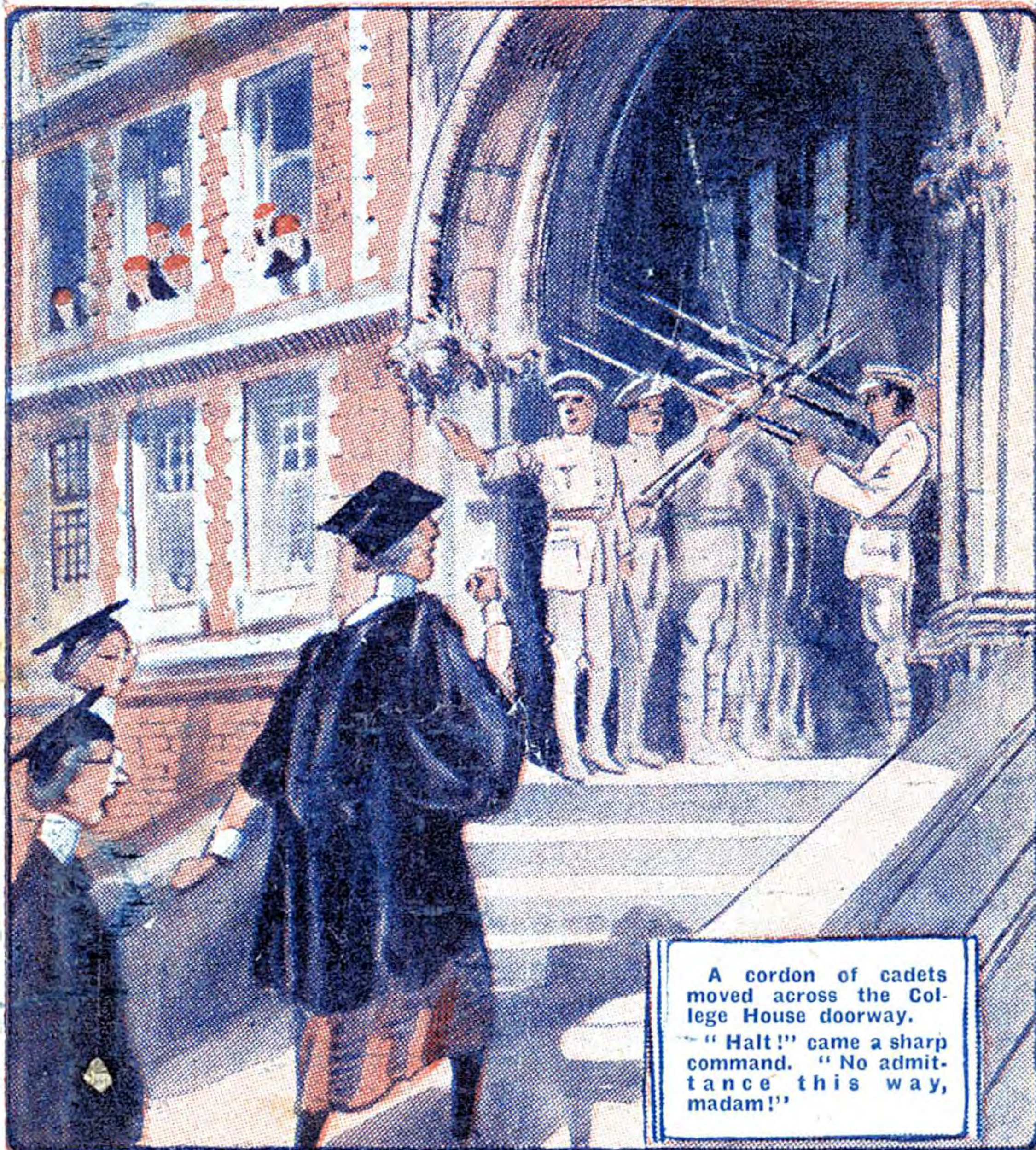


THE END OF "WOMEN RULE" AT ST. FRANK'S! SEE THIS WEEK'S ROUSING STORY!

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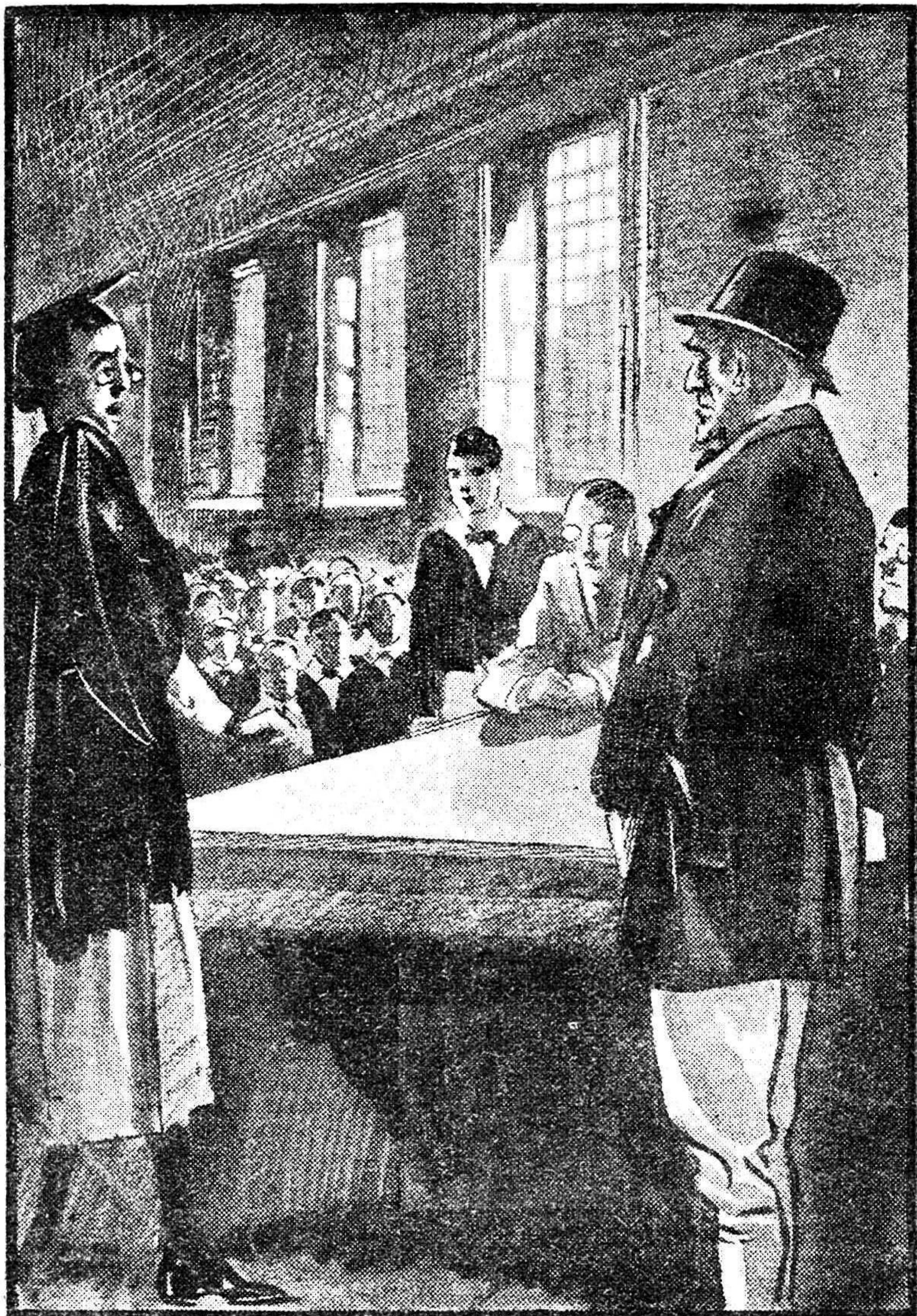


A cordon of cadets moved across the College House doorway.

"Halt!" came a sharp command. "No admittance this way, madam!"

The above dramatic scene is taken from this week's grand concluding story of the Great Barring Out series:—

THE BARRED OUT MISTRESSES!



"You promised to pay me all the wages of them men who tried to get the boys out," declared Farmer Holt. "You arranged the whole thing with me, an' I ain't seen a penny yet! What about my money?"



Related throughout by Nipper.

To the regular reader there is a wealth of meaning in the few words of the title of this week's story. Not for nothing have the boys taken these extreme and rather drastic measures against the Lady Head, Miss Trumble, and her colleagues. Last week Miss Trumble had called for an armistice, and, on certain conditions, the rebels agreed to suspend hostilities and to return to the school. Having achieved her purpose, Miss Trumble threw all scruples to one side, and went back on her word. The whole school was disgusted with this breach of faith. It was an insult to the great traditions of St. Frank's. The boys would no longer tolerate her presence within its time-honoured precincts. Hence the ruthless decision to bar out Miss Trumble and the other mistresses once and for all. It is quite the most exciting and dramatic story of a remarkably strong series. Next week will be announced the opening of another new and wonderful series!

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIGNAL OF DEFEAT!

MISS JANE TRUMBLE, the Head-mistress of St. Frank's, looked up from her desk as a tap sounded upon the door of the study.

"Come in!" she exclaimed sharply.

The door opened, and Miss Babbidge appeared, immediately followed by Miss Rice. These two ladies were the Housemistresses

of the Ancient House and the College House respectively.

For things were not quite as usual at the famous old public school. Masters were out of fashion at St. Frank's. And the boys were ruled over by mistresses instead.

But, according to all appearances at the moment, the mistresses were nearly at the end of their innings.

They didn't think so themselves.

"Well, Miss Babbidge?" said the Headmistress, laying down her pen. "Well, Miss Rice? May I ask why you have come to my study at this hour? I distinctly stated that I did not want to be disturbed."

The two ladies were looking grim.

"Nevertheless, Miss Trumble, we felt that it was quite impossible to keep away any longer!" said Miss Babbidge agitatedly. "We cannot possibly understand your attitude with the boys."

"We are quite mystified, Miss Trumble," added Miss Rice.

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Trumble sourly. "And is it necessary that you should understand? Is it highly essential that you should be brought out of your state of mystification?"

Her tone was intensely sarcastic, and her visitors did not like it.

"Yes, I think it is necessary!" retorted Miss Rice. "We hold responsible positions in the school, Miss Trumble, and it is right that we should know what is going on. For myself, I think it is perfectly scandalous that the Remove boys should have been allowed to return to those absurd trenches!"

"I quite agree!" said Miss Babbidge stiffly.

For a few moments it seemed as though an intensely dramatic feminine quarrel was about to follow. And this, no doubt, would have led to a scene such as St. Frank's had never before witnessed.

But, by an effort, the Headmistress controlled herself.

"Ladies—ladies!" she protested. "This conduct on your part is most unseemly—most out of keeping with your positions in the school. I am astonished that you should come here with the apparently deliberate intention of picking a quarrel with me."

Miss Babbidge sat down.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she exclaimed, almost tearfully. "You entirely misunderstand, Miss Trumble. We have no intention of picking a quarrel—but we are so worried, and so anxious."

"Concerning those wretched boys of the Remove?"

"Yes."

"Why are you anxious?"

"Because it seems such a mad thing to do," declared Miss Babbidge. "Everything has been all right during the day. The boys have been back, and the routine of the school went on smoothly and calmly. And now all this dreadful trouble has started over again."

"It is terrible!" added Miss Rice.

Miss Trumble had little sympathy with them. She regarded them as weak, and she gazed upon the pair with a cold eye. In her own opinion, she had dealt with the problem in a masterly fashion.

But the trouble at St. Frank's was far from over.

These ladies, strictly speaking, were in-

truders in the old school. It so happened that Miss Trumble was Chairman of the Board of Governors—who, with the exception of Sir John Brent, were a parcel of old fogeys who allowed the Lady Chairman to domineer them. Indeed, but for the fact that Sir John Brent was out of the country just now, it is very doubtful if Miss Trumble would ever have been elected to the honorary position she held.

If any proof was needed of the folly of the governors in allowing such a state of affairs to exist, that proof was here—within the walls of St. Frank's College itself.

Some weeks earlier Miss Trumble had come to the school on a visit of inspection. She had stayed. For her interference had caused all the masters to resign.

Obstinate and arrogant, the Lady Chairman had decided that she would take control of the school. And she had forthwith appointed herself Headmistress, and had sent for a number of other women to take the place of the masters.

Since then chaos had reigned.

In a nutshell, the Remove had refused to stand it. The Remove had rebelled. And for a good many days past the juniors had barred-out from the school—taking up their positions in a trench system which they had made just behind Little Side—with an old barn as Headquarters.

And only the previous evening there had been an armistice—a truce of twenty-four hours. Miss Trumble had succeeded in persuading the juniors to come back. Her object had been quite clear.

For the governors had come down on a visit of inspection—and to hold an inquiry. They had found the school normal, owing to Miss Trumble's trickery. And she had scared them into leaving at once. There was something about Miss Trumble's personality that made the other governors tremble in her presence.

And, to the consternation of Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice, Miss Trumble had now allowed the boys to return to their trenches. It was simply asking for more trouble. And the governors may have been satisfied for the moment. But the boys would never give in.

It was hateful to admit the thing, but the rebel Remove had been victorious all along the line. Miss Trumble had been unable to shift them one inch. From the very start the boys had held out.

They were fighting for the return of the masters.

Concessions had been offered to them, but all were refused. They would never give in until the masters returned. And that was the position at the present moment.

Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice were more anxious than they could say.

"And so, ladies, you believe that this dreadful trouble will start over again?" exclaimed Miss Trumble. "Have you no

better opinion of me than that? Can you not credit me with a slight amount of common sense?"

The ladies were silent.

"Since you are here, I will not send you away unsatisfied," continued Miss Trumble, with a patronising air that made her listeners almost squirm. "I will explain to you why I have allowed the boys to return—and why I am quite certain that it was the better course."

"Personally, Miss Trumble, I cannot follow your reasoning," said Miss Babbidge. "All along, the Remove has been most obstinate. It has resisted all our efforts to reason with—"

"Yes, yes, I know!" interrupted the Headmistress. "The only success I have had—I may as well be frank—was to get the boys back here for a truce of twenty-four hours."

"And that truce ended less than an hour ago—for it is hardly seven o'clock even now," said Miss Babbidge. "Once the boys were here, surely it would have been better to keep them here?"

"At any cost?" asked Miss Trumble.

"Well, I—"

"The fact is, Miss Babbidge, you don't understand," interrupted the lady Head. "I distinctly offered these boys every concession that I could reasonably make. They refused them. Nipper, the spokesman—the young rascal who leads the entire insurrection—point blank refused all my concessions, and stated that the Remove would only come back to duty on the distinct and clear understanding that we were to leave the school."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Babbidge indignantly.

"The impudent young wretch!" declared Miss Rice.

"So, perhaps, you will appreciate the position," went on Miss Trumble. "Do you think for one moment that I was going to agree to such a thing? Could I possibly leave the school—and dismiss you and all the other ladies?"

"Most certainly not!" said Miss Babbidge.

"My only course, accordingly, was to let the boys go back to their trenches," said Miss Trumble. "It may have seemed rather curious to you that I made no mention of this recent armistice to the school governors. But I had an excellent reason. The boys are beaten."

"Beaten?"

"Quite!"

"But—but really!" protested Miss Rice. "Surely that seems quite the reverse of the actual truth? The boys are back in their trenches—they have taken extra food—they will be able to hold out against any attacks!"

"Quite so!" agreed Miss Babbidge. "And if the rebellion continues for another week there will be further scandal—further publicity."

"The rebellion will conclude—to-night!" said Miss Trumble calmly.

From outside, dim and yet penetrating, came a boom. The window rattled the merest trifle. But there was no mistaking the sound. A slight explosion had occurred somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood.

"Good gracious!" said Miss Babbidge. "What was that?"

Miss Trumble smiled.

"That," she replied, "was the signal for the Remove's defeat!"

The other ladies looked at her in astonishment.

"I am sure I do not understand!" said Miss Rice feebly.

"Then I will explain—it is, perhaps, just as well that you should know the absolute truth," said the Headmistress, rising to her feet and gazing out of the window in a gloating kind of way. "During the day, ladies, Farmer Holt and his men have been digging a deep water course. They also constructed a kind of dam. And the explosion you just heard was the detonation of a small charge of gunpowder."

"But this seems dreadful!" exclaimed Miss Babbidge.

"On the contrary, it is a wonderful piece of strategy," smiled Miss Trumble. "Water is now rushing into these trenches—the trenches which the boys have defended so stubbornly. And they are now being flooded out."

"Good gracious!"

"Wonderful!"

"Flooded out!" repeated Miss Trumble triumphantly. "Consequently, they will have no other course but to give in. Resistance will be impossible."

The other ladies were rather bewildered.

"Before the evening is out the boys will be coming here, begging to be admitted!" went on the Headmistress. "They will have no choice in the matter. And when they do come, I shall only consent to take them on my own terms. Never will I allow such children to dictate to me!"

Miss Babbidge was frowning in a puzzled kind of way.

"But, really, I understood that a truce implied that hostilities should cease?" she asked.

"That is so."

"And yet, Miss Trumble, Farmer Holt and his men prepared this—this dam during the day!" exclaimed Miss Babbidge. "Was that quite correct? Was it fair to the boys—"

"That is enough, Miss Babbidge!" snapped the Headmistress curtly. "Do you think this is a time for hair-splitting? I had to get the boys back at the school at all costs! And if you think for one moment that I broke faith with the boys you are wrong. I did not."

"I am quite sure of that, but it seemed—"

"Never mind what it seemed," interrupted Miss Trumble. "I guaranteed that the trenches should not be entered, and that

nothing should be touched. I kept my word. The building of this dam took place a long distance from the defence system which the boys have manufactured for themselves. They cannot possibly accuse me of breaking faith."

"No, no, of course not!" said Miss Babidge. "Oh, how thankful I shall be when it is all over! It is disgraceful the way in which these young wretches have behaved!"

"Have no fear, ladies," said Miss Trumble, her voice quivering with inward triumph. "The signal you heard a few minutes ago was the doom of hope for those rebels."

Without the slightest doubt it was the doom of hope for somebody!

CHAPTER II.

THE GATHERING STORM!



"TRICKED, dished, and diddled!" said Handforth grimly.

"Just when we thought everything was going in our favour, too!" growled McClure. "It's all very well

for Nipper to be hopeful, but as far as I can see, the position is pretty rotten."

"Absolutely hopeless!" agreed Church.

The juniors were standing close against Fort Resolute, not far behind Little Side. The Fort was the headquarters of the rebel Remove; and, strictly speaking, was a thatched barn.

Dozens of other juniors were collected about in the twilight. And all round lay the trench system which had recently been the pride of the cadets. That trench system was now a series of miniature canals.

Brown, filthy water surged through each trench—filling them, and overflowing in many places. Any attempt at defence would be futile. Fort Resolute was open to any attack.

"It's all very well to talk about everything being all right!" growled Armstrong sulkily. "Nipper says he's got Miss Trumble whacked; that's piffle! How can she be whacked?"

"And what action can we take now?"

"None!"

"We're finished for good; we've got to knuckle under!"

"It's awful!"

"How many more times have I got to tell you grouzers to bottle up?" I demanded impatiently. "Am I in command of this rebellion or not?"

"You're welcome to it!" said Hubbard. "There's not much fun in being a beaten general! He's got to stand a lot more than his giddy army!"

