then—then we've been tricked!" he panted. "It was lit especially so that we should all come here and desert the trenches!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

The crowd of rebels stared at one another, and they stared at the bonfire. It was some moments before they could realise the full truth. But when they did so, they turned with one accord, and dashed off madly, back across Little Side. But there was a dread tugging at their hearts.

What had happened to Fort Resolute during their absence?

They reviled themselves for being tricked so easily. Certainly, the fire had looked real enough, but anybody who has seen a big bonfire at dead of night knows that such a fire is frequently mistaken for a big house conflagration. Such fires are very deceptive.

This one had been built for the especial purpose of deceiving. What was more, it had served its purpose.

Too late, the impulsive rebels dashed back. Would they be in time to save the stronghold from the hands of the enemy? For there was not the slightest doubt that Fort Resolute was being attacked.

The rebels ran madly.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEAR THING!



REGINALD PITT grasped my arm.

"Look!" he breathed. "I saw something moving just now"

"So did I!" I broke in.

"By jingo! I believe we were right—it's not a real fire at all—"

I broke off, acutely alert. There certainly were figures moving about in the gloom. And a moment later there was no time for further talk. And all our doubts were set at rest.

For dozens of figures sprang up from almost every surrounding hillock and tuft of grass. They came tearing down towards the trenches, shouting and yelling. The attack was as sudden as it was fierce.

And my worst fears were realised.

I bitterly accused the fellows of rashness

for dashing off as they had done. There was no fire at the school—only a faked affair.

What chance was there for us?

I gathered that these men who were coming to the attack were the gipsies who had molested us during the morning. Miss Trumble must have fixed up this affair almost immediately afterwards—planning it with much skill and foresight. It clearly proved that she was not to be lightly beaten.

My thoughts were quick, and I instantly decided what to do.

"Come on, you chaps!" I whispered sharply. "Down this trench!"

"But we've got to fight!" gasped Watson.

"It's useless!" I interrupted. "We should be wiped up in two ticks—there's only half a dozen of us all told! Let's get along this trench and dodge the rotters!"

"But we might be able to hold them back for a bit—"

"Impossible!" I insisted. "And in this way we can take them by surprise, later. They'll man the trenches, don't forget, and resist the fellows when they return. Then we can come along and take them in the rear!"

"By jingo, that's a cute idea!" breathed Pitt. "You're full of 'em!"

Without another word of objection they followed me. We crept along one trench after another, and had little fear of being detected. For we knew every twist and turn of these trenches.

But the enemy, of course, were strangers to them. And they had no time for investigation. For, even then, the disillusioned rebels were beginning to rush back.

The gipsies dropped down into the trenches, and soon found that these were quite deserted. And this was just what Miss Trumble had reckoned upon. Her scheme had nearly succeeded. But for the one little handful left behind, the whole Remove force had been lured away.

And the gipsies took up their positions, with the firm intention of holding the trenches against all attack. They held the upper hand now, and they were not without ammunition.

Each man had his pockets full of small stones, and they intended throwing these at the juniors as soon as they came up.

I need hardly add that Miss Trumble had issued no instructions to this effect. She had simply told the men to keep the boys out, but she had never believed the gipsies would adopt such risky methods. For stone throwing at night is decidedly dangerous.

Handforth came charging up, leading the main body of the Remove. Edward Oswald came tearing along, with the other fellows spreading out on either side of him. By this time a half moon was shedding a weak kind of light upon the whole scene. And the juniors soon knew the truth.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Stones came hissing through the air with perilous force. Several fellows yelled out

with surprise and pain and anger. And Handforth, who was foremost, suddenly staggered.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "What the— By George! Somebody threw a stone! It caught me right over the left eye. Mad fools, they might have blinded me!"

Handforth was absolutely furious. The stone had been a sharp one, and there was a nasty cut on his forehead. Instead of being deterred, Edward Oswald was all the more determined.

He bent his head down and rushed to the attack.

"Back up, Remove!" he roared. "Come on! Never say die! We'll soon drive these murderous brutes out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Remove to the attack!"

"Over the top!"

The fellows were so excited that they hardly realised their danger. And they were desperate with rage, too. They cared nothing for the hail of stones and pebbles which came hissing through the air.

With heads bent down, and in one tremendous rush, they reached the front line trench. It was something like real warfare, but without its horror. The juniors dropped into the trench breathlessly, and then came to close quarters with the enemy.

Other fellows were going further on, attacking the trench in the rear. And, at the same time, Pitt and I, and the other members of the handful, dashed up from the rear. We came along just in time to assist in the very thick of the fight.

I was feeling thrilled, and I was rather proud, too, of the wonderful manner in which the Remove had made amends for their error. With indomitable courage, the cadets had pelted to the attack of these invaders.

The gipsies had won the position from us by strategy, but we were winning it back by sheer hard fighting.

Already the first trench was ours. Those members of the enemy who had not been thrown out, were now retreating in disorder. And the Remove followed up its advantage with yells of triumph.

But at last, after many minutes of desperate fighting, the position was re-won. The enemy was flung out, neck and crop. There was no question whatever about the completeness of their defeat.

And the last member of the enemy force took to his heels, cursing loudly, and limping as he ran. And Miss Trumble, who had been watching the battle from a short distance, gritted her teeth with disappointment and helpless rage. After all her scheming—after all her strategy—this was the result!

