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THE Nelson Lee

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Read about the strange behaviour of the New Head in This
Week's Absorbing Story of St. Frank's:—

THE MYSTERY OF THE HEAD'S WIFE!



The boat was swung round, and a moment later Handforth dived overboard, hoping to be in time to save the drowning woman.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HEAD'S WIFE!



AN ENGROSSING STORY OF
THE POPULAR NEW HEAD
OF ST. FRANK'S.

Dr. Beverley Stokes, M.A., the locum tenens of Dr. Stafford, during the latter's absence on an expedition in Africa, is very different from the usual type of Headmaster. He is youthful, a keen follower and participator of sport, and, instead of standing aloof from the boys, he mixes with them freely. The boys feel completely at ease in his presence, and look upon him as an ideal Head. His wife, Mrs. Stokes, arrived at the school last week. She is young and attractive, and has already won great popu-

larity with the boys. Outwardly, Mr. and Mrs. Stokes appear to be on the best of terms, but owing to certain discoveries by some of the boys it is whispered that the Head ill-treats his wife. Whether this is merely scandal started by Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove, further revelations in this week's story will show.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE FOR ONE!

DR. BEVERLEY STOKES, M.A. halted abruptly.

The stranger's action struck him as being singular—even suspicious. And Dr. Stokes gazed at him in a curiously intense kind of way. The fellow was obviously ill at ease.

The Headmaster of St. Frank's had been walking briskly up from the village, and he was only a short distance from the school gates. It was mid-evening, and, being the month of June, broad daylight.

It had been rather a chilly, unpleasant day, with several sharp showers. But the evening made full compensation, for the air was now delightfully sweet and fresh, and the lane was devoid of its usual dust.

Dr. Stokes had been whistling absent-mindedly, and he hadn't seen the stranger until he was almost upon him. It may seem curious that a headmaster should whistle. But Dr. Beverley Stokes was a most uncommon Head.

"I don't like that beggar's look!" muttered Dr. Stokes.

The man was small, dapper, and immaculately dressed. One glimpse of his face had revealed the fact that he was a foreigner of some kind. And, foreigners being unusual near the old school, the Head had naturally taken a second glance.

And for some reason he looked almost alarmed.

The dapper little man was fully aware of the Head's sudden fixed attention, and he made haste to remove himself. He had stepped through a gap in the hedge, unaware that Dr. Stokes was approaching.

And it was his behaviour that seemed so strange.

For the man hesitated, crouched back, and then bolted swiftly through the gap and vanished from sight. That one glance at Dr. Stokes had been sufficient to alarm him—like a nervous rabbit at the sight of a fox-terrier.

Ordinary peaceable wayfarers are not in the habit of bolting through hedges at the sight of a mere pedestrian. And the stranger's action, together with his foreign appearance, caused the Head to make up his mind swiftly. This matter had to be investigated.

And Dr. Stokes, being eminently a man of action, hastened his steps, and broke through the gap in pursuit. He wanted to find out precisely who this man was, and why he had taken fright.

On the other side of the hedge he paused, pursing his lips grimly.

The dapper little foreigner was on the run, making his way across the meadow, and swerving towards Bellton Wood. Dr. Stokes growled out an exclamation, and gave chase.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "I want a word with you, sir!"

But the other only ran all the faster—not that he had the slightest hope of getting away from the athletic Headmaster. Dr. Stokes paid no heed to the thought that it was an undignified proceeding for him to engage in this chase. Indeed, the Head thought less of his dignity than the average Fifth-Former thought of his.

The little foreigner was now scared, for he realized that he was being rapidly overtaken. In desperation he doubled back, and bolted like a hare for the lane again. By a supreme effort, he reached the road at exactly the same second as his pursuer.

One swift glance up and down was enough for him. His hopes died down. He had prayed that somebody would be in sight—trusting that the Head would refrain from anything drastic in public.

But Bellton Lane was quite deserted.

"You infernal little toad!" shouted Dr. Stokes, his voice quivering with fury. "What are you doing in this district? By Heaven! I'll have the police on you—"

"Me do no harm!" gasped the other. "Me on holiday—"

"Lying won't help you, you unclean rat!" broke in Dr. Stokes, his rage apparently uncontrollable. "I know why you're here; I can see through your dirty game! And you're going to clear—this very instant! And if ever I find you prowling about the school again, I won't be responsible for what happens!"

The stranger was fairly shivering with fright. The Head's attitude was sufficiently alarming. The fellow was a Chinaman—refined-looking on account of his extremely neat attire and his spotless cleanliness. But the Chinaman's face was little short of hideous when gazed at closely.

"You no touch me!" he panted, fear in his tone. "Me velly good now, Dr. Stokes—no fly any ticks—"

"As long as there's a breath of life in your confounded body, you'll be as chock full of tricks as ever!" cut in the Head curtly. "I warned you once before, Yen, and this time I'm going further! And if you come again, I'll break your infernal neck!"