"That's a nice cheerful remark!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt. "All you fellows seem to think about is your own skin! You don't care what happens to Nipper! He's the chap who's led you on to victory all the way, and all you can do is to scoff at him!"

"Victory!" sneered Fullwood. "Look at it!"

He indicated the flooded trenches.

"I don't expect anything better from you, Fullwood!" I said quietly. "I can tell you at once that I wasn't prepared for such base treachery from a woman. I knew well enough that Miss Trumble was in a desperate fix, but I had no idea she would disregard the truce and get her paid men to work. Don't blame me for that piece of dirty business."

"My hat!" exclaimed De Valerie. "We're not asking you to give an explanation, Nipper. Don't take any notice of those cads."

"I have already told you that action is going to take place, and I meant it," I continued. "It may seem queer to you, but I'm absolutely convinced that Miss Trumble has shot her bolt."

"Ours, you mean!"

"No, I don't!" I retorted. "If only you chaps would think a little more deeply, instead of criticising at the slightest opportunity, we should be able to get along better."

"What's this action you're talking about?" demanded Handforth.

"I'll refer to that later," I replied. "I'm not going to state my plans to the whole crowd. In a few minutes there'll be a council meeting—a meeting between about ten of us."

"Shall I be included?" asked Handforth aggressively.

"Yes."

"Oh, well, that's all right then!" said Edward Oswald, beaming. "It's a jolly good idea! I've always said that you were the right chap in the right place, Nipper. Let's have this council meeting at once!"

"Certainly; but there's just another point first," I exclaimed. "I want to tell all you fellows, particularly the doubting Thomases, that we're certain of victory."

"I wish I could believe it!" said Armstrong.

"There's one thing to remember," I continued. "The school governors were here to-day, and I happen to know that they are still in the neighbourhood. They didn't return to London; they went to the Bannington Races."

"Gay old dogs!" grinned Pitt.

"And, after that, they're stopping for dinner at the Grapes Hotel," I said. "Somebody's got to take a letter to the governors—because they won't go to London by the night express, as they planned. They'll come back here. And when they arrive they'll have an eye-opener."

"I'd like to give them an eye-closer!" said Handforth, clenching his fists.

"You can't very well punch the face of an old school governor!" I smiled. "But we're simply wasting time, standing here, and talking about things in general. We've got to make our plans. And the sooner we get to work the better."

I picked out the fellows I wanted—all the most trustworthy juniors, including Pitt and Grey and Christine and Watson and Tregel-

lis-West and Handforth. And we adjourned forthwith to the barn.

The other juniors wanted to come in, too, but I barred them out.

"This is going to be a serious conference," I said quietly. "We don't want any noise. Now, all you fellows have got to be my officers. And you'll have duty to-night that will keep you very busy."

"Is it something big?" inquired Pitt.

"It's so big that you'll stare when I tell you!" I replied. "I've thought it over carefully, and I have come to the conclusion that it is the only possible way out of the whole trouble. But it'll need some planning. And I want all you fellows to fully realise that there must be no messing about—no excitement or rowdiness."

"But that's the idea, you chump!" demanded Handforth.

I spoke to them seriously for five solid minutes. They listened with growing expressions of astonishment, and by the time I had done they were all looking rather limp.

"And—and do you think it could be worked?" asked Pitt breathlessly.

"It's going to be worked!"

"But—but we should never do it!" protested Tommy Watson. "It's—it's too thick, you know. We shouldn't have the nerve! Of course, I'm game enough, but—"

"That's just it," I interrupted. "If you're game enough—and stick it—there can't be any question about our success. So far, we have been barring-out from the school. We are the ones who have been outside. This plan of mine simply reverses the whole thing."

"By George, it's great!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "Instead of us being barred out, it'll be Miss Trumble and her gang! Why, it's the greatest thing that ever happened!"

"Rather!"

"I was going to suggest practically the same thing a little while ago," went on Handy. "As a matter of fact, the idea came to me, and then it sort of—"

"Slipped away again?" interrupted Pitt blandly. "That's the worst of your ideas, old man. They come to you so swiftly that they vanish before you can catch them by the tail!"

"You—you dotty lunatic——"

"That's enough; don't start rowing now!" I interrupted. "Let me think! I've got to get out this note! And I want to word it carefully."

It did not take me long to write a short note on a page of my notebook. I enclosed it in an envelope and then looked round.

"Who's going to deliver this?" I inquired.

"I will!" said Willy Handforth.

He strolled forward from the deep shadows, calm and cool.

"You'd better trust that to me!" he said, holding out his hand. "I'll take it to Miss Trumble, and bring a reply back. Hand over!"

Handforth stared at his minor blankly.



"You'd better trust that to me!" said Willy, holding out his hand. "I'll take it to Miss Trumble, and bring a reply back. Hand over!"

Handforth stared at his minor blankly.

"Have you been here all the time?" he demanded darkly.

"You bet!" said Willy.

"And you've heard all our plans?" I put in.

"Well, I happen to have a pair of decent ears!" said Willy. "Considering that I

came in here to hear the plans I should be a prize sort of chump if I didn't know what was in the wind!"

I couldn't help laughing.

"Well I'm hanged if you don't take the biscuit!" I exclaimed. "In fact, you've got so much sauce, my lad, that you'll come a terrible cropper one of these days!"

"Don't waste time!" said Willy. "Let's have that letter!"

But Handforth grasped his shoulder.

"You—you young spy!" he said fiercely.

"Spies are pretty useful in war time!" said Willy. "I was a spy this afternoon, when Holt's men collared me. Don't mess about, Ted! I never knew such a chap for messing about! Take your mouldy hand off my shoulder! It feels like a sack of lead bullets!"

"Why, you—you——"

Handforth paused, unable to find the words he required. He always lost his vocabulary when he was dealing with his younger brother. There was something about Willy that caused Handy's vocal chords to fail him.

"I understand that you want this delivered straight into Miss Trumble's hands?" asked Willy, as he nimbly dodged away from his major. "Shall I wait for an answer?"

"Yes, and bring it back as soon as you can."

"Good!" said Willy. "I'm your man!" He calmly walked out of the barn, and Handforth looked after him, breathing very hard. And he regained his power of speech. He turned to me, red-faced and indignant.

"Are you trusting that note to that young rotter?" he demanded.

"Yes, of course."

"Then you're an idiot!" snapped Handy. "Willy's no good; he's a wash-out! All he can do is to cheek everybody?"

"That's one of the main reasons I've let him go," I replied. "He's got enough cheek to face Miss Trumble, and a dozen others like her! And I know I can rely upon him, too."

"Then you're absolutely off your rocker!" said Handforth, striding out with a snort. "I've a good mind to clear out. I'm disgusted! I never heard of such piffle!"

He marched outside, Church and McClure coming up to him. One glance at his face proved to them that all was not right. They tried to get away, but it was too late.

"What do you think of it?" demanded Handforth, pointing. "There goes my minor—buzzing off to Miss Trumble with a note! And Nipper calls himself a leader!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"The matter!" snapped Handforth. "Isn't he mad to give an important letter into the charge of a young fathead like Willy?"

Church and McClure had learned always to agree.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is," said Church. "Nipper certainly ought to have had more sense than to expect a cheeky Third-former to deliver a note properly."

Handforth glared.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Why, Willy's bound to make a mess of it, as you said——"

Biff!

"Yaroooh!" howled Church, sitting down violently.

"That'll teach you not to say things about my young brother!" said Handforth warmly. "If you think that I'm going to stand——"

"But—but you distinctly said that Nipper was mad for sending Willy on the errand!" breathed Church faintly. "I—I was only agreeing with you, old man——"

"We won't argue!" growled Handforth. "What I say about Willy, and what I allow others to say are two different things! But I'll jolly well guarantee that the young ass comes a hopeless mucker!"

This time Church and McClure said nothing. And even now they didn't feel safe. Handy was quite liable to turn on them for being sulky. He was a most difficult sort of fellow to get on with.

In the meantime, Willy was speeding across the meadows in the dusk. He reached Little Side, crossed over to the Triangle, and a few minutes later he was tapping boldly upon the door of Miss Trumble's study. He had marched straight into the passage without any announcement.

"Come in!" came the Headmistress' voice.

Willy entered, as cool as ice.

"Note from the C.O.," he said, indicating the letter by holding it up.

"Dear me!" said Miss Trumble, gazing at Willy in astonishment. "May I inquire what you want, my child?"

"If it's all the same to you, Miss Trumble, I'm not your child!" remarked Willy. "I don't want to be personal, but I'd much rather be an orphan! But, about this note. It's from Nipper."

Miss Trumble controlled herself.

"You—you have brought me a message from Nipper?" she asked.

"Haven't I just said so—twice?" asked Willy impatiently.

Miss Trumble was too agitated to take any notice of his "nerve." The very note she had been expecting—the message which would mean surrender, and humiliation for the entire Remove. She had expected it—but hardly as soon as all this.

"Give it to me, boy!" she commanded. "Give me that note at once!"

"All right—don't get excited, ma'am!" said Willy. "Here we are. I'm going to wait here for a reply. Call me when you're ready!"

He sat down on a handy chair, stuck his hands into his pockets, and lay back. He closed his eyes, and whistled a popular tune softly to himself. His discords were appalling.

But Miss Trumble did not even hear. She was reading the letter.

It was written in pencil, and was not particularly long. So she soon got to the end. This is what she read:

"Dear Madam,—As I write these words, I am aware that the trench sys-

tem which was the pride of my defence force is now a worthless series of ditches, filled to the brim with water. To defend such a position as this is no longer possible. The Remove will return to St. Frank's to-night.

"I have come to this decision because it would be futile to attempt further resistance. You have succeeded in driving us from our stronghold at last. Accordingly, every rebel will be back at St. Frank's before the evening is out.

"With regard to terms, it seems that only you are in the position to dictate. But I should like one favour—one concession. Alone I will come to the gymnasium at eight o'clock. I would like to talk to yourself, and all the other mistresses. Will you be there? Will you allow me to impart some information which is of the most urgent nature? This information will interest you intensely. The one word 'Yes' by bearer will be sufficient.

"NIPPER, Commander-in-Chief."

Miss Trumble looked up, her eyes glittering.

In every line she could read defeat—cold, stunning defeat. The boys were driven out—they were coming back again! And she gloated as she thought of my request. After all, why not? The boys were beaten—and she was curious to know what I had to tell her.

Miss Trumble turned to Willy.

"Go back to your young friends!" she said, almost pleasantly. "Do you hear me, child?"

"Oh, sorry!" said Willy, jumping up. "Ready?"

"Yes, young man, I am ready!" replied the Headmistress. "Go back to Nipper and tell him that I say 'Yes.' That is all!"

CHAPTER III.

MISS TRUMBLE'S LAST CHANCE!



EIGHT o'clock boomed out on the old clock tower at St. Frank's.

And as it did so I walked briskly into the Triangle and crossed over towards the gymnasium, which

was well lighted up. Inwardly, I was glowing with the thought of battle. Not a violent battle, perhaps—but one that would be just as interesting, nevertheless.

It would not be an exchange of blows—but a matching of wits. And I had an idea that Miss Trumble would be the loser. For mine were not the only wits that had been at work on the Remove side.

Miss Trumble had agreed to my request—she and the other mistresses were to be in the gymnasium at eight o'clock. This was splendid. Of course, if she had refused, I had an alternative plan ready. But this was the easier, and certainly the better.

And I had worded my little note with par-

ticular care. Every word was absolutely truthful. I had said that the boys were coming back to the school. They were! I had said that there would be no further resistance. There wouldn't.

When it came to a question of terms, I had said that it seemed that Miss Trumble was the only one in the position to dictate. It did seem so. But things are not always what they seem!

I arrived at the door of the gymnasium, and entered.

The one or two doubts that had slightly troubled me were now set aside. For inside the gymnasium were all the schoolmistresses of St. Frank's—Miss Trumble herself, Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice, and the undermistresses, Miss Teezer, Miss Nixon, and the others.

I walked straight in, and saluted. The mistresses regarded me coldly, but with looks of vindictive triumph. There was only one out of the whole lot who gave me a genuine smile—and this was Miss Nixon, the only nice looking one there.

"You are prompt, my boy!" said Miss Trumble. "You had better realise, at once, that I have done you a very great favour by coming here. But the matter is of great importance, and so I have made this concession. You have come, no doubt, to surrender yourself."

"And about time, too!" said Miss Babbidge tartly.

"Indeed, yes!" said Miss Rice.

"Ladies, you will kindly allow me to address this wretched boy!" said Miss Trumble severely. "I am glad, Nipper, that you have at last had the common sense to admit defeat. The rest of the boys are here?"

"They are coming, madam," I replied.

"When?"

"At once," I said coldly. "Within a few minutes they will all be in the Triangle, or near by."

"That is good!" said Miss Trumble. "You quite realise, of course, that you must submit to my rule? You quite realise that my orders must be obeyed in every particular."

I shook my head.

"Hardly that, Miss Trumble," I replied.

"Indeed!" she snapped. "Are you still ridiculous enough to suppose that you can discuss terms with me? There will be no terms! You have no alternative but to obey my every order!"

"I am sorry to disillusion you, Miss Trumble, but I am afraid it is necessary to do so," I said. "And I may as well inform you at once that I have not come here as a defeated foe—but, rather, as a conqueror!"

All the mistresses looked startled.

"The boy is mad!" exclaimed Miss Babbidge.

"Quite mad!" agreed Miss Rice.

"The boy is impertinent!" snapped Miss Trumble angrily. "What is the meaning of this? Why are you adopting such an arrogant, ridiculous tone? Did you not say in

your letter that I am the only one to dictate terms?"

"I said in my letter that it seems that you are," I replied. "As a matter of fact, you are not. I mentioned in my note, also, that I had some information of the most urgent nature."

"Was that a falsehood?"

"It was the truth," I replied politely.

"And what is this—this urgent information, pray?"

"I will come to that in a few moments, madam," I replied. "To begin with, I would like to put a few facts before you. I should be grateful if the other ladies will listen carefully. This is the first opportunity I have had of stating the facts before you all."

"What nonsense is this—"

"It is far from nonsense, Miss Trumble," I interrupted. "I should like to know what you think of yourself. I should like to know if you are satisfied that you have acted honourably?"

The Headmistress quivered with rage.

"How dare you?" she demanded.

"How dare I?" I repeated hotly. "I will ask you to consider the facts! You gave the Remove a distinct understanding—you signed a solemn document—that the armistice of to-day would be respected."

"It was respected!" shouted Miss Trumble shrilly.

"Pardon me, madam! It was not!" I re-

torted curtly. "The armistice was violated—but not by the Remove. I trusted you—in spite of my former experiences of your trickery, I thought you would at least respect a truce. But I was wrong."

"You—you wretched boy—"

"No, not wretched—indignant!" I exclaimed angrily. "Every fellow in the Remove is indignant—and with just cause! You have stated that the armistice was not violated. I declare that it was! The Remove was tricked in a cowardly way—it was like a stab in the back!"

"Be careful what you say!" broke in Miss Trumble, beside herself.

"I am choosing my words with the greatest possible care, madam," I replied. "I repeat that the Remove was tricked. You gave an undertaking that the trenches would not be interfered with. And yet, while this armistice was being held, you allowed Farmer Holt and his men to prepare a water-trough, which would mean the flooding of our defences."

"The men did not come near—"

"That, Miss Trumble, is a quibble, and you know it!" I interrupted hotly. "It makes no difference to the actual violation. Literally, you may have kept to the letter of your promise. But, in real truth, you have departed from it. Do you consider that to be an honourable act?"

Miss Trumble was hardly able to speak. There was scorn and contempt in my voice. All the other mistresses were looking startled and angry—all, with the exception of one.

Miss Nixon, the rather pretty mistress of the Third Form, was red with indignation.

"What Nipper has said is correct!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Miss Trumble, it wasn't fair. I didn't know the exact facts until now. It wasn't right to trick them in that way—"

"Silence, Miss Nixon!" screamed the Headmistress. "How dare you? How dare you agree with this impertinent young rascal? Have a care, my lady! It will not take me long to give you notice—"

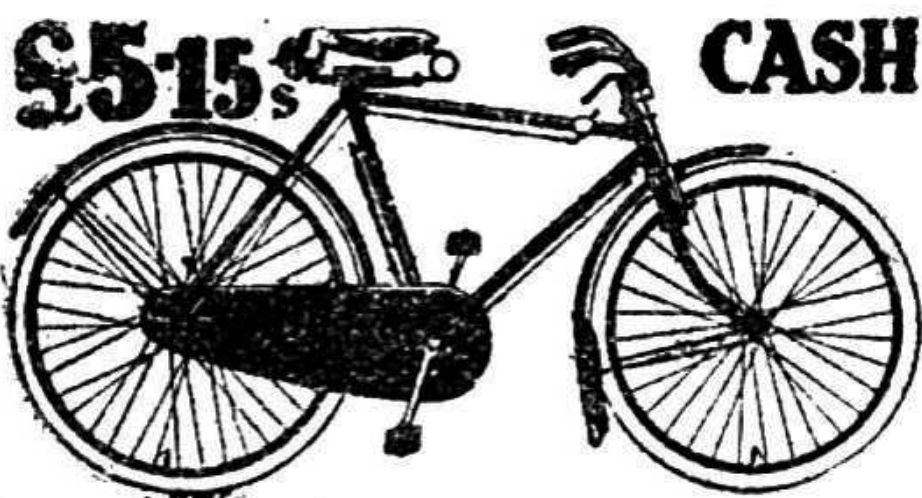
"That will be quite unnecessary, Miss Trumble," interrupted the girl. "I have already decided to tender my resignation. I cannot consent to remain at St. Frank's under your rule."

I bowed.

"Thank you, Miss Nixon," I said quietly. "It is a great pleasure to find that at least one lady is on the side of justice."

Miss Nixon gave me a look, and then turned, with her head in the air, and walked out of the gymnasium. But that look was one of warmth, and not of scorn. She, I knew, was in full sympathy with the Remove.

"This—this absurd scene has gone far enough!" exclaimed Miss Trumble harshly. "I am amazed that I have allowed it to proceed so far! Boy! You have behaved



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so badly that I shall not consent to your reinstatement!"

"I agree—I agree!" said Miss Babbidge warmly.

I smiled, quite confident.

"I hardly think, Miss Trumble, that you are in a position to decide the matter," I replied. "The information I have to impart is that the Remove has come to the firm decision that you must not remain in the school."

"I must not remain!" shouted the Head-mistress.

"Exactly!"

"Are you insane?" she screamed.

"Not at all," I replied. "I will give you one last chance."

"A—a last chance!" repeated Miss Trumble, nearly choking.

"Exactly!" I said. "You must agree to leave St. Frank's before noon to-morrow, and all the other ladies must accompany you. In addition, the masters must return—"

"Stop!" interrupted Miss Trumble fiercely. "When you first entered, I thought that you were going to act sensibly. Now I find that you have taken leave of your senses. You are quite, quite mad!"

"Not at all," I said easily. "I mean every word I say, Miss Trumble. This is your last chance to finish the whole affair quietly, and without unnecessary humiliation."

"Good gracious me!" she said faintly.

"You have brought the whole matter on yourself, and you must suffer the consequences if you persist," I went on. "Take my advice, Miss Trumble, and give me your word of honour that you will leave the school to-morrow, before noon. It is your only opportunity."