The Remove was as strongly entrenched as ever, and Miss Trumble's paid allies were on the run.

But it had been a near thing



Wielded by Handforth and Co. and De Valerie, the big chunk of wood was brought back, and then sent heavily against the strong oaken door.

When we had time to lick our wounds, so to speak, we found that black eyes were as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa, and gashed lips and minor hurts were distributed with a lavish hand. And one or two fellows were really badly mauled about, and had to be carefully put to bed. Edward Oswald Handforth was one of these. He had fought until he was dazed, bleeding from half a dozen places.

But, after all, the injuries were superficial, and in the morning we should be practically ourselves, except for patches of court-plaster and numerous aches. And in our hearts there was a feeling of triumph that easily compensated for a little bodily pain.

We had won the position back. Fort Resolute was ours once more! And there was very little likelihood of the Remove being caught napping for a second time. Miss Trumble's cunning had tricked us once—but never again!

We could safely say that the war at St. Frank's was going decidedly in favour of the rebel Remove!

THE END.

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My Dear Readers,—The "Barring Out" at St. Frank's is now in full swing. It has successfully survived two attacks made by a gang of gipsies hired by Miss Trumble to drive the Juniors from their fortified position in the trenches; it has also won the sympathy of the Fifth and Sixth Form fellows, who at any moment might throw in their lot with the Remove. But that may not be necessary, as the Remove is in a stronger position than ever, and is no longer dependent on raiding the school pantry for stores—thanks to Archie, who, judging by the amount of furniture he has brought with him, has come prepared for a long stay. It looks as if the Juniors have only to wait long enough for victory. But Miss Trumble will not listen to the advice of her mistresses to come to terms with the boys by restoring to them their lost privileges. Instead, she has devised a new scheme by which she hopes to bring her naughty children to their senses. It is rather an ingenious plan, even for Miss Trumble, who has proved herself not to be lacking in resource, and when the Juniors get to hear of it, there will be consternation in the camp. I will not divulge Miss Trumble's trump card just now, as you will have the pleasure of reading it next

week in Nipper's own words, in the exciting narrative, entitled; "THE REMOVE AT BAY!"

RESULT OF VOTING COMPETITION!

I hope to be able to publish next week the name of the winner of the magnificent Model Steam Locomotive in the recent Story Voting Competition. The number of entries was very encouraging and tempts me to run another competition of a similar kind in the near future.

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THE EDITOR.

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some method in the old fellow's madness. In one of the underground chambers they found bags of gold and a wrecked chemical laboratory, plainly indicating the source of old Willard's wealth. In short, Willard had discovered how to manufacture gold. Then he began to fear that if his secret became known, the precious metal would become valueless, and that his discovery would plunge the world into untold misery instead of bringing happiness. So he carefully concealed the gold he had made and destroyed all the evidence of how he had manufactured it, and ended his days as a pauper. The property was afterwards acquired by Colonel Glenthorne, Archie's father, who very generously restored the gold that was found, and worth a considerable fortune, to the descendants of old Willard. And that is the romantic story of Willard's Island.

THE EDITOR.

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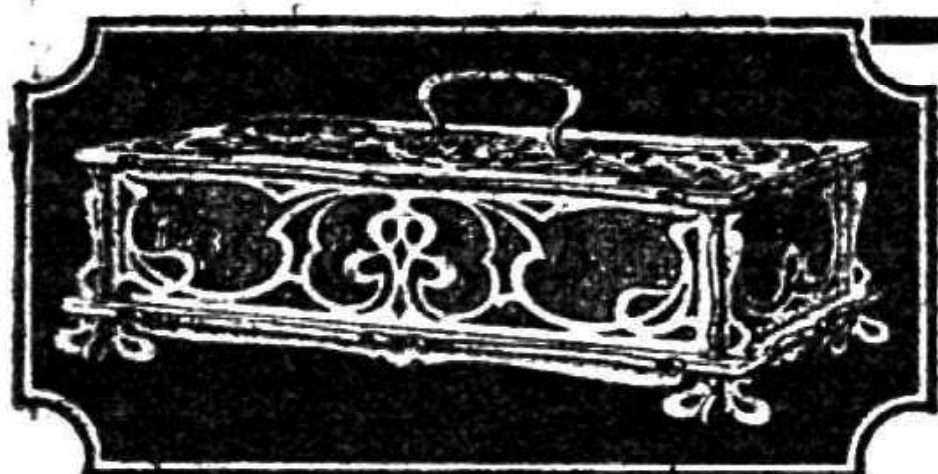
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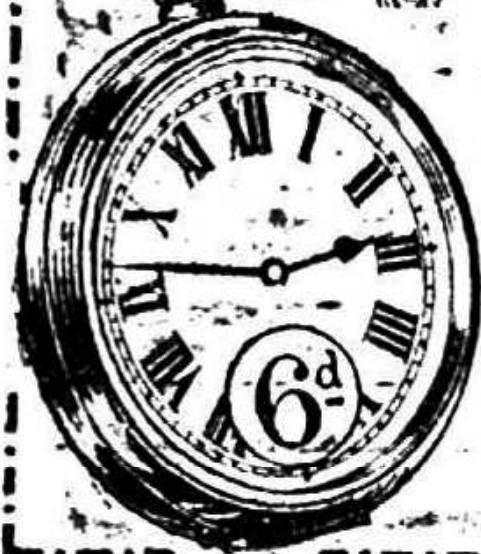
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