At the same second Dr. Stokes reached out and grasped the Chinaman by the scruff of his neck. His rage was terrifying. And it was all the more so because he was apparently acting without provocation. Dr.

Stokes had been the aggressor from the very first.

He shook the Chinaman until the yellow man's teeth rattled. And then, with one driving blow, the Head sent the man reeling to the ground, where he collapsed in a dishevelled heap.

But he was up in a twinkling, and quickly as he acted, the Head was quicker. For as the Chinaman half-raised himself, Dr. Stokes brought his foot round, and literally lifted the wretched Oriental on the toe of his boot. Yen collapsed again, howling.

Even this was not sufficient for the Headmaster of St. Frank's. He bent over his victim, lifted him bodily as though he were a sack of rubbish, and pitched him with a strenuous heave into the ditch.

Splash! Squelch!

The previous day that ditch had been nearly dry, but the recent rain had half-filled it, and it was in a shocking condition. The previously immaculate Chinaman plunged into the sticky mire and vanished from sight. A second later a black, dripping, ghastly object appeared.

The Head regarded his handiwork with complete satisfaction.

"And let that be a warning!" he said breathlessly. "I've dealt with you lightly this time, Yen; and by taking the law into my own hands I've gained some slight amusement. Now get out!"

The Chinaman crawled out of the ditch, wailing and spluttering with fright and pain. And if the Head was amused, he didn't look it. For the expression he turned upon the yellow man was one of fierce anger.

There was something rather mysterious about the whole incident.

CHAPTER II.

ARCHIE, THE CHAMPION.



IRENE MANNERS was enthusiastic.

"She's a perfect dear!" she declared stoutly. "I didn't know that any schoolmaster's wife could be so sweet. And she's so young, too—she doesn't look a day older than nineteen or twenty!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "As a matter of fact, dear old girl, Mrs. Stokes is a perfect ripper! I mean, there's not a chapple in the whole Remove who wouldn't lay down his life, so to speak."

"I'm awfully pleased," said Irene. "It's lovely to have somebody like that at St. Frank's."

"Rather!" agreed Marjorie Temple. "Somehow, there was always something lacking at St. Frank's when Dr. Stafford was here. But Mrs. Stokes has changed everything."

"Well, in a way," said Archie. "That is, not precisely if you grasp what I mean. It's the good old Head himself who has done

such a frightful amount of changing business. Why, dash it, since Dr. Stokes arrived the good old routine has been positively washed and manicured!"

Archie was strolling up the lane wheeling his bicycle. He had met Irene and Co. a few moments before, and had naturally dismounted, in order to walk a little distance with the Moor View girls. There were four of them, including Tessa Love, the adopted sister of Johnny and Bertie Onions of the Remove. Until quite recently, Tessa had been a circus girl, but now she was no longer "Queen of the Ring." And since her arrival at the Moor View School, she had become very friendly with Irene and her chums, and was, indeed, a member of the "Co."

"Yes, Dr. Stokes is a wonderful man," said Tessa. "I'd love to meet him, Archie. We've heard such a lot about him, and everybody praises him up to the skies. Indeed, one might almost think that Dr. Stokes was a boy, and not a master."

Archie Glenthorne nodded.

"And there, if I may say so, you have placed the old finger upon the spot, as it were," he observed. "That is to say, the Head is so absolutely priceless that mere words cannot describe him. He is just as much a schoolboy as the rest of the chappies; he has tea with us in our studies, he plays cricket, and generally behaves like a bally Removite!"

"Isn't that rather awkward sometimes?" asked Irene.

"Oh, rather not! In fact, absolutely not—with knobs on!" replied Archie. "The Head's such a brick, don't you know, that all the lads of the village adore him. It's no exaggeration to say that most of us would clean his good old footgear with positive relish. And Mrs. Stokes, in her own way, is just as priceless."

"You're lucky," declared Marjorie.

"Lucky, dear old girl, is scarcely the word," said Glenthorne. "The new Head is a sportsman to his finger-tips; he absolutely couldn't commit a piece of dirty work at the cross-roads if he tried! That is, he's true-blue, and a white man, and all that sort of stuff."

The girls were rather amused at Archie's eulogistic description of the Head. And it wasn't the first time they had heard Dr. Stokes praised up so highly. Handforth and Co. had been just as eloquent, although, of course, in a different way. And many of the other juniors had all added their song of praise to the general voice.

And the reason for all this was obvious.

Since the beginning of the term, Dr. Beverley Stokes had proved himself to be a headmaster of a novel type. He had set himself out to get on intimate terms with his boys—to join in their pleasures and pastimes, to help them in their little troubles, and to generally make himself a close and intimate chum.