"I will not—I will not!" she shrieked. "Am I to be dictated to by a wretched child? This is terrible—scandalous! I have a good mind to have the police on you for—"

"Please do not talk wildly, Miss Trumble," I interrupted. "And, remember, that I am doing my very utmost to bring this whole unfortunate affair to a peaceful conclusion. If you were men instead of women, the Remove would act differently. But we wish to avoid, at all costs, any unseemly conduct. That is why I am giving you the chance to leave quietly, without any demonstration. Be sure of one thing—the Remove is determined!"

"You are mad!" repeated Miss Trumble harshly.

"The Remove has been goaded into this action," I continued. "To-day you could have brought the whole matter to a peaceful finish. Instead of that, you preferred to adopt further trickery. And the Remove has been goaded into firm, drastic action. What happens now, Miss Trumble, will be entirely your own fault. Will you agree, or not?"

Miss Trumble laughed harshly.

"You are a young fool!" she exclaimed. "You are nothing more or less than a preposterous child. Stand out of my way! I refuse to have another word with you!"

She swept out of the gymnasium, almost unable to trust herself to speak. And the other mistresses, who were looking quite startled, followed her outside into the gloomy Triangle.

I looked after them, and smiled.

CHAPTER IV.

BARRED OUT!



MISS TRUMBLE was in a state of confusion as she left the gym.

Her mind was in a whirl. All she wanted to do was to escape—to get indoors, so that she could think clearly, and decide upon some instant course of action. It was quite impossible to argue further.

The other mistresses went behind her, like so many sheep following a leader. Out in the Triangle all was quiet and dim. Certainly, a few fags were standing about, and one or two Fifth-Formers stood in groups.

But there was no noise—no demonstration. And from the windows there were other fellows looking out. It really seemed as though something special was in the wind. Miss Trumble could not understand—and she did not try to.

And then came the first shock.

As she tried to get in her own doorway, six forms loomed up from either side and formed a cordon right across the porch. It was impossible for anybody to pass.

The six forms were cadets—members of the Rebel Remove. And with them was an officer—Reggie Pitt. All stood at attention. Miss Trumble came to an abrupt halt.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" she exclaimed fiercely.

"I am sorry, madam—"

"Stand out of my way at once—at once!"

Pitt saluted.

"I regret, madam, that you cannot pass," he said coldly.

"What!" said Miss Trumble, clutching at her throat. "You—you dare to stop me—"

"Orders from my commanding officer, madam," said Pitt. "I have strict instructions to prevent all ladies from entering. Men, remain firm. Do not let these ladies pass!"

Miss Trumble thought that she was in a kind of nightmare.

"This—this is scandalous!" she screamed wildly. "You impertinent young scoundrels! Stand aside! Do you hear me? I will not be flouted in this disgraceful fashion. Let me pass!"

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madam," said Pitt respectfully. "Our orders are that all ladies must be kept out."

Miss Trumble hesitated for a moment, and then dashed forward. The cordon of cadets drew rigid, and formed an impassable line. The boys had no intention whatever of touching the ladies. But if the ladies attacked them—well, they would be compelled to defend themselves.

But an attack was very improbable.

Miss Trumble came to a halt, turned round, and gazed at Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice, who were close behind. They were both startled beyond measure. The under-mistresses were standing back, almost on the verge of tears.

"Do—do you hear this?" demanded Miss Trumble shrilly. "These boys refuse to let me pass into my own doorway!"

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"Scandalous!" shouted Miss Babbidge.

"It is criminal!" raved Miss Rice. "What shall we do? What shall we do? I suggest that the police be fetched—"

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Miss Rice?" demanded the Headmistress curtly. "Do we want this insane affair bandied about all over the neighbourhood? I have never been so insulted in my life! These boys shall pay dearly for their behaviour."

Miss Trumble swept round, and marched straight towards the Ancient House doorway. The other mistresses followed in a kind of trance. The thing was becoming a nightmare, indeed.

The Ancient House door stood open.

The lobby was deserted, and here, at all events, there was no attempt to bar the entrance. For a moment Miss Trumble had had an awful sort of fear that she would not be able to get indoors.

As she swept up towards the door five forms appeared from either side of the stone steps. An officer was there, too. He pointed his hand, and rapped out an order.

"Form a line across the steps!" he commanded. "Let no lady pass within this doorway. Attention!"

The ten cadets shuffled into position, forming a barrier. And Handforth, who was the officer, saluted at Miss Trumble as she rushed up. Handforth was quite enjoying himself.

"Is—is this possible?" shrieked the Headmistress.

"Looks like it, ma'am," said Handforth, saluting again. "Stand back, please! No women allowed inside!"

Miss Trumble stood there, breathing rapidly. Her face had gone deathly pale with rage, and a wild alarm was surging through her. This was more awful than anything that had happened hitherto.

"Is—is this some trick?" she demanded thickly.

"You ought to know, ma'am," replied Handforth. "You seem particularly good at tricks yourself. No, ma'am! Sorry—you can't get in this way. Orders from the commanding officer."

"I have never heard of such a thing!" screamed Miss Babbidge, rushing up. "Am I to be barred out of my own house?"

Handforth nodded.

"You've got it, ma'am—in a nutshell!" he replied. "Up till now the Remove has been barring out. But we thought it better to have a little change. All the mistresses are barred out from the school."

There was a tense silence.

The cadets, standing at attention, uttered no word. There was no attempt at a demonstration. The Triangle was quite peaceful, in fact. And this very absence of noise rendered the whole thing more terrible. It would have been comparatively easy to deal with a rowdy crowd.

But all this was so grim—so deliberate—so impressively prearranged. Miss Trumble

stood there, positively fighting to maintain her control. And at length she managed to find her voice.

"Boys—boys!" she exclaimed huskily. "What is this madness? Let me pass at once!"

"Sorry, ma'am; orders are orders!" said Handforth.

"Strike the boy down!" shouted Miss Babbidge. "Oh dear! Oh dear! Whatever can we do?"

Miss Trumble turned, frowning.

"You will not improve matters, Miss Babbidge, by becoming hysterical!" she said sharply. "You will please make an attempt to control yourself. If these young reprobates

imagine for a moment that I am to be kept out of my own school, they are very wrong! Come! We will not remain here to be further humiliated!"

"You'd better try somewhere else!" suggested Handforth. "Somehow, I've got an idea you won't have much luck!"

Miss Trumble turned away, not daring to make any reply. And she noticed that all the upper windows of the school were filled with peering faces. Fellows were looking out upon the scene.

There were fags, Fifth-Formers, Sixth-Formers, and even prefects. And nobody interfered—there was not the slightest attempt to butt in. The Remove was being allowed to have its own way.

And, for the mistresses, the humiliation was terrible.

They were out in the Triangle, and they were not allowed to return indoors! The women, in fact, were barred out! The rebel Remove had acted with drastic decisiveness.

It was my idea, and the fellows had entered into it with heart and soul. Their enthusiasm had known no bounds. It was the only way to defeat Miss Trumble, and to rid the school of the unwelcome mistresses. The Remove was making a firm stand—with right on their side.

And the other Forms knew well enough that it would be quite useless to attempt any interference. Not that they wanted to interfere. And the Fifth and the Sixth were heartily tired of Miss Trumble's domination. And so they looked upon this scene with secret joy. And they were safe, in any case. It wasn't their affair.

Miss Trumble tried to think of some way out as she strode across the Triangle. But it was useless. These rebels were so calm—



Willy entered as cool as ice. "Note from the C.O.," he said, indicating the letter by holding it up.

so coldly firm. There was something about the whole business that told Miss Trumble that the end was very near at hand.

She hurried across to the College House, with the other ladies still following behind, as though they were tied by strings.

A cordon of cadets moved across the College House doorway.

"Halt!" came a sharp command. "No admittance this way, madam!"

Miss Rice rushed up.

"This is my House!" she exclaimed, her voice rising to a shriek. "Let me pass! Let me pass! If you dare to stop me, I will scream the place down! Let me pass, you wicked, wicked boys!"

"Sorry; commander's orders!" said the officer curtly.

And Miss Rice stood there, shrieking wildly, her temper having completely got the better of her.

"This is absurd!" exclaimed Miss Trumble harshly. "I am amazed, ladies, that you should behave in such a way! These boys have played this rascally trick upon us, but you need not imagine that I am beaten!"

She hurried away round to the rear of the Ancient House. The others followed. The affair was almost becoming comical.

At the main domestic entrance was another cordon. Entry by that means was out of the question. Another of Miss Trumble's hopes had gone. But her eyes gleamed as she saw the windows filled with faces—the faces of the domestic staff.

"Come out here at once!" shouted Miss Trumble thickly. "Get these boys away from the doorway! Do you hear me?"

The faces disappeared, and did not return.

And Miss Trumble raved in vain. She

soon found that it was impossible to obtain any satisfaction on this side. A cold sort of despair was coming over her by now.

With a sick feeling at her heart, she began to understand that the Remove was really in grim earnest. There was not going to be any fooling here! She and the other mistresses were being kept out of the school! They were not wanted—they were barred!

Nothing could have been more significant.

And the very fact that the other boys took no action spoke volumes. For it proved that they were in sympathy with the rebels. Miss Trumble and her colleagues had no friends—they were beaten. It was too galling for words.

And just then an incident happened that fairly made Miss Trumble quiver with fury.

I was in the Triangle, looking on the scene with perfect calmness. I had planned all this in advance, and had pictured exactly what would happen. And I noticed that somebody was lurking in the shadows just against the old elm-tree. Approaching, I found that it was Miss Nixon.

I saluted.

"I deeply regret, Miss Nixon, that you should be mixed up in this unfortunate affair," I said quietly. "I have done my utmost to keep everything orderly. It was the only way. I was afraid that the fellows would lose control of themselves, and do something that might bring discredit on the school. In their excitement and anger—"

"Yes, I quite understand," said Miss Nixon. "And you are right, too; I have felt it for days. I think your conduct now is wonderful. There has been no rowdyism whatever."

"It was splendid of you to act as you did—"

"No, no!" said Miss Nixon quickly. "As soon as I heard the facts, it was the only course that I could adopt. And I shall leave the school feeling quite happy—at least, when I am able to get indoors to prepare my things."

I started.

"Why, were you prevented from entering?" I asked.

"The boys would not let me pass."

"Oh, I say, I'm awfully sorry!" I apologised. "But you mustn't blame the fellows—they didn't know. Please come this way, Miss Nixon."

She followed me, and I went straight over to the Ancient House. The cordon was still in position across the doorway.

"Let this lady pass!" I said smoothly.

Handforth stared.

"Look here, what's the idea?" he demanded. "You know jolly well that we've all agreed—"

"Let this lady pass!" I repeated. "It's all right, you fellows. Miss Nixon has resigned. When she heard of Miss Trumble's treachery, she tendered her resignation. Miss Nixon is true blue—one of us. She

wants to leave the school quietly and honourably.

Handforth saluted.

"Attention!" he thundered. "Mark time! Take three paces to your right! Good! That's the stuff!"

The doorway was clear, and Miss Nixon entered. The Headmistress came running up at the same moment. But before she could even get near, the cordon was drawn across once more.

"What is the meaning of this?" panted the Headmistress.

"Miss Nixon is no longer a mistress of this school," I replied. "She desires to leave at the earliest moment, and we do not stand in her way. If there is any other lady who wishes to go indoors to pack, that lady may pass."

"I wish to go indoors to pack!" retorted Miss Trumble.

"Do you give me your solemn word of honour, in the hearing all these fellows, that you intend to leave St. Frank's for good?" I asked quietly.

Miss Trumble shook both her clenched fists at me.

"No, no, no!" she screamed. "I will not leave St. Frank's! I am the Headmistress, and I will regain control!"

"Then you admit you've lost control?" put in Handforth.

"Never!" panted Miss Trumble! "I take no notice of this ridiculous demonstration. All you boys will suffer dearly for what you are doing! It is you who have done this—you!" she added, turning on me like a spit-fire. "What have you got to say?"

"Very little more than I said in the gym," I replied. "There is still time for you to leave the school with a remnant of dignity. I only require an assurance that the masters will be brought back—"

"I will never give it!" interrupted Miss Trumble shrilly.

"Then you will not be allowed to pass!" I said. "You have had your chance, Miss Trumble, and you have ignored it. This evening you had an opportunity of bringing this unfortunate affair to a quiet conclusion. But since you have chosen to remain firm—well, the Remove is firm, too. We will see who wins in the end!"

She turned round, and gazed up at the windows. There were crowds of Fifth-Formers and Sixth-Formers there, all looking down on the scene. They were, in fact, enjoying the show.

"At least, I still have command over you boys!" shouted Miss Trumble. "I order you to come down at once, and to take these young wretches away by sheer force! Fenton! Morrow! Obey my instructions!"

There was an ominous silence.

"Boys! Boys!" pleaded Miss Trumble. "Have you no thought of the school's fair name? Will you allow this hooliganism to continue?"

"Which hooliganism?" shouted Bryant of the Fifth.

"Everything is quiet, ma'am!" said somebody else.

"Come down at once——"

"Nothing doing!"

And the Fifth and the Sixth continued to look on with an air of indifference. It was assumed; but Miss Trumble didn't know it. Actually, the seniors were as excited as any of the others.

Never before, in the whole history of the school, had anything of this nature occurred. And Miss Trumble, feeling that the reins of control were slipping further and further out of her grasp, turned upon me once more. She was growing desperate.

"There has been enough of this!" she said, her voice trembling. "I will agree to your own terms! I will restore all the privileges that you demand! Let this matter finish——"

"Certainly—if you will agree to leave St. Frank's!" I said grimly.

"No, I will not—I will not!" she stormed, her anger bursting forth again. "Oh, you wretched, wretched boy! I will have all the school governors sent for! I will——"

"That is quite unnecessary, Miss Trumble," I broke in. "The school governors are on their way here even now. I am expecting them at any moment."

She gazed at me dazedly.

"They—they are coming?" she gasped faintly.

"Yes!"

Oh, but—but it is impossible!"

"Not at all," I replied. "I thought it as well that they should see everything with their own eyes, Miss Trumble. You still have time—it is your last and only chance! Give in now, and when the governors come they will find everything quiet!"

Miss Trumble screamed incoherently.

"It is a trick—a trick!" she exclaimed, at length. "No, I will not consent!"

She was obstinate to the last. But, in her heart, she must have known that this was indeed to be her last day at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER V.

A SURPRISE FOR THE GOVERNORS!



THE GRAPES HOTEL, in Bannington, was a very high-class establishment.

It was select, and it was expensive. And it was rather famous for its food. Sir

James Henson and Lord Walberry and the other two governors of St. Frank's considered that they had dined exceedingly well.

All four gentlemen were in the best of spirits.

Dinner was just over, and the four governors were discussing the racing of the afternoon, and partaking of wine and cigars. There was no hurry. The night express for London did not leave for another hour.

"Yes, I'm glad we came down gentlemen," said Sir James, as he sipped his wine. "We have had a most enjoyable day, and a rather profitable one, eh?"

"Not so bad—not so bad!" said Mr. Stevens. "But the most satisfactory part of the whole affair is connected with the school. I am delighted that we found everything quite normal."

"A wonderful relief—yes, indeed!" said Lord Walberry, nodding.

"It is truly amazing how these rumours grow and become exaggerated," said Sir James. "We are in a position to know, gentlemen, having been at the school this morning. And I think we are all quite satisfied that Miss Trumble has the boys under perfect control?"

"Oh, quite satisfied!" declared General Milton.

"And yet, as an example of these rumours, I was chatting with a man on the racecourse," continued Sir James. "Naturally, he did not know who I was, and I saw no reason to enlighten him."

"What did he say, Sir James?" inquired Lord Walberry.

Sir James Henson chuckled.

"Well, as a matter of fact, the fellow's conversation was rather amusing," he replied. "I was solemnly informed that affairs were in a very bad way at the school. I was told that the boys—particularly the juniors—were opposed to all authority, and had actually set up a kind of camp, near the school property."

"Absurd—absurd!" grunted his lordship.

"Oh, quite absurd," agreed Sir James. "It appears, also, that these boys have been fighting desperately. They have made a war against Miss Trumble, and will not give in. Furthermore, the trouble at the school is becoming worse and worse as the hours go on. And to-night—to-night, mark you—some extra big things have been planned. For example, the boys are in trenches, and these trenches are to be flooded."

The other governors laughed uproariously.

"Extraordinary!" commented Mr. Stevens. "Yes, quite extraordinary! How such stories get into circulation is always a big puzzle to me. At the same time, gentlemen, it is rather a pity. It won't do St. Frank's any good."

Sir James frowned.

"No. I shall take steps to have these stories contradicted," he said. "They are nothing more nor less than idle gossip, without a single shred of truth. We happen to know, because we have seen with our own eyes."

"Precisely!" agreed Lord Walberry. "That is why I am feeling perfectly satisfied. I consider Miss Trumble to be an ideal principal for the school. Yes, quite ideal!"

His lordship frowned as a tap sounded on the door.

"What is it—what is it?" he said testily, as a waiter appeared.

"There is a young gentleman outside who requests an immediate interview, my lord," said the waiter. "He says that he has come from St. Frank's College, and the matter is of the utmost importance."

"A young gentleman?" said Sir James. "Quite a small young gentleman, sir," replied the waiter. "I imagine him to be one of the junior pupils."

The governors looked at one another. "Ridiculous!" said Sir James. "No junior schoolboy would have the audacity to come here—Good gracious!"

He broke off, and stared at the doorway. "It's all right—I thought I'd better come in straight away," announced Willy Handforth, as he strolled into the room. "No time to mess about with these waiters! Action's required—not formalities!"

"Upon my soul!" said Lord Walberry, adjusting his glasses.

He and the other governors proceeded to gaze at Willy as though he were some extraordinary specimen that was being exhibited by a zoologist. Willy stood this for about fifteen seconds, and then he thought it time to protest.

He slowly turned round, and gave the governors a view of his back.

"Seen me enough?" he asked calmly. "If you particularly want it—I'll stand on my head—just for a change! Have I got a tear somewhere, or what?"

"Upon my soul!" repeated Lord Walberry.

"What are you doing here, boy?" demanded Sir James frowning. "Who on earth told you to come? Waiter take this young gentleman away at once! I do not like to be interrupted—"

"Sorry, but it's got to be done!" said Willy, who was secretly contemptuous of the four old gentlemen. "It so happens that you're needed at St. Frank's. I've come along to shove some pep into you!"

"Good heavens!" said Sir James, nearly dropping his cigar. "What an extraordinary boy! What a most remarkable child!"

Willy snorted.

"Oh, go on—get it thoroughly out of your system!" he invited. "There's nothing extraordinary about me—I can tell you that! But I happen to be in a hurry, and if you start messing me about, I shall get fed up!"

"You—you impertinent young rascal!" said Sir James severely. "Waiter, you can go! This child interests me!"

"That's one step, anyway," said Willy, with relief.

The waiter went, and Sir James turned to the junior, and gazed at him in the same searching manner as before. Sir James knew that Willy was a St. Frank's junior, and he was quite interested. There was something about Willy that made him want to know more.

There was no question that Willy was impertinent. He was. But he managed to be impertinent in such an innocent way that his impudence was robbed of its sting.

"Now, young man, what is the trouble?" asked Sir James briskly.

Willy brightened up.

"That's the stuff, sir!" he said. "Getting down to business, eh? I've brought this note from the Commander-in-Chief!"

With a flourish, Willy jerked a letter out of his pocket. He intended the movement to be dramatic. Unfortunately, he jerked out a grubby handkerchief at the same time, to say nothing of a biscuit, a piece of cocoanut toffee, and a small jew's harp.

"Good gracious!" said Sir James. "What on earth—"

"Sorry!" said Willy. "Just a slip!" He rescued his jew's harp from Sir James's lap, where it had fallen, and picked the chunk of cocoanut toffee from Sir James's trousers. And Sir James, gazing at the operations in a kind of horror, could scarcely find any words.

"It's all right, sir—only just a bit sticky!" said Willy. "No need to worry about that. Take my advice, and open the letter, sir. You won't be looking quite so cheerful when you've read what's inside!"

"Indeed!" grunted Sir James. "Am I to receive a shock, then?"

"A shock!" repeated Willy. "You'll probably have a fit!"

He thoughtfully rubbed the piece of toffee on his jacket, and then slipped it into his mouth. And the governors listened in horror as they heard Willy's teeth crunching like a steam crushing mill.

"This—this boy is impossible!" said Lord Walberry gruffly. "The whole thing is ridiculous—most ridiculous! Send him away, Sir James! With regard to that note, I cannot believe—"

"Good heavens!" muttered Sir James blankly.

He had torn the letter open, and was reading the contents. He forgot all about Willy, and he looked up at the other governors with a startled expression in his eyes.

"I cannot believe it—it is too terrible!" he ejaculated. "Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Read this note!"

He passed it over the table, and the other governors took the note in turn. By the time they had all read it they were considerably flustered. And Willy was looking on with a keen sense of delight. He was very pleased to find that the old fellows were being gingered up.

It was hardly surprising that the note

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(Continued on page 15)

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THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER

An absorbing story of how MERVYN HUME, the master newspaper sleuth investigates the alleged bullying at Margrave College, and how Nunky "The Wire" office boy plays a leading role.



by S. ROSSITER SHEPHERD.

"SCHOOLBOY'S ATTEMPTED SUICIDE.
"MARGRAVE SCHOLAR HURLS HIMSELF
INTO RIVER.
"TERRIBLE STATE OF FEAR THROUGH
BULLIES.

"**P**ERCY MORLAND, a member of the Fourth Form at Margrave College, attempted suicide yesterday afternoon by jumping into the River Swale to escape the persecutions of a number of his schoolfellows. Moreland was eventually rescued by a farmer who took him home to his house. He was reported to be extremely agitated and in a highly nervous state. He complains that he had been unmercifully bullied for some time past, and that he could stand it no longer. This is not the first case of its kind that has occurred at public schools recently, and the 'Daily Wire' understands that an enquiry into the affair is to be made."

When the above story appeared on the front page of the "Daily Wire" it created no small sensation, and the public anxiously awaited the result of the promised enquiry.

It was not long in coming.

Dr. Spinx, the Headmaster of Margrave, vehemently and indignantly denied that bullying was practised by the boys under

his charge. It was a scandalous suggestion, he said, and was without the slightest foundation.

The lad in question, the unfortunate Percy Moreland, was a timid, almost hysterical youth, who could not be regarded as normal. It was true that a little ordinary schoolboy ragging went on at Margrave, but no more than at any other big public school. And this ragging, which was after all only a sign of healthy animal spirits, the hysterical Moreland had taken too seriously, with the deplorable results already known.

That was the sum and substance of Dr. Spinx's report. And by the greater section of both the Press and the public it was accepted. Certainly, it sounded convincing enough, but there was one man it did not convince, and that was Mervyn Hume, the celebrated crime investigator of the "Daily Wire."

Hume found several flaws in the story, and the fact that Moreland's alleged hysterical nature was not vouched for by any medical man was one of the principal.

"This is a matter that requires looking into," he told Harvey Frost, the news editor of the "Daily Wire." "For obvious reasons I cannot make any investigations myself. We must find out exactly what

goes on at Margrave, and if vicious bullying does occur as I firmly believe it does, what steps are taken by the authorities to stop it."

But how to obtain reliable information of this character looked like being a problem. Until Hume was struck with the brilliant idea of sending William Whitehead, the red-headed office boy of the "Wire," otherwise known as Nunky, to the school as a pupil.

And so it was that in due course, Nunky found himself installed at Margrave College as a member of the Lower Fourth.

He had been instructed to keep the fact that he was a representative of the "Wire" a secret, but to keep his eyes well open for any bullying that might occur, and to report it to Hume in London.

The first week of Nunky's stay at Margrave College passed uneventfully enough. The affair of Percy Moreland had not yet blown over, the juniors still seeming somewhat scared at the result of their handiwork.

But, that the members of the Lower Fourth were a pretty tough lot was apparent enough. Then, too, there seemed to be an air of mystery about them which Nunky could not quite account for.

It was about the twelfth day after his arrival before the shock of the narrowly averted tragedy of Percy Moreland finally wore off, and things assumed a more normal state.

Nunky was passing down the corridor leading by the Junior Common-room, when his attention was attracted by loud shouts and a curious series of thuds.

"Wow! Stop it!" came a voice. "Let me alone, you fellows. Wow! Leave me alone!"

The sound of blows and shouts continued.

Pushing his way through a crowd of Second Formers standing in the doorway, Nunky beheld a number of youths, all armed with long worsted stockings, with hard tennis balls stuffed in the end, laming into a diminutive, freckled-faced boy for all they were worth.

Bill, thud, biff!

Hard and heavy blows rained unmercifully on the lad's head and shoulders, drawing loud cries of pain from him, which only seemed to egg his tormentors on to greater efforts.

The red-headed office boy of the "Wire" regarded the spectacle for just a fraction of a moment, his blood coursing violently through his veins and his temper rising rapidly.

"'Ere, leave the kid alone!" he shouted, advancing further into the room. "'Ow many of yer on to one?"

The small boy's tormentors suddenly ceased their assault and stared at the interrupter in open-mouthed astonishment. That anyone should have the temerity to interfere seemed to render them almost speechless—almost, but not quite.

"Who the——"

"What the dickens——"

"Leave the kid alone!" reiterated Nunky, his face a flaming red. "'Ow many more of yer?"

"Yes, 'ow many?" mimicked a burly youth named "Walnut" Watkins, whom Nunky recognised as the leader.

"Did you hear him, you chaps?"

"He wants to know—'ow many!"

Watkins' little pleasantry was greeted with a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where did you spring from, young carrots, Bermondsey or Battersea?"

"You buzz off, Kid," said Nunky, turning to Waterbury, Watkin and Co.'s small victim, who was standing quietly sobbing in a corner. "Never mind these 'ere cads."

"Walnut" Watkins, supported by his pals, Bonsey and Cappel, advanced on the boy from the "Wire" with an ugly expression on his heavy features.

"Take your coat off," he said. "I'm going to teach you manners, you gutter-snipe."

But before Nunky could accept this invitation, the form bully swung his fist up and caught him squarely on the point of the jaw.

It was a cowardly blow and Nunky, who was not prepared for it, emitted a grunt of pain. But he soon recovered himself, and the next moment, with a growl of anger, rushed at the bully, hitting out right and left.

Nunky was no boxer, but he was certainly a fighter. And he was fighting now as he had never fought before. Blow after blow, delivered with lightning-like rapidity, landed on all parts of the bully's face and chest, almost blinding him, and preventing him from retaliating to any marked degree.

And within a very few moments the battle was over. With a hefty upper-cut Nunky caught Watkins dead on the point, and he fell to the floor with a crash.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of the fact that Watkins' bullying pals were concentrating all their attention on the fight, Waterbury, their unfortunate victim, had slipped unobserved out of the Common-room to his study, where he had locked himself in.

"If any more of you want a good 'iding, you know where to come for it," observed Nunky, replacing his jacket. "Let me see yer 'itting that kid any more, that's all."

And with that he turned and left the Common-room, Bonsey, Cappel and Co., Watkins' precious pals, too astounded by the downfall of their leader to prevent him.

But if Nunky had succeeded in putting a spoke in the wheel of the form bully, he had not heard the last of it, as he was very soon to find out.

When Nunky left the Junior Common-room, he made his way straight to his study, which happened to be next door to that shared by Waterbury with two other juniors.

Having removed some of the marks of

battle, the boy from the "Wire" stepped out into the passage and tapped at the study next door. It was opened by Waterbury, still pale and trembling; but when he saw Nunky he smiled and commenced to pour out his thanks. Nunky blushed awkwardly, and, cutting him short, invited him into his own apartment for a chat.

It seemed, from what he said, he had incurred the wrath of "Walnut" Watkins and Co. on account of refusing to clean the bully's boots, a task which he was not supposed to perform, and which had only been ordered for the edification of the other juniors.

In short, Waterbury gave Watkins no very pleasant character; and it transpired among other things, that he and his cronies had been principally responsible for Moreland's attempt to drown himself.

All of which Nunky listened to, making mental notes of what he was going to report to Hume.

"But what about the Head?" asked Nunky, at the end of this recital. "Why don't you complain to him? I suppose he knows bullying goes on!"

"He may do," replied Waterbury. "But if he does he makes no attempt to stop it. In fact, he seems half nervous of Watkins and Bonsey. They do almost what they like, and he never says a word. It has always struck me as jolly curious, and I feel there's something queer behind it."

Nunky thought over what he had been told, and resolved to make a full report of the activities of "Walnut" Watkins and Co. to Mervyn Hume the following evening. From Waterbury he had learned that a lot of bullying went on in secret, and he therefore decided to keep his eyes sharply skinned.

But the next day, soon after tea in Hall, when Nunky returned to his study, he found a black envelope on his table, his name written upon it in white ink.

He ripped it open with a pen-knife, and as he did so two small scarlet feathers dropped out on to the table.

Considerably puzzled, Nunky examined them, and then turned to the sombre-hued envelope from which he extracted a sheet of black paper, and there, in the centre of it, in flaming white characters, he read the following amazing inscription.

"Beware! You are marked! Heed the warning of the Black Klan Klick. The hand of vengeance is drawing nigh! You are marked! Beware!"

In each corner of the sheet of black note-paper, also done in white ink, appeared a wicked-looking cat-o'-nine-tails.

Nunky stared at the curious missive in amazement.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he gasped at length. "What does it all mean?"

Before he could find answer to his question, there came a timid knock at his door, and in response to his invitation to enter, Waterbury, the junior from the next study, peered with a scared expression round the

portal. His face was ashen white, and it was patent that he was in a terrible state of funk. In his hand he held a black envelope, similar to the one lying on Nunky's table.

"Oh, so you've got one, too, have you, kid?" observed Nunky cheerfully. "Let's have a look at it." He took the proffered sheet and saw that it was identical in every respect with his own.

"Well, wot's the idea?" he asked at length.

"I noticed some of the blokes were rather quiet at tea, but at first I thought it was because of that 'iding I gave to Bully Watkins. I suppose this was wot they 'ad up their sleeves then."

Waterbury nodded nervously.

"Yes, Watkins is the Chief of the Society," he said. "There are a lot of them in it, including fellows from other forms—and they are nearly all a bullying lot. The decent chaps won't have anything to do with it."

Nunky nodded grimly.

"Well, don't let this put the wind up you," he said. "I'll stand by you, so that's all right. Let them try any of their fancy stunts on me, that's all. I'll give them Black Klan Klick."

Nunky picked up his cap, but he noticed that despite the cheerful nature of his remarks, Waterbury did not seem much assured. Indeed, for that matter, he was almost trembling with terror, and was already frightened nearly out of his wits.

"Come on, kid," said Nunky. "Let's get down to the tuck shop. I'll push the boat out."

The two juniors left the study, and made their way down the Fourth Form passage to the Close. Nunky noted, not without some apprehension, that few of the Fourth Formers were to be seen, although it was well past tea-time, and they must have left the Hall, where the meal was served, long since.

Fortunately, Waterbury did not know what was passing through Nunk's mind. If he had, it would only have served to increase his alarm.

The two juniors made their way across the Close to the little school tuck-shop, where Nunky ordered ginger-pop and cream buns.

But even here, with the exception of a few fags making purchases for seniors, no members of the lower school were to be seen.

Dusk was beginning to fall by the time Nunky and Waterbury left the shop, and together they started back to the school-house. But they had not proceeded beyond the rear of the chapel, which butted on the back of the Close, when a number of figures, grotesquely robed and masked, ghost-like in their silence, rose swiftly from the long grass in which they had been hiding.

A dozen powerful hands gripped the two juniors, and before they could cry out or recover from their surprise, a thick canvas sack was dropped over the head of each, muffling their shouts of protest and obstructing their vision.

Many hands swung them none too gently from the ground, and to a weird, mournful chant they were carried along to they knew not where, struggling and kicking.

Eventually their captors ceased their chant and came to a halt.

But their hold on the prisoners was not relaxed.

There was a sharp rap of metal upon metal, a moment's pause, and the two prisoners found themselves being carried down a set of stone steps on which the footfalls of their captors rang hollowly.

Another halt, and then a deep voice challenged.

"Who seeketh entry to the Temple of the Innermost Sanctuary?"

"Brethren of the Klick."

"Give the pass-word, Brethren of the Klick."

"The Eye of Vengeance."

"The Eye of Vengeance never sleeps!" came the low, booming reply. "Enter, Brethren of the Klick."

Followed the grating sound of rusty hinges, and a door swung slowly open. The two prisoners felt stout thongs being passed round their legs and arms which were drawn taut, rendering them quite powerless. Eventually, the coarse, thick sacks which enveloped their heads were drawn off, and Nunky and Waterbury blinked, endeavouring to adjust their sight to the flickering light of the apartment in which they found themselves.

The whole affair, from the time they were captured at the rear of the school chapel in the Close, to the moment their heads had been free from the sacks, had occupied but a few minutes. And now, their vision no longer impeded, the terror stricken and trembling Waterbury, and the slightly apprehensive boy from the "Wire," took stock of their surroundings with feelings of considerable misgiving.

They found themselves in a low, vaulted stone chamber, supported by pillars blackened with age.

A curious fungus-like growth clung to the damp and earthy smelling walls, the whole illuminated by the flickering yellow light of a number of blazing torches, held aloft at intervals of a few yards by sinister looking figures attired in white robes, on which appeared strange devices worked in black.

In front of the two bound juniors, was a curious altar-like construction draped in black, on which stood two small iron braziers, one each end, from which ghostly blue flames rose and fell.

And before the altar, wearing a heavy robe of the same deep black, ornamented in front by a solitary eye embroidered in white, stood a figure with arm upraised pointing in the prisoners' direction.

The deep boom of a gong resounded hollowly through the vaulted chamber.

The hooded figure in black lowered his arm and advanced to the middle of the hall; the remainder of the strange assembly dropped silently to their knees, bowed low, and in

deep tones, chanted some weird sounding words, the meaning of which was quite unknown to the two prisoners.

The Chief, for so the figure in black appeared to be, then returned slowly to the altar, and faced the whole assembly once again.

"The Eye of Vengeance of the Black Klan Klick hath seen," he said in sepulchral tones.

"Behold, the Lodge is open!"

"Long live the Black Klan Klick!" chanted the hooded figures in unison.

"Long live the Black Klan Klick!" responded the chief.

"'Ere, chuck all this tomfoolery, and untie my 'ands," shouted Nunky at length. "You won't frighten me with your Black Klick business!"

Brave words they were, but, truth to tell, the boy from the "Wire" was feeling far from easy.

The sinister, robed figures, their eyes gleaming snake-like through the eyeholes of their hoods, the flaming torches, the sombre hued altar and its ghostly flickering braziers, the dank, mysterious atmosphere of the vaulted cavern, as well as the helplessness of his own position was well calculated to strike terror to the heart of any boy.

A dead silence followed his outburst.

"Let me go, let me go!" screamed the terror-stricken Waterbury, finding his voice at last. "Let me go, I tell you!"

"'Ere 'old up, kid. Don't let these cowards frighten you," said Nunky in a manner which was meant to be comforting.

Waterbury made no reply, but commenced to sob gently.

"Prisoners of the Black Klan Klick," began the black hooded chief, when the outburst had abated somewhat. "The charges against you will now be read out."

"You, William Whitehead"—the extended arm of the chief pointed straight at Nunky—"are charged with the assault and battery with no provocation whatever of one of your form fellows at Margrave College.

"You are also charged with interfering with the just punishment meted out to another member of the Form for refusing to obey the orders of his superiors. You are charged with being a usurper and a low-bred cad. Have you anything to say before sentence is pronounced on you by the Black Klan Klick?"

"Let me free and I'll punch your blessed nose," retorted Nunky with spirit.

"Silence!" boomed the figures in white.

"And you," went on the chief, turning to Waterbury, who was almost unconscious with fright. "You are charged with aiding and abetting your fellow prisoner. What have you to say?"

Waterbury groaned inaudibly, and leaned heavily against Nunky.

"Very well," said the chief, "since you have nothing to say the sentence will be passed."

Another silence followed this announcement.

The chief then moved forward and received from the hands of one of the white-robed

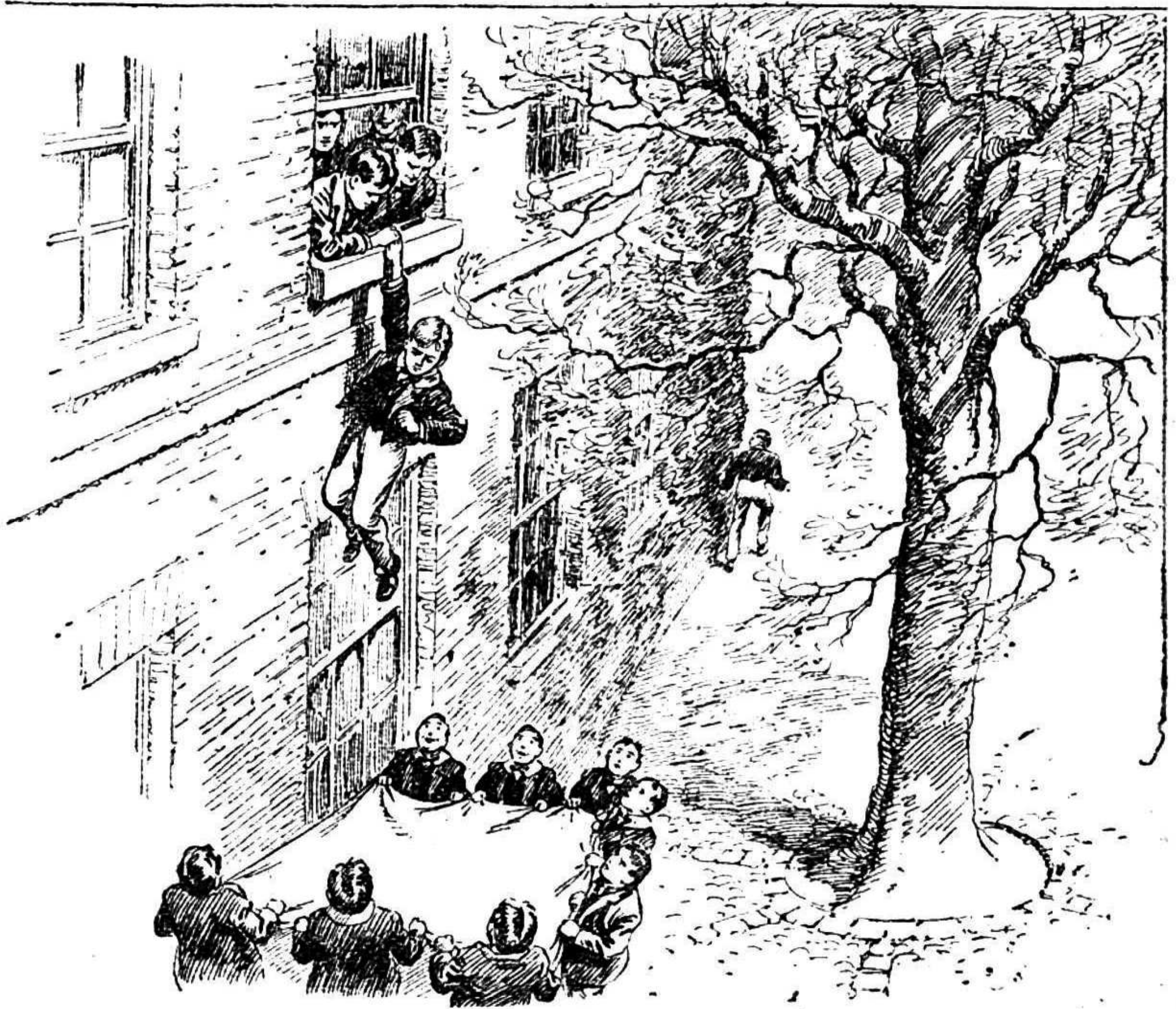
figures a small square of white cambric which he carefully placed upon his head, and turning to the prisoners he raised one arm dramatically.