He had succeeded beyond all his hopes, mainly because his own personality was cheery, sunny, and lovable. And he had been greatly assisted by his attractive young wife. For Mrs. Stokes was generally regarded as a kind of human angel.

The Head's methods were so new and novel that St. Frank's had hardly got over the shock even now. And Irene and Co., naturally enough, were extremely interested.

"It would be rather jolly if we ran into Dr. Stokes this evening," said Doris Berkeley. "I'd just love— Oh, goodness! Just look at that poor man being knocked—"

"Good gad!" gasped Archie. "The Head!"

He nearly let his bicycle fall over in his blank astonishment. And all the girls were staring in a horrified kind of way.

They had just strolled leisurely round the bend, and a short distance up the lane a remarkable scene was taking place. Dr. Beverley Stokes was talking with a beautifully dressed stranger. But even as the newcomers caught sight of him, the Head abruptly attacked his companion.

He seemed to do so without any provocation. He shook the man, he knocked him down, he kicked him, he picked him up, and he flung him into the ditch. To the girls it looked like an exhibition of sheer, unwarrantable brutality. As for Archie, he was speechless.

He was horrified to see that the Head had all the advantage. This was no mere fight, but a one-sided attack. The Head was nearly double the size of the insignificant little foreigner. For the Chinaman was diminutive in the extreme.

"Oh!" cried Irene indignantly. "What a brute!"

"Eh?" gasped Archie. "Oh, I say—"

"It can't be Dr. Stokes—and yet it is!" panted Marjorie. "Oh, Archie, what does it mean? You told us that Dr. Stokes was such a wonderful sportsman—"

"And, oddslife, so he is!" broke in Archie warmly. "Dash it all, I don't pretend to know what this foul affair means, but I am bally certain that the Head is justified! Absolutely! The Head, let me tell you, is not only true blue, but gilt-edged!"

"Archie!" protested Irene. "How can you?"

"How can I?" repeated Archie vaguely. "Sorry, old girl, but I don't quite follow the trend—"

"How can you stick up for Dr. Stokes after seeing this?" demanded Irene angrily. "Why, I've never seen such an exhibition of atrocious bullying! That poor little man has been terribly treated!"

Without waiting for Archie to make any further comment, the girls raced up, and were just in time to see the muddy, dejected figure of the little Chinaman vanishing through the hedge. The Oriental staggered away across the meadow.

"You brute!" said Irene hotly.

Dr. Stokes turned, his fury leaving him.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, raising his hat.

"How dare you treat the poor little man in that way?" asked Marjorie. "Oh, it was shameful! And all the boys have told us that you were so wonderful, too! You ought to be arrested, Dr. Stokes!"

The Head's eyes twinkled.

"Come, come!" he said gently. "What's all the excitement about, young ladies? I am sorry if I have offended you so much—and if I had been aware of your approach, I might have been more careful."

Irene looked at him scornfully.

"You thought your brutal action was unobserved, didn't you?" she asked, in a biting tone.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I did!" confessed the Head candidly. "But, I say, let me make a slight correction, please. My action wasn't brutal at all, but a highly necessary act of chastisement. I am afraid you are rather prone to jump at conclusions, girls."

"What ho!" said Archie breathlessly. "I say, sir, I am bally certain you had a dashed good reason to wipe up the poor old lad as you did! But these young ladies are somewhat hasty, as you just observed——"

"We're not hasty at all!" denied Irene. "There can't be any excuse, because there can be no justification for such bullying! Good-evening, Dr. Stokes!"

Irene tossed her head, and marched on. But she was pulled back by her chums. And the Head chuckled.

"It grieves me to learn that you have formed such a poor opinion of me," he said, with mock gravity. "But I dare say I shall outlive the ordeal. I am sorry I can't say more."

He raised his hat, and walked off—leaving Irene and Co. hot and flustered. They realised that they had rather overstepped the mark in speaking to Dr. Stokes so bluntly. But his treatment of the Chinaman had been so drastic that their indignation got the better of them.

"There you are!" said Archie. "The dear old Head is absolutely as calm as you like! I mean to say, he must have had a pretty priceless reason for billing into the merchant as he did——"

"Are you trying to defend him?" interrupted Marjorie coldly.

"Rather!" said Archie stontly. "The Head's an absolute top-holer, and—— Here, I say! Just a minute, dear girls——"

But Irene and Co., to Archie's dismay, were walking indignantly away. And it must be confessed that Archie Glenthorne realised the weakness of his own championship.

And he was not only puzzled about the Head's behaviour, but gravely worried, too.

CHAPTER III.

THE HEAD'S PROMISE.



BOB CHRISTINE grunted. "I'm game, of course—and in saying that, I'm speaking for the Monks in general," he said. "But I certainly think that Dodd ought to be left out

of the Ancient House Eleven."

"Dodd left out?" snorted Handforth. "What on earth for?"