"Prisoners of the Black Klan Klick," he said in a deep, booming voice. "You have been found guilty of the charges preferred against you. Therefore, the sentence of the Brotherhood is that, one after another you shall be hung—hung by the arm from a window of the Fourth Form dormitory until

and the white hooded figures waved their flaming torches from side to side three times in succession; the Great Wizard bowed, and the next moment the short canvas sacks were thrust over the victims' heads again.

The lodge of the Black Klan Klick had closed.

The prisoners felt the grasp of many hands upon them, and heard the opening of the door at the far end of the cavern. Some moments later they felt the keen night air



Nunky was then pushed clear of the stone sill, and, suspended by one arm, swung gently backwards and forwards over the ground some twelve feet below.

you drop into the blanket which the chosen of the Klick shall hold below. You shall then be tossed for ten minutes by the school clock. I have spoken."

Another silence, and then, from the surrounding hooded figures, in a low, sing-song voice, came:

"The Great Wizard has spoken! Long live the Black Klan Klick!"

Sounded the harsh booming of the gong,

about them. They were carried along in silence for some minutes until the party came to a halt and they were placed on the ground. One hand of each prisoner was then loosened, and thus they were left.

Came the soft pad, pad of retreating foot-falls, and then Nunky turned to Waterbury and asked for a knife. After a short interval the boy from the "Wire" succeeded in cutting the cord binding his other wrist,

and then he loosened his companion. Drawing the sacks from their heads they stared about them.

They found themselves in the middle of the Close, the watery moon shining down on them from behind the school clock tower.

"Come on, kid," said Nunky. "They won't interfere with us again to-night, so we might as well get back. By the way, where was that place they took us to?"

"T-the c-crypt beneath the ruined abbey," stuttered Waterbury. "It's near the back of the school chapel. Don't ask me a-anything more, I—I feel rather queer."

This was apparent enough, for Waterbury was trembling and quaking from the ordeal he had endured. Nunky decided to get him back to the School House and to bed with all possible speed. And even before the arrival of the prefect to see lights out both juniors were fast asleep.

Nunky was not one to blubber or to sneak, but he felt he was doing his duty by the other boys in reporting the affair to the Head.

And before classes next morning he interviewed Dr. Spinx, and gave him a detailed account of the previous night's proceedings, stressing the nature of the punishment which was to come.

To all of which the Head listened impatiently. He then informed the junior that his story was absurd, that he could not believe a word he said, and that if he came to him with any more such yarns he would be severely thrashed for his pains.

Controlling his anger with difficulty, and considerably puzzled at the attitude the Head had taken, Nunky repaired to the Form-room.

The day passed uneventfully.

But after tea that evening, Nunky and Waterbury went to the dormitory in order to change before going out. They had not been there long, however, before there came a rush of feet from the passage without, and the fraction of a second later a crowd of juniors streamed in at the door.

"Look out," roared Nunky. "They're after us. Get to the corner, kid, quickly!"

But before they could move Nunky and his companion found themselves surrounded by a yelling mob of Fourth Formers and a sprinkling of members of the Fifth.

The boy from the "Wire" hit out right and left, sending one junior after another spinning to the floor. But the odds were against him, and before long he was borne to the ground, at least half a dozen of his opponents all endeavouring to find a seat on some part of his anatomy.

The juniors, who seemed to be following out some pre-arranged plan, wasted no time in words. A sharp order was rapped out by "Walnut" Watkins, and one of the long dormitory windows was flung up to its fullest extent. Towards this Nunky was taken, struggling for all he was worth.

The sentence of the mysterious hooded organisation was about to be carried out.

Between them, several juniors hoisted him to the window, and finally succeeded in gripping him by the wrist. He was then pushed clear of the stone sill, and, suspended by one arm, swung gently backwards and forwards over the ground some twelve feet below. With almost fiendish delight, Watkins and Bonsey, from the window above, then proceeded to jerk him up and down like a marionette.

Nunky shouted and threatened, but of no avail.

"Buck up with the blanket, below!" roared Cappel from a window further along. "The prisoner is waiting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him socks!"

Came the rush of many feet on the gravel below, and, glancing down, Nunky saw some dozen juniors standing in a circle beneath him, a double-sized blanket stretched between them, waiting for him to drop. Nunky gritted his teeth. Being hung out of a window by one arm is no joke at any time, and already the strain on the muscles of his arm was beginning to make the newspaper boy feel rather faint.

"Let me go, you cads!" he shouted. "Pull me up again. I'll smash the lot of you! Yow! You're breaking my arm, you rotters! Yerooooogh!"

His cries went unheeded.

Little Waterbury, surrounded by a crowd of juniors, watched the proceedings from another window with a dull, sick feeling. In a very short time it would be his own turn. Quite sincerely he prayed that the floor might open beneath him and swallow him up. But he knew such a thing was not likely to happen, and that no mercy might be expected from his tormentors.

Every window of the dorm. was packed with watching juniors by now, while many more were in the Close below. At each end of the dormitory wing was posted a flag to raise the alarm should anyone of any consequence approach.

There were many in the crowd who strongly disapproved of the whole proceedings. But, according to their code, they could not inform the authorities without committing the heinous crime of sneaking, and on the other hand, they were not in sufficient numbers to interfere.

"Ready, above!" came from the juniors holding the blanket. "Let him drop!"

"On the ball!"

Watkins and Bonsey commenced to swing Nunky slowly from side to side, and then, with a great shout, suddenly released his wrist. Nunky dropped exactly into the centre of the outstretched blanket, and then bounced up into the air again like an indiarubber ball.

"Ow! Yerooooogh!"

"And again!"

Again and again the boy from the "Wire" was sent spinning into the air until he felt faint and dizzy. His usually ruddy complexion turned a dirty pale, and

only by biting deeply into his lip did he refrain from begging for mercy. Whatever happened he did not intend to let the Form bullies have the satisfaction of hearing him squeal.

Eventually, amid many yells, Waterbury was suspended from the window in the same manner that the red-haired office-boy had been. But not for long did he remain there. With a quick upward jerk of his foot he caught the hand which imprisoned the wrist of his captive arm full on the side. Its owner, who happened to be "Walnut" Watkins, emitted a howl of pain and released his hold.

Waterbury fell into the blanket almost on top of Nunky. But the blanket was not meant to stand the heavy strain being imposed upon it, and with a loud crack it split from end to end, discharging the unfortunate victims of the Fourth Form bullies on the gravel beneath.

A yell of consternation went up from those who had been holding the blanket, but the next moment it suddenly died away. For on the ground, just where he had fallen, Waterbury lay deathly pale and perfectly still.

A gasp of fear went up from the assembly, and those above, quick to realise what had happened, slammed down the dormitory windows and vanished. Their companions in the Close, like the cowards they were, did likewise. If any tragedy had resulted from their brutal horseplay they did not intend to be identified with it if they could possibly help it.

And barely five minutes after Waterbury's fall, the diminutive junior and the boy from the "Wire" found themselves alone.

A rapid examination of the unconscious lad revealed to Nunky that he had only fainted. A few moments later he had recovered sufficiently to be able to walk away.

But neither Nunky nor Waterbury slept in the dorm. that night. With the aid of a couple of easy-chairs and some cushions the juniors made up a bed in the former's study, and there they stayed till rising-bell.

The following day Nunky wrote a full description of all that had happened, and despatched it to the private chambers of Mervyn Hume at Lincoln's Inn. Hume read the report with a grim frown. He was able to read between the lines, and he knew, not from what Nunky had said, but what he had left unsaid, that the boy had had a far rougher time than he wanted Hume to know.

That evening Hume spent some time putting Nunky's report into shape, and then he took it along to the "Daily Wire" office. By running a special "Letters to the Editor" feature on bullying in public schools, that journal had more than maintained their readers' interest in the subject, and it only needed such a story as the one

received from Nunky to set them going again.

The next day the story duly appeared, and read as follows:

"HORSEPLAY AND BULLYING AT WELL KNOWN PUBLIC SCHOOL.

"Scholar Dropped from Dormitory Window.

"Boy Tossed in Blanket Until Unconscious.

"The 'Daily Wire' understands from an authoritative source that bullying of a very vicious nature is still going on at a certain well-known college. Small boys are attacked and brutally treated by the elder and bigger lads to such an extent that they are afraid to sleep in the proper quarters.

"Two particularly bad cases of ill-treatment have just been brought to the notice of the 'Wire.' One of the victims complains that when he informed his Headmaster of the treatment he had received, and was expecting to receive again in the future, he was threatened with a severe punishment for telling what were described as absurd yarns.

"The Headmaster in question made no attempt to investigate the truth of the lad's story, as the 'Wire' considers he should have done, and he may therefore be regarded as having failed in his duty.

"On behalf of its readers the 'Daily Wire' has decided to go more fully into the alleged bullying at our public schools.

"Unless different treatment is received by the two juniors mentioned in connection with the above story, we will publish further startling disclosures, together with the name of the school, next week."

And certainly the story caused a sensation. Many people would have liked to have known the name of the school referred to; some could guess; but there was one man, Dr. Spinx, the Head of Margrave College, who knew all too well.

A copy of that day's "Wire" was brought to him by one of the assistant masters while he was at breakfast, and it did not serve to improve his digestion. He stared at the paper, his face red with anger, then suddenly rose, and stalked to his study.

He had no doubts as to who the victim of the bullying described in the story was, and he sent a prefect post haste to find Nunky and bring him to him, whether he had finished his breakfast or not. And when, later, Nunky entered Dr. Spinx's study, it was with the greatest difficulty that he repressed a grin.

The Head of Margrave was pacing restlessly to and fro on the study carpet, gnawing nervously at his upper lip. He looked up as Nunky entered, and scowled.

"What do you know about this, boy?" he demanded, when the prefect who had brought the junior had retired, at the same time thrusting a copy of the "Wire" to-

wards the junior. "Did you write this absurd story?"

Nunky took the paper and glanced at a column which had been marked out in blue in order that he should not waste time by reading the wrong one. But there was little chance of the glaring black type in which the heading was set passing unnoticed.

"Seems very serious, sir," ventured Nunky, returning the paper to the Head.

"Serious, boy!" stormed Dr. Spink, his face purple with anger. "Serious! I should think it is. I pity the person responsible for the newspapers getting hold of this! By Jove, I pity him!"

"I didn't write it, sir," observed Nunky quite truthfully. He omitted to say, however, that it was only because his grammar would not have passed a sub-editor that the story he did write had been kept back in favour of Hume's more polished version.

"No, I can see that," said the Head grimly. "But you put those confounded newspaper people up to it. I know all about it, and now you'll have to suffer for it! A more disgraceful thing I have never heard of in all my life! Where is your regard for the good name of the school? Where is your sense of honour? Where is——"

"I admit I told them all about it," broke in Nunky. "But I told you about it first, sir, and you took no notice. You said you didn't believe me. Then me and young Waterbury 'ad a rough time afterwards which might have been prevented. It's young Waterbury 'oo troubles me, sir; he can't stand it. That kid'll do something

rash one of these days, sir, if the bullies in this school don't kill him before then——"

"Silence, boy!" snapped the Head angrily. "A nice thing you have done. But if you think I am going to punish you so that you can make another fuss, you are wrong—very wrong indeed."

And the eyes of the Head gleamed in a manner which plainly foreboded evil for the unfortunate boy from the "Wire."

"Oh, no!" he went on, rubbing his hands together with a diabolical sort of satisfaction. "I shall not punish you; indeed, no. I have a far better plan than that. I will make you feel ashamed of the dishonourable thing you have done. I will inform your schoolfellows of all the circumstances of the case, and leave you to them—leave you to them!"

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of, sir," protested Nunky. "The boot's rather on the other——"

"Silence, I say, boy! What will happen to you then I will not be responsible for. Yes, that is the best thing, to leave your punishment to your schoolfellows. And I pity you—I pity you! My boy, you have not been bullied so far—you have not been ill-treated. But when your schoolfellows learn of what you have done—I pity you!"

Nunky remained silent.

"You may go now," said Dr. Spinx at length, and Nunky did.

So far he had done his job by his paper well. But it was not yet over. He had already suffered personally in the execution of his duty, and it looked certain that he was to suffer yet again.

THE END.

Further Revelations of the Alleged Bullying at Margrave College will appear Next Week as a sequel to the above story, and will be entitled:

The Headmaster's Secret!

Introduces the well-known Detective Journalist, MERVYN HUME and NUNKY, the plucky office boy of the "Daily Wire," who, as a new boy at the school again plays a leading part.



THE BLACK MASK

Grand New Serial
Detective Story of
Nelson Lee and
Nipper.

FIRST CHAPTERS.

Olive Brent, the beautiful young ward of Mr. Matheson, has disappeared under singular circumstances from her guardian's London residence, after returning from a visit to the theatre. Her French maid, who was the only person in the house when Olive left so mysteriously, is found drugged. At the time, Miss Brent was wearing a valuable necklace, which had been lent her by Mr. Matheson. There is evidence that the missing girl had departed in a hurry and had taken the necklace with her.

A letter is received from the missing girl saying all is well, but Lee suspects that it has been written under compulsion. Investigations lead to suspicions against a man named Carey and two accomplices. These men are known to frequent an opium den in Chinatown. Here Nipper gets on to the track of Carey, but is himself trapped by the scoundrel.

(Now read on.)

HOW NIPPER IS RESCUED.

TWO days after he had fallen into the clutches of Jarvis Carey and the French waiter, at a rather late hour of the night, Nelson Lee's young assistant, Nipper, rose with difficulty on his cramped limbs, drew a deep breath of relief, and stood peering into the black darkness that surrounded him.

On the night when he was captured, on coming to his senses, he had found himself lying on a heap of dirty straw in a damp cellar, tightly gagged and bound. Jarvis Carey and Alphonse Lefroy were standing by him, the latter holding a lighted lantern; and, with muttered threats, and an intimation that they knew who the lad was, they had mounted a flight of steps, and disappeared through a door at the top of them.

Since then Nipper had been a helpless prisoner. He had suffered from hunger, for only twice had his captors given him food and drink. He had slept for long intervals—whether by day or night he could not tell—and while he was awake rats had scuttled over the straw on which he lay, their eyes shining pink in the gloom.

Occasionally he had heard the two men talking in low tones overheard, and once there had floated dimly to his ears a cry of distress, which had been instantly silenced—doubtless a cry from the lips of Olive Brent. He had felt sorry for the girl, and he had had a bad time of it himself. He had not been apprehensive, however. He did not believe that his life was in danger. He had been more concerned for Nelson Lee. He was sure that his master must be terribly worried about him, and he was afraid that it would be most difficult, if not impossible, for Lee to trace and rescue him.

Thus the two days had dragged monotonously by. Meanwhile, Nipper had frequently rubbed his fettered wrists on the hard floor, and to-night, to his joy, a strand of the frayed cords had yielded to the strain and snapped. That accomplished, he had untied his ankles and torn the bandage from his mouth.

And now he was free, but with limitations. He was still a prisoner. There was no small window by which he might escape, and the door above him was bolted on the outer side, as he knew.

"I might force it open," he reflected, "if I could be sure that those scoundrels were out. I wonder if they are?"

He groped in the darkness like a blind man, this way and that. He bumped into a wall, recoiled from it, and moved to another wall. Finally, he touched the handrail which skirted one side of the staircase.

He crept very softly up the stairs, and at the top he paused and stood listening by the door. For two or three minutes he listened and heard nothing. His captors were not at home, he was sure. What an opportunity for him! He could rescue Olive Brent, escape with her, and perhaps he could find the stolen jewels and carry them off. It was a thrilling thought.

But as he was about to make the attempt he heard approaching footsteps. They drew nearer and nearer. A door was unlocked, opened and shut. The steps were in the room beyond the lad now—the steps of two persons. They passed on, and another door was opened. Jarvis Carey and Alphonse Lefroy had returned.

"Confound the luck!" muttered Nipper, keenly disappointed.

To his ears came low and angry voices—an oath and a savage threat—a rattling, creaking noise. Then there was silence—flushed silence, that lasted for several minutes. The men had quarrelled over something, it was evident.

Were they gone? Had they left the building together, at the rear of it? Nipper supposed they had, yet he could not be certain. He waited a little longer, and of a sudden he heard a violent wrench, and the banging of a door, followed by loud and confused sounds.

There were shouts—the heavy trampling of feet—and a clamour of voices. Men—a number of them—had forced their way into the apartments occupied by the crook and his accomplice. One voice was familiar to the lad, and at once the truth flashed to his mind.

"It's a police raid!" he thought. "And Nelson Lee is with the police!"

With that he attacked the cellar door, hurling himself against it with all his strength. He beat upon it with his fists, hammered and kicked at the panels.

"Guv'nor!" he called again and again. "Guv'nor, let me out!"

Somebody shot the bolt and the door flew abruptly open. Nipper pitched forward, recovered his balance, and staggered into a lighted room which seemed to be filled with policemen in plain clothes. At a glance he saw a double bed, chairs, and a table and couch. Then Nelson Lee was shaking his hand and gazing into his eyes.

"My dear boy!" he said in a tone of emotion. "Safe and sound, eh? I was worried about you!"

"I knew you would be," Nipper replied. "I didn't think you would be able to find me. How did you do it?"

"By dogged patience and perseverance," said Lee. "On the morning after the raid at Wang Foo's café in Chinatown I read of the affair in the paper, and in view of the fact that you were missing, it suggested a very plausible deduction.

"I was led to think that you had stumbled on Jarvis Carey in the café on the previous night; that you had shadowed him from there, and that he had suspected, or discovered, that he was being shadowed, and had set a trap for you. During yesterday and to-day I have been in the East End in disguise, going here and there, and making widespread inquiries?

"This evening I learned that a young man, who had a tiny mole under his left eye, and in other respects answered to the description of Jarvis Carey, was living on the ground-floor of a tenement-house in Canton Street, Limehouse. And I also learned that another man, whom I guessed to be the missing French waiter, was living with him.

"I hurried to Scotland Yard. I returned

with Inspector Lennard and a number of his men, and we raided the premises."

"You didn't find Carey and Lefroy, then?"

"We did not, worse luck. They were both gone."

"But Miss Olive Brent was here, guv'nor, surely she was."

"No, she was gone, too. Something went wrong with our plans. When we arrived in the vicinity we sent two of our men round to a side street on the left, and two more to another street on the right, to watch both ends of an alley which runs between the two streets, and passes the rear of this dwelling.

"We waited for a little while to give the men time to get to their posts, and then we broke in here and found nobody. Carey and Lefroy had warning of their danger from some source or other I think; and they made their escape before the trap was set, taking Miss Brent with them. No alarm has been raised outside, Nipper, so I am afraid there is no hope of—"

Nelson Lee broke off. Followed by the lad, he entered the adjoining room, which was a small bed-chamber. Several of the police were here and Inspector Lennard was standing by the bed. At the farther end of the room was an open window that gave access to the alley which Lee had mentioned.

"You were right about the girl, Lee," declared the inspector. "She has been a prisoner here. I have found a couple of hairpins."

"And here is something else," said Nelson Lee, as he picked up from the floor a circlet of strong cord that was tied in a knot. "This was around Miss Brent's wrists. It appears to be severely strained as if the girl had—"

"She must have escaped, guv'nor!" Nipper interrupted. "I'm sure of it. That would account for what I heard."

He briefly told his story, relating how he had been caught, and how he had spent the past two days. He spoke of hearing the quarrel between Carey and the French waiter, as he had supposed it to be, and he had just finished when a plain-clothes constable climbed through the window from the alley. Three more came after him.

"We haven't seen anybody, sir, though we kept a close watch," the foremost one said to Inspector Lennard. "We knew it would be no use waiting any longer."

"No, you were too late," the inspector replied. "The rascals got away before you went round to the alley."

Nelson Lee nodded. "What happened is as clear as daylight," he said. "To-night, after long and patient efforts, Miss Brent succeeded in slipping her hands through her fetters. She escaped by the window, and when Carey and Lefroy came home and discovered that she was gone they were frightened.

"They could not have known how long an interval had elapsed since the girl's escape, and as they were afraid she would fetch the police here they took to flight themselves, also through the window."

"That's the explanation," Inspector Len-

nard assented. "It is not likely that the girl has fallen into the clutches of those scoundrels again. She has gone to Mr. Matheson's residence in Coburg Square, I suppose."

"I daresay she has. I hope so."

"And as for the stolen jewels, of course the men took them with them."

"They wouldn't have left them behind, would they?"

"But Miss Brent may have carried them off, Lee."

"No, Lennard, that is most improbable. The girl's captors would not have let her see where they had concealed the jewels."

There could be no doubt at all, it was to be presumed, that the jewels were not on the premises. It was Nelson Lee's habit, however, to leave nothing to chance. Having thoroughly searched the small bed-chamber, he went into the other room, and searched that also.

Then, observing that some papers had been burnt in the grate, he looked beneath it. And there he found a scrap of paper, scorched at the edges, on which was written in ink part of a name that began with a capital letter—"Shadra—" Lee's eyes sparkled. He handed the bit of paper to Inspector Lennard, who glanced at it, and knit his brows.

"This stands for Shadrach," he said.

"Exactly," Nelson Lee replied.

"There is a pawnbroker of the name of Saul Shadrach in Sadler Street, Islington," the inspector continued.

"I know him," said Lee, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He is more than a pawnbroker. He is a fence, an associate of crooks, and a clever forger."

"You think Jarvis Carey and the French waiter have had dealings with the man, I dare say, and that he wrote to them."

"Yes, Lennard, I do think that. I am strongly inclined to believe that the men fled to Saul Shadrach's with the stolen jewels, and that he advanced money on them."

"I shouldn't wonder if you were right, Lee. It is a plausible theory."

"It is, Lennard. The clue of the burnt letter is most important. You can leave it to me. I'll call on Shadrach to-morrow, and I'll force the truth from the old rascal's lips. I won't go to-night. There is no hurry. It won't occur to Carey and Lefroy that they might not have entirely destroyed the letter. And at present I am thinking more of Miss Brent than of the jewels. There is no telling what state of mind the girl was in when she escaped. Her sufferings may possibly have affected her memory."

Lee paused for a moment.

"We will be off now, Nipper and I," he resumed. "We won't wait for you, Len-

nard. Good-night! Come along, my boy!" he added.

A VISIT TO SAUL SHADRACH.

IT was after eleven o'clock, drawing near to midnight, when Nelson Lee, and his young assistant arrived at their chambers in the Gray's Inn Road. Though Nipper had been lying in the damp cellar for forty-eight hours, he was little or none the worse for it. But he was tired and hungry, and in need of sleep. He had something to eat, and then he settled himself comfortably on the big couch in the consulting-room.

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee had departed, and was hastening in a cab to Coburg Square, where he got Mr. Douglas Matheson out of bed, and learned from him that Olive Brent had not come home. It was a shock to Lee. He related to Mr. Matheson all that had occurred, and, leaving him in distress, he drove back to the Gray's Inn Road.

He roused Nipper, and when he had told him of his fruitless errand, he stepped to the telephone. He rang up the police-stations at Limehouse and Poplar, and several others as well, and was informed from each of them that nothing had been seen or heard of a young woman answering to the description of Mr. Douglas Matheson's ward.

Where was Olive Brent? Why had she not gone home? Was she wandering about the streets, suffering from loss of memory? Or had she fallen again into the clutches of Jarvis Carey and Alphonse Lefroy?

Nelson Lee was inclined to reject the latter theory. He had suspected from the first why the girl had been kept a prisoner by the two men, and he felt that now, since she had escaped from them, they could not have any motive for wanting to get her into their power again.

"We can only hope for the best, Nipper," he said. "There may be good news to-morrow. Come, let us go to bed."

It was very late when they retired, and they did not rise until nine o'clock the next morning. Having telephoned to Coburg Square, and heard from Mr. Matheson that Olive Brent was still missing, Lee rang up his garage, and gave orders that his car should be sent round.

He and Nipper ate a hasty breakfast, and set off. Having driven first to the East End, they called at a number of police-stations, and made inquiries. They learned nothing of the missing girl, and with anxious hearts they drove to Sadler Street, Islington, and stepped from the car in front of the pawnbroking establishment of Mr. Saul Shadrach.

They walked straight through the shop, paying no heed to an assistant who questioned them, and entered a small office at

the rear of it. A little, elderly man, with a greyish beard and moustache, was seated here at a desk. At sight of the detective his sallow complexion turned pale, but he quickly recovered his self-possession.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lee!" he said, in a cheerful tone. "It's quite a long while since I have seen either of you. And what can I have the pleasure of doing for you, Mr. Lee?"

"I want some information from you," Nelson Lee replied, as he closed the door. "Don't try to deceive me, for I know more than you may think I do. You have had dealings recently with Jarvis Carey, the crook, and a French waiter of the name of Alphonse Lefroy."

Saul Shadrach shook his head.

"You are wrong, sir," he quietly declared. "I have not had any dealings with them. I am slightly acquainted with Carey. Of the other man I have no knowledge."

"You know them both. You wrote a letter to Jarvis Carey a day or so ago, to his address in Canton Street, Limehouse."

"I—I wrote a letter to Carey?"

"Yes, you did. Carey burnt the letter, but not all of it. I found under the grate a charred scrap of paper, on which your signature was written."

"I had forgotten, sir. I remember now that I did write a letter to Jarvis Carey. It was about a private matter."

"A private matter?" Nelson Lee repeated, with a scornful laugh. "You lying old rascal! The letter was about a lot of valuable jewels, which were stolen from the residence of a Mr. Matheson, in Coburg Square, Kensington. Carey and Lefroy brought those jewels to you, and you advanced a sum of money on them."

"Jewels!" cried Saul Shadrach, staring blankly. "Stolen jewels! No, no, I haven't seen them! I haven't heard of them! It is true! I swear it is! I don't know what you are talking about, on my solemn word of honour. You've got to believe me, Mr. Lee. You must! You can search anywhere, everywhere, but you won't find what you are after—not any jewels which you can identify as being stolen property. I am not lying, and you ought to know it!"

Nelson Lee did know it. Keen, infallible judge of character that he was, he was convinced beyond a doubt that the old Jew had told him the truth. He was silent for a moment, and then a shrewd suspicion flashed to his mind.

"We will drop the question of jewels," he said sharply. "But what of the passports you forged for Jarvis Carey and Alphonse Lefroy? I know all about that. Don't deny your guilt, or it will be the worse for you."

Saul Shadrach drew a startled breath.

"I won't deny it, sir," he said, in a tremulous voice. "Carey told me several

days ago that he and his friend Lefroy wanted to go abroad, and—and he persuaded me to prepare passports for the two of them."

"Have they had them yet?" Lee asked.

"Yes; they came for them late last night."

"To what part of the Continent were they going?"

"To Paris, Mr. Lee."

"And when do they intend to leave London?"

"They are on the way now, sir. They were to have left Victoria by the boat-train at ten o'clock this morning."

"Ten o'clock this morning, Shadrach! By what route? Don't lie to me."

"By Newhaven and Dieppe, Mr. Lee."

"Give me a description of them. What did they look like? How are they disguised? How are they dressed?"

"They are both clean-shaven, sir. And both are wearing grey overcoats and soft-hats. I have told you the truth, Mr. Lee, and I beg that you won't be hard on me. Don't get me into trouble over this business. I have helped you before. I have often given you information, and I will always be willing to—"

Nelson Lee cut him short.

"You don't deserve any mercy, you cunning rogue," he said. "I'll have to report the matter to the police, and I dare say you will hear from them."

A moment later Saul Shadrach was alone. Nelson Lee and Nipper hurried through the shop, out to the street, and sprang into the car. Lee glanced at his watch as he drove off.

"It is just as I supposed," he said. "Carey and Lefroy kept Clive Brent in their power because they dared not release her until they were ready to go abroad. It is twelve o'clock now, and they are at Newhaven, perhaps on board the boat. They have the jewels with them. We will get an aeroplane at Croydon, cross to Dieppe, and arrest the scoundrels when they land."

"I thought that was what you meant to do," Nipper replied. "We shall have plenty of time, for the boat won't arrive at Dieppe until between three and four between three and four o'clock this afternoon."

"Quite right, my boy."

They had no great distance to go, but they were frequently delayed by traffic, and it took them nearly an hour to get to Croydon. They hired a small machine at the aerodrome, without any trouble, and were soon on their way. Before two o'clock they were crossing the Channel, and presently Nelson Lee pointed ahead.

"There is the Dieppe boat, Nipper," he said. "That small white object belching smoke. In five or six minutes we shall have left it behind us."

(To be continued.)

(Continued from page 14)

startled Sir James Henson and his companions. For it ran in this way:

"Gentlemen,—When you were at St. Frank's to-day, you were led to believe by Miss Trumble that the school was in a normal condition of order. As a matter of fact, the Remove was in a state of rebellion, and only returned to duty because Miss Trumble had called a twenty-four hour truce.

"This truce was arranged by Miss Trumble for the especial purpose of fooling you. Much as I regret to say it, she succeeded. And Miss Trumble also violated the truce in an attempt to bring the rebellion to an end by means of trickery. She has failed, and the whole Remove Form is now firmly determined that Miss Trumble and the other mistresses shall go. If you desire to find out the true state of affairs, come to St. Frank's at once. Your eyes will be widely opened. You will learn that the rumours and reports have not been exaggerated. Indeed, only half the truth has been allowed to leak out.

"It is impossible for me to go into full details. But I urge you to come. The matter is vital.

"But whether you come or not, Miss Trumble will be compelled to leave St. Frank's to-night. We won't have her here. —NIPPER, Commander-in-Chief of the Rebel Forces."

"Obviously, the whole thing is a hoax!" declared Lord Walberry. "What preposterous nonsense! The boys will not have Miss Trumble!"

"Absurd!" said Mr. Stevens.

"Certainly, a hoax!" agreed General Milton.

Willy put his hands on the table, and leaned forward.

"Don't you believe it!" he said impressively. "A hoax, eh? Just you come back to St. Frank's! The Remove is doing things with a vengeance! And you can take it from me that Miss Trumble has got the order of the boot!"

"The which?" gasped Sir James.

"The bird!" said Willy.

"Upon my soul!" said Sir James. "What extraordinary terms—"

"In other words, sir, Miss Trumble and all the other ladies will be kicked out neck and crop!" said Willy. "We're fed up with 'em—and for days past the Remove has been in a state of rebellion. You may not think so, but I'm one of the rebels, too! Take my advice, and buzz back. You'll have your eyes skinned pretty thoroughly if you do!"

And Willy nodded knowingly, and stood back from the table, having left his trademark in no uncertain manner. The snowy white cloth now showed two grimy smudges.

The governors were more startled than they could say. And there was something

about Willy that convinced them that he was speaking the truth. That letter, too! When I wrote it, I intended that the governors should be startled. I wanted them to come back—it was most important for them to be present.

Sir James Henson rose to his feet.

"I think, gentlemen, that it is our clear duty to return to the school at once," he said quietly.

"Not at all—not at all!" said Lord Walberry. "Ignore the whole thing! I can assure you, Sir James, that it is a stupid attempt at a practical joke. As for this young rascal—"

"One moment, please, Walberry," said Sir James. "Now, young man. I want to talk to you seriously," he added, turning to Willy. "Answer me with perfect truth. Is this a hoax or not?"

"No, sir, it's the truth!" said Willy earnestly.

"The boys of the Remove are actually in open rebellion?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And it is true that they have been in rebellion for several days?"

"True!" repeated Willy. "Why, we've had the most unholy ructions during the week. Miss Trumble's had hired men to chuck us out of the trenches—and she's failed. It was only spoof to-day, when you came to the school. She planned it all, especially to diddle you!"

Sir James looked grim. He knew that Willy was speaking the truth, although he half suspected that the junior was exaggerating. But there was no doubt that an immediate investigation was necessary.

"Gentlemen, we must go!" he declared. "If these boys are actually in open revolt, the position will be serious in the extreme. I will order the car at once, and we must hurry off."

"Good!" said Willy. "That's the idea, sir!"

With considerable tact, Willy slipped out of the apartment at once. Then he hovered about outside, on the hotel steps. Less than ten minutes later the four governors came down and made for the big car which had been brought round by telephone. Willy hurried forward and opened the door.

"I'm going back to St. Frank's, Sir," he remarked. "Can I have a lift?"

"Certainly, my boy. Jump in the front," said Sir James. "You are an impertinent young rascal, but I'm hanged if I don't like you!"

Willy grinned, and a minute later the party was off. Handforth minor was feeling highly elated. As far as he could see, the end of the whole business was in sight. The return of the governors at such a time as this would undoubtedly mean that Miss Trumble's regime would come to an abrupt end.

Her attempt to draw a veil over the governors' eyes had succeeded, but now that veil was being removed. And Willy was beginning to assure himself that the old fel-

lows weren't so dusty after all. It would all depend upon how they acted now.

St. Frank's was reached after a quick run—and even now the hour was still quite early—being only just about half-past eight. The car turned into the Triangle and came to a standstill.

From all the windows there was a buzz of excited talk.

Sir James Henson had taken command of the situation—the others were still bewildered. Sir James was the only one who now revealed a show of initiative and firmness.

He got out from the car, and stood there, looking round. Then he compressed his lips and his brow grew very stern.

For, at the first glance, he could see that things were very far from being normal. Every window within sight—both in the College House and Ancient House—was packed with faces. The whole school appeared to be looking out into the Triangle. Yet, remarkably enough, there was no rowdyism. The whole place was quiet; at least, quiet as far as the boys were concerned.

But Miss Trumble was quite the reverse of silent.

She didn't even know that the governors had arrived. Her back was towards the gates, and she was talking to me, and hurling a long string of abuse at my head. Her voice rose shrilly on the night air.

"This is your doing, you wretched, impertinent young puppy!" she was screaming. "You have organised the whole thing from start to finish! Never shall I allow you to enter the school again! You are expelled—you are forbidden to remain here a moment longer! Order those boys to let me pass! Do you hear me? I command you—I command you!"

"I have already told you, Miss Trumble, that your commands carry weight no longer," I said quietly. "We do not recognise you as our Headmistress. By your actions you have forfeited all right to our respect. We take no orders from you, madam!"

"Oh, you wicked, wicked wretch!" she shrieked madly.

It was her helplessness more than anything else that drove her to the point of hysteria. And to hear that her commands carried no weight was the greatest shock of all. Her authority had gone! She was ignored by the boys; they looked upon her with contempt! Her last shred of control had gone!

And then, as she fairly let herself go, the governors strode up

I saluted.

"Good evening, gentlemen," I said quietly. "We are sorry that you should find these conditions prevailing at the school. But we have decided that lady teachers are most unsuitable. We want the masters back again. I think you will understand why we are so firm on the point."

Miss Trumble turned, checking herself by a great effort. By fighting hard she managed to regain some of her calmness.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Sir James—Sir James! I appeal to you to control these

terrible boys! They've treated me shamefully—disgracefully! They've refused to let me into the school!"

"Please control yourself, madam," said Sir James agitatedly. "Boys—boys! Allow all these ladies to pass!"

"I am sorry, sir, but that is impossible!" I replied.

"Impossible!" thundered Sir James.

"Quite!"

"Boy! What do you mean?" gasped the baronet.

"I mean, sir, that you and the other governors are at full liberty to enter," I replied. "But the school has decided that Miss Trumble shall not pass within these doors again until she has resigned!"

"Good heavens!" said Sir James. "Then—then the position is even worse than I had anticipated! Gentlemen, can you imagine it? These boys have actually taken possession of the whole school!"

"It is nothing more or less than a crime!" shouted Lord Walberry.

"The boys must be subdued this instant!" said Mr. Stevens. "We cannot allow this to continue; it is against all discipline!"

"Pardon me, sir, but there is no lack of discipline here!" I interrupted. "As for being subdued, I hardly think that you can accuse us of being unruly. But we are certainly firm. We are determined!"

"Do you hear—do you hear?" screamed Miss Trumble, clutching at Sir James' arm and pulling him round. "That is what I've had to put up with! These boys are villains, unscrupulous young hooligans! I appeal to you, Sir James, to protect me! I demand it—I demand it! I shall fetch the police—I shall scream for help! Oh, this is too much!"

Sir James Henson was quite frightened.

Miss Trumble went off into a wild, shrieking tirade of abuse. At last she had lost control of herself. Finding herself completely beaten—with all her authority gone—she could no longer retain her calmness. She became an object of scorn for the bulk of the juniors.

And this, of course, was disastrous. Never again would Miss Trumble be able to command respect at St. Frank's. As for the other lady teachers, they were all standing in a group—scared, hysterical, and sobbing. I felt rather sorry for two or three of them, but I had no pity for Miss Babbidge or Miss Rice. They were tarred with the same brush as Miss Trumble. They had been hand in glove with her throughout.

I walked up to Sir James and again saluted.

"Pardon me, sir, but I can explain the whole circumstances of this affair," I said quietly. "I should greatly appreciate five minutes' interview—in private."

"Do not worry me, boy!" said Sir James shakily. "Who—who are you?"

"I am Nipper, sir—the leader of this rebellion."

Sir James looked at me sternly.

"Oh, indeed!" he snapped. "So you are

the leader, eh? And you have the audacity to tell me so to my face?"

"It's not a question of audacity, sir," I replied. "We are thoroughly justified in every step that we have taken, and we can give a full explanation which will satisfy any fair-minded man. Seriously, sir, we would like to state the facts. I do not think Miss Trumble is capable of giving her account just now."

Sir James fingered his beard in agitation.

"Well, well," he exclaimed at length, "possibly so! I must confess that I am intensely worried. Very well—very well! I will let you have a short conversation with me, young man. After all, this matter must be settled, and I am anxious to lose no time."

Sir James, as a matter of fact, was greatly struck by the calm, business-like attitude of the juniors. In all his experience of a school rike, or barring-out, such an event had been accompanied by wild excitement and considerable rowdiness.

But here it was quite the opposite.

And, somehow, it was impressive. Sir James instinctively felt that the juniors had a genuine grievance. And Miss Trumble's pitiful exhibition had made it quite clear to the governors that she was unfitted for her post of authority. Certainly, something had to be done.

All the ladies were ushered into the porter's lodge. Mr. Cuttle cleared out—he didn't care for ladies, and he preferred the Triangle just now. The mistresses were not allowed in the school—and so any refuge was better than none.

And then I led the four governors into the gymnasium.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SILENT VICTORY!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grinned.

"Well, I think we can safely say that the end's coming pretty quickly now," he remarked.

"After Miss Trumble's little scene she'll never be able to hold her head up again. She's got the order of the boot, and she'll be lucky to escape."

"Rather!" agreed Church.

"Nipper's a bit of a wonder, you know," added McClure. "Blessed if I know how he thinks of all these schemes!"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Handforth casually. "I don't want to boast, but, strictly speaking, this is my idea! Perhaps mine was a little different in unessential details, but in the main, my wheeze was absolutely identical. But I'll let Nipper take the credit."

"Noble fellow!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

The guards were all taking things easy. The storm had died down, and the Triangle was quiet and comparatively still. And all the cadets were gathering together, discussing the situation.

And the rest of the school, rather breathless with excitement, continued to look on from the upper windows. As though by some mutual understanding, none of the non-combatants came out into the Triangle. It was left entirely in the hands of the rebels.

And the lack of noise was rather significant. It proved that this affair was absolutely serious. There was no nonsense about it—no silly harum-scarum tactics. It was a grim business.

And, in the gymnasium, I was facing the school governors.

I had decided at the very first that it would be better for me to see them alone. It would only confuse things if a whole crowd of fellows piled in. And the governors would get the impression that this was merely an extra-elaborate kind of public school rag. It wasn't, of course. And I wanted to tell them so quietly and straight from the shoulder.

"Now, my lad, what have you got to say?" demanded Sir James. "I will remark at once that I am decidedly pleased with your attitude. You are calm, respectful, and the whole business is devoid of hooliganism. I am impressed. If you can give me a reasonable explanation, I can assure you that justice will be done. Now, sir!"

"I am afraid that a full inquiry will be necessary, sir," I replied. "That, of course, will follow. I can only give you the bare outline of what has been happening. It will be for you to judge, Sir James. And I think you will admit that we have been justified in all our actions."

"That remains to be seen—that remains to be seen!" put in Lord Walberry. "Personally, I consider the whole affair to be deplorable—quite deplorable! It is a disgrace to the school!"

Sir James frowned.

"Please allow me to question the boy, Walberry," he said. "When it comes to a question of disgracing the school, I must confess—with great reluctance—that Miss Trumble herself has contributed largely in that direction. Never have I seen a more blatant exhibition of incompetence than that which she gave a few minutes ago."

"True—true!" muttered Mr. Stevens. "Quite pitiful!"

"And yet she seemed so self-reliant and confident when we inspected the school this morning," put in General Milton. "The whole thing is incomprehensible. For myself, I am half inclined to think that these boys have driven the poor woman to a state of distraction. I know what boys are—confound them! Grandchildren of my own! Infernal young monkeys!"

"If Miss Trumble has been driven to distraction, she has driven herself!" I declared. "When you inspected the school this morning, the peace was only a mock peace. For days we have been barring out against Miss Trumble's authority. We arranged an armistice—"

"Good gracious!" said Sir James. "One might think there had been a war!"

"And so there has been a war, sir!" I declared. "The Remove went into trenches, and Miss Trumble hired men in order to go to the attack. We have only held out by sheer determination—assisted by the knowledge that our cause is just and right."

"Indeed!"

"To-day you were basely deceived, sir," I went on. "Miss Trumble led you to believe that she was in full control. Yet there was only this truce to give that appearance. And Miss Trumble violated the truce and made a final attempt to bring us to subjection. It was her trickery which goaded the Remove to take this drastic action. And now, gentlemen, we have firmly decided that the mistresses shall not enter the school buildings again until they have resigned. Further, the Remove requires your assurance that Dr. Stafford and all the other masters will return at the earliest possible moment."

"Upon my soul!" said Sir James. "You have a remarkable lot to say for one so young! But, by gad! I must admit that I am impressed. If Miss Trumble has actually been behaving in this way, I can fully understand your indignation and your extraordinary conduct. Of course, an inquiry is essential."

"So I assume, sir."

Sir James turned to the other governors.

"Gentlemen, we must remain here until to-morrow," he declared. "There must be no delay regarding this inquiry—it must be held in the morning, and the whole matter will be threshed out."

"Certainly—certainly!"

"Oh, without question!"

"Furthermore, I have seen quite enough to convince me that these boys have been acting in all earnestness," went on Sir James. "I even believe that they have the school's welfare at heart. Certainly, there is no noisy rebellion, as I had half feared. What shall we say?"

"About the ladies?" said Lord Walberry.

"Well, hang it all, I don't like it, Henson! They made a poor sort of show, didn't they? The boys seem to be right—and we've got to admit it."

Sir James turned to me.

"My boy," he said seriously, "I can give you my assurance that Miss Trumble and her colleagues will leave the school to-morrow. That is imperative. With regard to the masters, I can promise you that they will be reinstated at the earliest possible moment. There will be a full inquiry, and if any of you youngsters are found guilty of disgraceful conduct, your punishment will be severe."

"We are quite ready for the inquiry, sir,"

I replied quietly. "In fact, it is the one thing we desire more than any other."

"Well, spoken, by gad—well spoken!" said Sir James. "Strictly speaking, I ought to give you no promises until after the inquiry. But I can quite easily see that Miss Trumble will have no further authority. After her behaviour to-night, she cannot possibly remain—even if the inquiry proves her to be entirely guiltless. But we need not discuss that further. Go to your companions, and tell them to cease all this mock warfare at once. And I shall appreciate it if there is no demonstration."

"There will be none, sir," I said smoothly. "Thank you, sir."

"I trust you—remember that!" said Sir James. "Much will depend upon the behaviour of the school to-night. In a way, you boys will have gained a great triumph—at least, so you will assume. It will strike you in that light. And if you forget yourselves you might behave in an unseemly manner—"

"It is not considered right, sir, to kick a man when he is down," I interrupted quietly. "The fellows will certainly not indulge in any form of horse-play to celebrate this triumph over a woman."

I walked out of the gymnasium. And, although I seemed calm enough, I was really bubbling with excitement. It was all over! And, without question, the Remove had won the day—they had won all along the line.

For Miss Trumble I felt no pity whatever. From the very beginning she had proved herself incapable, and towards the end she had behaved in a manner which can scarcely be described as anything but unscrupulous.

But what would the juniors do?

All their natural instincts would urge them to celebrate. And the celebration of such a big triumph as this might result in cheering, much yelling and laughter, and a very considerable amount of mafficking. And that was the last thing that I desired.

Indeed, I had given my word to Sir James that no such demonstrations would take place. So it was up to me to see that the fellows respected my promise—which had been given on their behalf.

I walked straight to the Ancient House.

Handforth and Co., and the other cadets, guarding that door looked at me with uneasy misgiving. There was nothing whatever on my face to reveal the excitement which surged within me. And the juniors half thought that I had come there with bad news.

"Well?" asked Reggie Pitt quickly.

"Before I tell you anything, I want all you fellows to listen to this—don't make any noise!" I exclaimed impressively. "Don't yell—don't cheer! But the news is good."

"You—you mean—"

"Out with it!"

"Let's hear it, Nipper!"

"I have the word of the governors that Miss Trumble and all the other ladies will leave St. Frank's to-morrow," I said quietly. "There will be an inquiry to-morrow, and we

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can take it as practically certain that the masters will be back within a couple of days. In any case, there will be no more mistresses."

"Then—then we've won!" gasped Handforth.

"Absolutely," I replied.

Handforth drew a deep breath, and opened his mouth. It was his intention to give one tremendous yell of victory. He was an impulsive chap, and had already forgotten my word of warning. In a moment, I leapt forward and clapped my hand over his mouth.

"No yelling!" I hissed. "I've given my word!"

"What!" he gasped. "You—you funny ass! What's the idea of bottling me up like that? Haven't we won? Haven't we got a right to yell? You silly chump, I going to—"

"You're going to be quiet!" I said grimly. "And all you others will be quiet, too. It wouldn't be right to crow now!"

"By George, that's true!" breathed Reggie Pitt. "Besides, it'll be ten times more impressive if we take it quietly. But—but I can't believe it, you know! Are you sure, Nipper?"

"I have the word of Sir James Henson and the other governors."

"Miss Trumble and her gang will really go to-morrow?"

"Yes," I replied. "Whatever the result of the inquiry, Miss Trumble and the other women will go. The governors saw quite enough with their own eyes. I'm thankful they did!" I added fervently. "Seeing is believing!"

"My hat! It was a cute dodge!" said Pitt admiringly. "Bringing the governors over here—and timing it so that they arrived just when the mistresses were in the Triangle! Nipper, old man, I think your brains must be double refined and gilt-edged!"

"Rats!" I grinned. "It was the obvious thing to be done."

All the juniors at the Ancient House doorway were now talking together in excited, low tones. But I soon brought this to a stop. I went among them and commanded silence.

"Form up, go indoors, and get into Etons," I said quietly. "Don't make a fuss—but carry on just the same as if the school was going on in the ordinary way."

They agreed, and passed indoors.

The other juniors were told, one group after another.

In one or two instances there were a few shouts of triumph—but they were soon suppressed, and not repeated.

It was almost uncanny.

In less than half an hour St. Frank's was absolutely normal—so far as appearances went. There had been no cheering—no wild shouting—no dancing about and general ragging.

And Sir James Henson and the other governors were more impressed than ever. The silence of the Remove in its hour of triumph



"It's all right—I thought I'd better come in straight away," announced Willy Handforth, as he strolled into the room. "No time to mess about with these waiters! Action's required—not formalities!"

was a certain indication of the justice of their cause.

But the matter was not over—all the facts had to be sifted to the bottom.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INQUIRY!



CLANG! CLANG!

The rising bell rang in the same old way as ever. I sat up in bed in the Remove dormitory, and as I sat there comfortably between the sheets, it almost seemed that the events of the past week or so were nothing but a dream.

Here we were, back in the old routine.

We should get up, go down to breakfast, and then lessons. No more trenches—no more trouble with the food supply—no worry of responsibility. And within a day or two St. Frank's would really be itself.

For Dr. Malcolm Stafford would come back, and take charge. The dear old Head himself would take hold of the reins once more. Nelson Lee would resume control over the Ancient House. Mr. Stockdale would appear in the College House. And we

should have Mr. Crowell—sharp-tongued and eagle-eyed as ever—presiding over us in the Remove.

What a fine prospect!

Before long all the juniors were dressing. And, of course, there was only one subject to be discussed. This subject was the inquiry which was due to take place during the morning.

"Of course, all the most important fellows will be called to give evidence!" said Pitt. "We shan't see Nipper in the Form-room this morning."

"You won't see me, either," remarked Handforth. "They're bound to call me!"

"My dear chap, you won't need any calling—you'll be there in any case!" chuckled Pitt. "How could the inquiry be a success without you? Perish the thought!"

Now that all the trouble was over, the juniors were aware of a great sense of relief. There was no further worry of any kind. And it was grand to know that the Remove had won its fight. It had been rather a long-drawn-out, desperate business, but the victory was certainly ours. That was something to inwardly gloat over.

Chambers was quite the hero of the Fifth—he put himself in that position, by the way. He was the only senior who had taken part in the rebellion, and he tried to make everybody believe that it was solely owing to him that complete success had come to our cause. But as nobody took any notice, it didn't matter much.

The inquiry was not delayed. Immediately after breakfast the Remove was informed that it was to gather in Big Hall. Chambers, of the Fifth, and Willy Handforth, of the Third, were ordered to be present, too. To be exact, every late rebel was instructed to appear.

"Good!" said Bob Christine. "That's what I like, you know. No messing about—no delay. I hardly thought these old fogeys had enough gumption in them to get busy so quickly. Well, there's only one possible result of the inquiry."

"We're bound to win!" said Handforth. "It's a cert!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean to say, we're positively brimming with large supplies of confidence, laddie. When it comes to the positive truth, we're bally well fearless. Having done no wrong, we can face the world with a clear what-do-you-call-it?"

"Conscience?" grinned Church.

"Thanks, old bean!" smiled Archie. "The very word. Now and again a chappie can't think of the precise expresh. Of course, if I'm required for evidence, I'll dash up, and do my bit. The old witness-box stuff, what? I mean to say, cross-examination, and all that rot!"

"It'll be pretty interesting, anyway," said Christine.

It seemed that there were to be no morning lessons for the Remove. Indeed, the whole school was in a bit of a mix. The

mistresses were not on duty—and would never be again.

The previous evening they had been allowed to enter the school, of course. They had gone straight to their respective rooms, and we had seen or heard nothing of them since.

The Fifth and Sixth went to their Form-rooms, but there was no work done. Some of the seniors, indeed, would be required for the inquiry. Their evidence would be necessary.

The preliminaries were rather impressive.

The Remove were provided with chairs, and they sat looking on. On the raised platform in Big Hall there was a big table round which sat Sir James Henson, Lord Walberry, Mr. Stevens, and General Milton. They held a consultation which lasted about fifteen minutes.

Then there was a slight murmur among the fellows, for Miss Trumble appeared from the door at the back of the platform. It was known by this time that she was no longer Chairman of the Governing Board. She had, in fact, resigned. Under the circumstances, it was her only course. And Sir James was temporary chairman—until a full meeting of the board could be convened.

Miss Trumble was looking pale, but just as obstinate and grim as ever. She had completely recovered from her attack of hysterical excitement. And now there was a glint in her eye which did not look very well for the Remove.

"Miss Trumble, you have requested that you should be called to give evidence at this inquiry," said Sir James gravely. "Personally, I should not have expected you to attend."

"It is my own wish, Sir James!" said Miss Trumble. "I consider it right that you should know the truth—and you will not get the truth from these wretched, disobedient boys!"

"Ahem! We shall see—we shall see!" murmured Sir James. "It is not my desire to question you, Miss Trumble. I should much prefer you to make a full statement."

Miss Trumble flashed a glance at the Remove, and then cleared her throat.

"From the very first moment of my arrival in this school I have met with nothing but insolence and insubordination from the boys of the Remove Form," she declared. "I was prepared for this, for I know that such boys are very awkward to deal with. They are at a peculiar age—they are not quite old enough to go into the senior class, and yet they consider themselves to be of importance. And right from the first it was the Remove boys who caused the trouble."

"We should prefer you to be slightly more definite, Miss Trumble," said Sir James gently. "We do not think it will help the inquiry for you to indulge in general observations. Please confine yourself to the rebellion."

"Certainly," said Miss Trumble. "The boys of the Remove strongly objected to a few restrictions which I made—entirely for their own benefit. In their obstinate way, they would not see this—"

"May we inquire the nature of these restrictions, madam?" asked Mr. Stevens.

"For one thing, I considered that football was altogether too rough and degrading," said Miss Trumble. "I issued an order that it should stop, and that net-ball should take its place."

Sir James looked rather startled.

"You prohibited football!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Yes—"

"But, my dear madam, football is a kind of institution at all our public schools!" protested Sir James. "Net-ball, after all, is a pastime that is far more suitable for girls. I must be allowed to remark that it was decidedly unwise to make such a drastic alteration in the school sports."

"I considered it to be for the good of the boys!" snapped Miss Trumble.

"No doubt—no doubt!" muttered Sir James. "At the same time, it was unwise. I do not wonder—ahem!—that the youngsters were somewhat dismayed. But kindly proceed, Miss Trumble."

"There was a deal of fuss over my decision," said Miss Trumble. "A most unnecessary commotion, in fact. I was obliged to punish many of the boys, and, finally, I considered that it would be for the good of the whole Remove if they were deprived of their private studies. Accordingly, I made an order that such studies were not to be used."

"Indeed!" said Sir James. "Was that not rather harsh, madam?"

"Harsh!" retorted Miss Trumble. "No; it was absolutely necessary! I happened to make a round of inspection one evening, and discovered the boys smoking in practically every study—"

"Oh!" shouted the Remove indignantly.

"It was only Fullwood's study!" roared Handforth. "It's not fair to—"

"Boys—boys!" protested Sir James. "You must not interrupt in that unseemly fashion! If these boys were smoking in their studies, Miss Trumble, you were indeed justified in banning them."

"I am gratified!" said Miss Trumble sourly. "It seems that this fresh decision of mine brought matters to a head. During the night the boys left the school, and took up their quarters in a barn just beyond the playing fields. I may mention that they robbed the school store-rooms in the most villainous manner. I was amazed—shocked!"

"What did you do to bring the boys back?"

"I at once ordered them to return, and they laughed at me!" retorted Miss Trumble. "They insulted me to my face, and all my attempts to reason with them were of no avail. Finally, after flouting

me in this way for several days, they came to the school and took possession of it. And last night, as you know, they had the unparalleled audacity to keep me out."

"And that is all?" asked Sir James.

"I have stated the main facts—yes."

"But we should like to hear more of the details," put in Mr. Stevens.

Miss Trumble proceeded to supply them—but her story was a mere travesty of the truth. She gave an elaborately exaggerated account of her attempts to get the Remove back to the school. According to what she said, she was a kind of saint, and the Remove fellows were demons. And we could all see that the governors were slowly but surely being influenced in her favour.

Indeed, before very long Miss Trumble herself realised that she was gaining ground. She warmed to her work. She got herself into a fine state of indignation, and in the finish it really seemed as though she had been extremely badly treated.

The governors held a short consultation after her evidence was concluded. She was requested to take a seat, and then Sir James Henson looked over towards us with a grim, rather unpleasant look in his eyes.

"Nipper," he called, "I shall now require you to give evidence."

"Certainly, sir," I said promptly.

I went up, and took my stand beside the table. And, without delay, I was invited to give my version of what had occurred. I did so, quietly and without any kind of exaggeration. I felt that the simple truth would be better than anything else—for the Remove had a perfect case, without a single flaw.

The governors listened with much interest as I proceeded. I was pulled up when I mentioned the incident when Miss Trumble had sold the meadows to Farmer Holt.

"There can be no doubt, gentlemen, that Miss Trumble effected this sale so that she could arrange with Holt to bring all his men for the purpose of attacking us," I declared. "It was below Miss Trumble's dignity to attack us herself. So she adopted this subterfuge."

"Indeed!" said Sir James. "Are you quite sure this is true, Nipper? We have heard no mention of any land being sold to Farmer Holt. I think you must have made a mistake."

"Ask Miss Trumble, sir," I said quietly. Sir James did so.

"Yes, it is true!" admitted Miss Trumble defiantly. "And what of it? Mr. Holt required those meadows months ago—he even approached Dr. Stafford on the subject. As there was no particular use for the meadows, I considered it just as well that Mr. Holt should be obliged."

Sir James turned to me.

"Well?" he asked quietly.

"I am not making any definite statement, sir, but I suggest that Miss Trumble paid Mr. Holt to bring his men on the scene in

order to attack us," I continued. "I also suggest that Miss Trumble arranged with Holt to steal our food, and then besiege the Fort."

"No, no!" shouted Miss Trumble, springing up. "That is a lie!"

"Really, madam—"

"I will not have this young scoundrel making such base accusations!" declared Miss Trumble hotly. "I have never paid Holt a penny—I never arranged a single thing with him! With regard to the siege, that was Mr. Holt's own scheme."

"Thank you, Miss Trumble," said Sir James. "Of course, we accept your word without question. Proceed, Nipper."

"There is the matter concerning the final

I did so, feeling that the inquiry was not going as it ought. And when I had done, Fenton was called.

Fenton was followed by Morrow, and several other prefects. They all explained that the Remove had been goaded to action by the many petty restrictions. They further explained that every boy in the school had sympathised with the Remove. And Morrow was just in the middle of a sentence when a big form entered through the door at the rear of the stage. It was the form of Mr. Jeremiah Holt, the local farmer—the hated enemy of the Remove.

Miss Trumble jumped to her feet, flushing with alarm.

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development, sir," I said grimly. "I suggest that Miss Trumble planned with Holt for our trenches to be flooded, so that we should be driven out—"

"That is another base lie!" declared Miss Trumble fiercely. "I will not remain here and listen to these scandalous suggestions. It is disgraceful, Sir James. Why do you allow the boy to—"

"Nipper, you must not state anything except absolute facts!" interrupted Sir James sternly. "Miss Trumble is quite right. You have absolutely no cause for making any suggestions which cast aspersions upon Miss Trumble's character. Get on with your story."

"Why have you come here, Mr. Holt?" she demanded angrily.

"Why?" said the farmer grimly. "Because I've been hearin' that things ain't right here. Folks are sayin' that they boys have bested you."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Sir James hotly. "How dare you come here? By what right do you force your way in—"

"If this lady ain't stoppin' at St. Frank's, I want to see her afore she goes," growled Holt. "Now then, Miss Trumble, what about our little account? Business is business—"

"That is private—quite private!" said Miss Trumble hurriedly.

"Oh, is it?" demanded the farmer. "You promised to pay me all the wages of them men who tried to get the boys out. You arranged the whole thing with me, an' I ain't seen a penny yet! What about my money?"

Miss Trumble nearly fainted.

"What money is this, Mr. Holt?" asked Sir James sharply.

"I'm not goin' to be left in the cold!" said the farmer. "This 'ere lady made all them plans for stealin' the boys' food, an' floodin' the trenches. I spent a lot o' money on barbed wire, an' other things, to say nothin' of payin' the men. Miss Trumble promised to pay me, an'—"

He paused, for Miss Trumble at that moment uttered a kind of wild scream, and ran from the platform. The governors gazed after her in consternation and alarm.

And I looked at Sir James with quiet confidence.

"Well, sir?" I asked. "Were my suggestions correct, or not? You heard Miss Trumble declare that I was lying—"

"You need say no more, Nipper—and I think this inquiry has gone quite far enough," interrupted Sir James Henson, rising to his feet. "Gentlemen, I find these boys were provoked in a most definite manner, and under the circumstances I consider that the whole matter should be allowed to drop."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Stevens. "I am quite satisfied—quite!"

"We have been sadly mistaken in Miss Trumble," growled Lord Walberry. "And this morning she has destroyed every vestige of faith that we might have retained in her."

Sir James turned to the Remove.

"Boys, as far as you are concerned, this inquiry is over," he said quietly. "You may go back to your lessons, and nothing more will be heard of the affair. There will be no punishment, and those boys who were expelled are automatically reinstated. You may dismiss."

And the former rebels passed out—glowing with complete triumph. It was rather curious that Farmer Holt, their chief enemy, should have provided the one link which completed the chain of evidence against the degraded Headmistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TELEGRAM EPIDEMIC.



"HURRAH!"

"Everything's all right!"

"Rather!"

"And to-morrow we shall have all the masters back again."

The fellows were out in the Triangle—and now they celebrated in no uncertain tones. The inquiry was over, and it had resulted in the complete vindication of the Remove.

From now onwards the old order of things was restored. There would be no further hated restrictions, and by to-morrow the masters would be all back again.

Indeed, although we did not know it, Sir James had already sent telegrams to every one of the Form-masters—urgently requesting their immediate return. He wanted them to come back that very day, if possible.

And just before dinner-time, when the Triangle was filled with elated juniors, the first reply arrived. The telegram was taken straight to the governors, who were holding a quiet consultation in the Head's study. By this time, Miss Trumble and all the other ladies had gone.

They had been requested to leave at the earliest possible moment. Any further communications would be made with them elsewhere. Sir James considered it highly necessary that Miss Trumble should leave at once. After her public exposure and disgrace—for it had amounted to nothing less—it was out of the question for her to remain.

"In her right sphere Miss Trumble is probably a most useful and highly-respected person," said Sir James, as he talked to the other governors. "Personally, I cannot commend these boys too highly for drawing our attention to the appalling state of affairs that existed."

"It was a big mistake, in the first place, for us to allow this woman to remain in the school," said Mr. Stevens. "It was her idea to bring other women here, and we countenanced the suggestion. Let this be a lesson to us."

"It shall be," declared Sir James. "We will get the masters back by to-morrow, no doubt—and I think that will be a fairly easy task. Of course, we shall have to make some sort of compensation for their inconvenience—and I think an apology would not be out of place."

"An apology is necessary," said the general.

"Come in—come in!" called out Sir James.

A tap had sounded on the door, and Tubbs entered. He carried a telegram. Sir James took it, and looked up rather concernedly as he finished reading the words on the form.

"This is awkward—very awkward!" he said, frowning.

The telegram was passed round, and it read as follows:

"Dr. Stafford confined to bed with slight attack diphtheria. Impossible to come. Writing.—MRS. LONG, Housekeeper."

"Diphtheria!" exclaimed Mr. Stevens, with a whistle. "That is bad—very bad! It is doubtful if Dr. Stafford will be able to return to St. Frank's until the new term commences."

"Most annoying—most upsetting!" exclaimed Lord Walberry.

"Come in!" said Sir James testily.

It was Tubbs again—with another telegram. It was from another housekeeper—Nelson Lee's this time, and it created further consternation. For this telegram contained the following news:

"Mr. Lee absent on Continent.—MRS. JONES, Housekeeper."

"What on earth shall we do?" demanded Sir James, rising to his feet, and pacing up and down with a worried frown. "The two most important men! I had not reckoned on this—I had not even considered the possibility."

"They had no right to go away," growled Mr. Stevens. "It was absurd! This is what comes of a woman being in control!"

"Dear me!" said Sir James, staring out of the window. "There is another telegram coming, I do believe. A boy has just arrived on a red bicycle. Let us hope he brings better news."

This time it was Mr. Stockdale, and the governors were freshly startled when they read these words:

"Mr. Stockdale is taking short holiday in Switzerland. Am sending your telegram on at once.—MRS. STOCKDALE."

"This is terrible—terrible!" ejaculated Sir James. "We have got rid of the mistresses, and now there are no masters to take their places! As far as I can see, it will mean complete disorganisation and general trouble. Just at the end of the term, too!"

"Very distressing!" said Mr. Stevens. "Yes, yes. I think the Easter holidays begin in just over a week. That, at all events, is some consolation. We shall certainly be able to get the masters back in time for the new term."

Ten minutes later there was another telegram—they seemed to be coming in one long line. It was rather more hopeful than the others:

"Will arrive St. Frank's to-morrow, mid-day.—PAGETT."

"The Fifth Form, at least, will not be without a master," growled Sir James. "But what of the others? Both the Ancient House and the College House will have nobody to control them. So far we can only count upon one unimportant assistant master. Terrible!"

Only a quarter of an hour elapsed before the next telegram arrived. And this time it was from Mr. Crowell's brother—with whom the Remove Form-master was staying. It ran in this way:

"Mr. Crowell seriously injured in street

accident yesterday. Broken leg. Unable to resume duties for many weeks."

"Poor man—poor man!" said Sir James. "A broken leg, eh? That probably means that Mr. Crowell will not be able to resume his duties in the school until after the Whitsun holidays. We must engage a new master for the Remove for the forthcoming term."

"But what of the present—what shall we do now?" demanded Lord Walberry.

"It was an infernally ridiculous thing to allow these women to have control—even for a day!" exclaimed General Milton, in desperation. "The fact is, we have been hypnotised by that confounded woman! Positively hypnotised! Bah! We deserve nothing better than what we are getting!"

Three more telegrams shortly arrived. One was from Mr. Clifford, the sports master. He would return, if necessary, but preferred to stay away until the new term commenced. Another was Mr. Suncliffe, of the Third. He would arrive in the evening. The other telegram was from Mr. Langton, the Sixth Form-master. Mr. Langton had a bad cold, but would come at the earliest possible moment.

The governors were face to face with a big difficulty.

There were no masters available, with the exception of one or two Form-masters, who, after all, were quite incapable of running the school. It was a disastrous state of affairs.

"Really, we are in a most appalling quandary," declared Sir James. "It is impossible to obtain substitutes. We cannot engage a number of men to come here for a mere week."

"It is quite certain the boys cannot look after themselves."

"Yes, I agree, Mr. Stevens," went on Sir James. "I am afraid that our only course will be to send the boys home."

"Home?" ejaculated the general.

"Yes—and they must go either to-day or to-morrow."

"By gad, sir, that's the one solution—the one way out of the difficulty," declared Lord Walberry, with a sigh of relief. "Let 'em have a week's extra holiday. Things are upside down, so it can't do much harm. With the masters back next term, everything will go smoothly."

Sir James chuckled.

"Upon my soul, the youngsters deserve it!" he exclaimed, with twinkling eyes. "They've had rather a rough time of it during the past four or five weeks—so this will act as a kind of compensation."

And it was decided upon.

Less than an hour later the school was informed—and the general excitement was tremendous. There was cheering, and celebrations of every kind. And all this had come about because of the great barring-out.

The Remove had won, with a vengeance!

CHAPTER IX.

OFF FOR EASTER.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE lay at full length on the lounge in his elegant study. Phipps, his valet, was pouring out a cup of tea.

"The absolute stuff, old scout!" said Archie. "I mean to say, I feel that I'm positively in need of a bally stimulant. And there's nothing like the good old brew for reviving the tissues. Thanks, laddie—thanks in large chunks! When it comes to rallying round, you're the absolute goods!"

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps.

"About this dashing-away business," went on Archie. "It appears, Phipps, that the governors have sent forth the priceless edict that we've got to stagger out of the landscape practically at once. In other words, we're buzzing off for the Easter holidays before the actual time."

"So I understand, sir."

"A dashed ripe scheme, Phipps, but it takes a chappie somewhat in the wind, as you might say," went on Archie. "In other words, it has him doubled up, don't you know. You see, I'd planned all sorts of frightfully decent things for the holidays, and now they're jolly well on top of us."

"There is certainly a lack of time, sir."

"A lack!" repeated Archie. "Dash it all, I haven't got a chance! You see, I thought it'd be rather a fruity sort of scheme to get some of the lads of the village to rally round. You gather the idea, Phipps?"

"Hardly, sir."

"Wait! The young master will enlarge," said Archie, sipping his tea. "My idea was to send round the invitations in style, don't you know—cards, and what not! But, of course, that's all biffed on the think-tank! There's no dashed time."

"I fail to understand——"

"Kindly keep the good old trap closed!" said Archie, holding up a reproving finger. "Allow me to proceed with the gentle flow of chat. About the dashing-about stuff, I mean. Well, here we are—that is to say, there we are. I mean, there we shall all be in London—on Bank Holiday. Easter Monday, don't you know—revels and rejoicing, and so forth!"

"I take it, sir, that you are thinking of inviting some of the young gentlemen to spend Easter Monday in London with you."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That, old bird, is the precise wheeze. But there's no time, you know. I simply can't write scores of letters all over the show, and——"

"Would it not be better to invite the young gentleman personally, sir?" asked Phipps. "I suggest that you go round at once. You will catch them all, and you can easily arrange all the details."

Archie looked up.

"Well, of course, between you and me, that's what some chappies would call a



Miss Trumble didn't even know that the governors had arrived. Her back was towards the gates, and she was talking to me, and hurling a long string of abuse at my head. Her voice rose shrilly on the night air.

brain wave," he observed. "Phipps, old lad, you've hit the bally nail! I shall trickle forth, and proceed to mouth the invitations. Bally good! The situation, in fact, is saved!"

Archie strolled outside, adjusting his monocle as he did so. In the passage he came face to face with Handforth and Co., who, for some miraculous reason, were walking along arm in arm. They felt so happy at the joyous news that Handy couldn't even quarrel.

"Hail, fair youths!" said Archie. "What about it?"

"Eh?" said Handforth. "What about what?"

"The old revels, don't you know," said Archie. "The good old Zoo, and the Waxworks, and all that sort of stuff! Don't you think it would be rather a priceless wheeze if we buzzed round a bit? A juicy scheme—what?"

"To go to the Zoo and the Waxworks?" demanded Handforth.

"Madame What-do-you-call-it's," said Archie vaguely.

"Fathead!" said Edward Oswald.

"I say! Dash it all!" protested Archie. "Don't you think that's rather dashed severe? I mean, when one chappie invites another chappie, it's not absolutely the

thing to hurl abuse. You gather what I mean?"

"I gather that you're talking out of the back of your neck," said Handforth. "How the dickens can we go to the Zoo now? We're all buzzing off home! School's over, and the holidays have practically started!"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "But I'm thinking about Bank Holiday, you know. Easter Monday, and so forth. How about a big party—a jolly fat crowd of us, as it were? Don't you think it would be topping?"

"Are you inviting us somewhere?" asked Church.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "That, dear old fruit, is absolutely the wheeze! To be exact, a Bank Holiday crowd of us, buzzing about and seeing the sights. How does it strike you?"

"Jolly nice," said McClure.

"That's settled, then," said Archie, with a sigh of relief. "I want you to come to the pater's place the night before—you understand. Then you can all be on the spot to start out with the rising of the sun, to be poetic. We can have a dashed ripping day, and finish up with a dance-party at the pater's. You see, my people are getting up a perfectly ripping party for Easter Monday evening. Dancing and eating, and all that sort of thing."

"It seems jolly good," said Handforth. "But I can't quite make out how you can do it. Your people live at Bannington——"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Archie. "Well, that is, not all the time. You see, the pater's got a rather priceless show in London—Portland Place, to be exact. That's where we congregate when we whizz up to town. What do you say to the idea?"

Handforth and Co. accepted the invitation with alacrity.

As a matter of face, they had been discussing Bank Holiday only a short time earlier, and had been planning to meet somewhere.

It turned out that Archie was thinking of making a kind of tour of London, in two of his father's huge motor-cars. At least a dozen fellows would be included in the party, and the itinerary would include the Zoological Gardens, the Tower of London, Madame Tussaud's, and any other places of interest that the fellows wanted to visit.

Naturally, the juniors jumped at the chance.

Archie had no difficulty whatever in getting up his party. I was included, and so was Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. And Reggie Pitt had arranged to be on hand, too.

"There's one thing pretty certain," he said, with a grin. "If Handforth's going to be in the party, you can bet there'll be plenty of excitement! I can't imagine him going round London without creating havoc."

"We ought to get some fun at the Zoo!" chuckled Watson.

"Rather; you bet we will!" said Pitt.

"Well, it's decent of Archie to think of us all like this. There'll be the big party at his pater's place, too—to put a finish to the day."

And the fellows discussed the prospects with much anticipation. This Easter party of Archie's promised to be one of exceptional interest. And those fellows who were not invited were inclined to be green with jealousy.

There was one exception in Willy Handforth. Edward Oswald fairly gloated when he told Willy all about it.

"And don't forget, my son, that you're left out in the cold!" concluded Handforth severely. "No kids are allowed! If you try to butt in, you'll be jolly well kicked!"

Willy grinned.

"Keep your silly hair on!" he said calmly. "Do you think I want to join the party? I should hope I've got something better to do than to waste my time in looking at waxworks, and visiting the monkey-house at the Zoo! I can see something better at St. Frank's every day of the week!"

"You young fathead——"

"Why go to the monkey-house, when I can look at you?" asked Willy. "I'll bet there's not a single monkey in the Zoo with a face like yours!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you——"

Handforth paused as Willy dashed off.

"All the same," sang out the fag, "I'll bet I'm in that party! If I make up my mind to it, I'll join in!"

"And, by Jove, he will!" said Church, with conviction. "That young brother of yours has got enough cheek for anything."

Handforth drew a deep breath.

"Just wait until I find him!" he said darkly. "By George! I'll skin him alive!"

But Willy wanted a lot of finding. By the time the two brothers did come together again, Handforth had forgotten all about his threats.

And, in the evening of the day, all the St. Frank's fellows left the school—returning home over a week earlier than usual.

As the Remove fellows pointed out, this was the direct result of their own activities. They had barred-out from St. Frank's in order to get rid of the mistresses, and they had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

And, instead of any punishment falling on the rebels, the whole school was provided with an extra week's holiday. From the point of view of the Remove, nothing in the world could have been better.

And when the school reassembled for the new term, conditions at the famous school would be quite normal. For St. Frank's had seen the last of the mistresses, and the masters would return and take complete control. And then everything would be as usual.

But when the specially invited members of Archie Glenthorne's party left St. Frank's, they little guessed what that Easter Monday jaunt was to lead to!

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Editorial Announcement.

MY DEAR READERS,

The Remove Juniors have every reason to congratulate themselves on their hard-fought victory over Miss Trumble and her satellites. For, in bringing to an inglorious end the farcical rule of the Lady Head, and reinstating the masters, the Remove have earned for themselves and the whole school an extra week to the Easter vac.

NEXT WEEK'S EASTER STORY.

Everyone, I am sure, will wish the Remove a rattling good time this Easter, and, judging by the extent of their programme, as outlined by Archie Glenthorne, it is fairly certain that our good wishes will be fulfilled. Anyhow, their Easter adventures in London will be related in next week's rollicking Holiday Story, "A PRICELESS TIME; or Archie's Easter Party!" You must not, on any account, miss this story, for not only will it tell you how a number of light-hearted schoolboys can enjoy themselves in a trip to London, but it leads on to another grand new St. Frank's series,

which I think you will like even better than the last.

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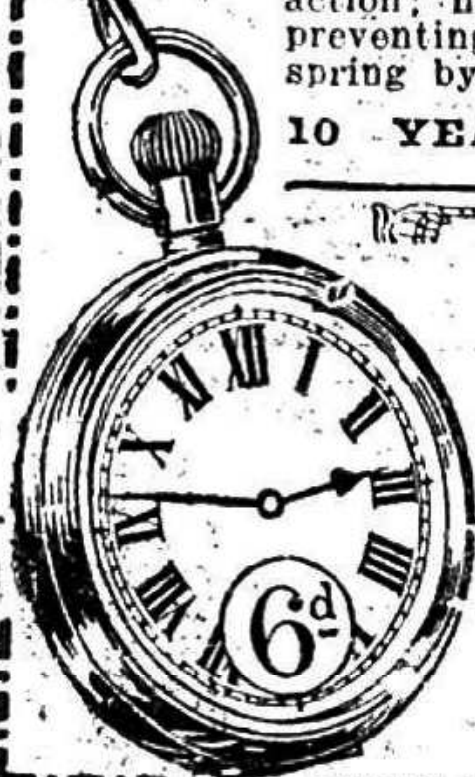
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