"Because he's too hot!" replied Christine. "Look here, Nipper, you want to fix up this inter-House match, and I'm as keen as you are. But we don't want the thing to be a farce, do we?"

"Well, hardly," I smiled.

"Then the only thing you can do is to play a reserve in place of Jerry Dodd," said Christine firmly. "He's an unholy terror, and although I'm proud to play in the same eleven with him in all the big fixtures, I'm dead scared of him in a House match."

Handforth laughed scornfully.

"Then you admit the Ancient House whacks the College House?" he demanded. "You admit that you're afraid of one of our players?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Bob. "Of course I admit it—I'd be a fool if I didn't! Look at the way Jerry Dodd played against the seniors last week! The man's a marvel! And if he plays against the Monks in a House match, the game will be a mere comedy."

"Wait a minute, old man," I said. "It's awfully good of you to hand Jerry these bouquets, but the College House isn't so badly off when it comes to good cricketers. How about yourself, for example?"

"I am no good at batting," said Christine modestly.

"But what about bowling?" I said. "You've been showing wonderful form just recently, my son, and in some ways, you're nearly as good as Jerry. So I don't altogether agree to your proposition."

We were on Little Side, near the practice nets, and we had just fixed up this arrangement for the inter-House match. But Christine firmly maintained his objection to Jerry Dodd—on the ground that the Australian junior was so hot that the College House would start the match under an insuperable handicap.

And while we were talking, Dr. Stokes strolled up. There was now no trace of the Head's recent anger. His drastic treatment of the mysterious Chinaman had, indeed, apparently put him in an unusually good humour.

"I don't agree!" Handforth was saying loudly. "Dodd's in the Ancient House Eleven, and it's like your giddy nerve to bring up a fatheaded objection of this kind!"

"But it'll be too one-sided!" roared Christine, annoyed.

"All right—all the better!" shouted Handforth. "In any case, you're booked for a ghastly licking. My only hat! You silly Monks don't expect to have an earthly chance, do you?"

"Look here——"

"You fatheaded Monk——"

"Here, steady!" laughed the Head, joining us. "I can't allow you boys to squabble like this! Scandalous!" added Dr. Stokes, in a shocked voice. "What's the argument about, anyhow?"

He was quickly informed.

"My dear young duffers, what's all the storm about, then?" asked the Head, at length. "We'll soon settle the point. What do you fellows think of me as a cricketer?"

"We think you're a living wonder, sir!"

"You're one of the keenest players at St. Frank's, sir!"

"You're a genius at the game, sir!"

"Hold on—hold on!" said the Head hastily. "Upon my word! You'll make me blush with all these undeserved compliments! I didn't really mean to ask for praise like that, you know. But I take it that you regard me as a player worth including in a match?"

"Rather, sir!"

"Then it's fixed!" said Dr. Stokes calmly. Jerry Dodd will play for the Ancient House, and I'll turn out for the College House. Perhaps my inclusion in your team, Christine, will level things up a bit, eh?"

"You—you mean it, sir?" asked Bob jubilantly.

"Of course—why not?" said the Head. "Any objections?"

"None, sir—your idea is a very simple way out of the little difficulty," I declared. "I'm afraid we Fossils will have a hard fight, but I'll get Dodd to bowl you out for a duck, sir."

Dr. Stokes grinned.

"Splendid!" he chuckled. "But if I don't put up a better show than that for the College House, I shan't deserve anything better than a swishing!"

And Dr. Stokes, with a nod, strolled off.

Accustomed as we were to his little surprises, it had nevertheless pleased us enormously to see this fresh display of chummy interest. The inclusion of the Head in the match would make it altogether more attractive. And, if anything, the odds were now more in favour of the College House.

"I don't agree to it!" said Handforth firmly. "I object!"

"Why didn't you tell the Head so?" demanded Christine.

"I object!" roared Edward Oswald. "It won't be fair! The Head's a man—he's played for this University—he's scored a century in County cricket! I refuse to play if the Head's included!"

"That's a bit awkward," I said. "Sorry you'll be unable to turn out, Handy. I shall have to play Church in your place."

Handforth stared blankly.

"But I'm playing!" he howled.

"If you're playing, the thing's settled," I grinned. "But I'm the Ancient House skipper, Handy, and if I agree to the Head's proposal, you haven't got a word to say."

Handforth gave us one glare, and stalked off.

CHAPTER IV.

HELPING THE HEAD'S WIFE.



HANDFORTH strode into the Tringle in a huff. In his heart, he was rather pleased that the Head would play in that House match, but he didn't like being thwarted. And he was looking round for Church and McClure, his long-suffering chums.

Whenever Handforth was wild, he always relieved his feelings upon Church and McClure, much to their detriment. But in this instance they had sniffed danger from afar, so to speak, and were safely out of harm's way.

"Oh, dear! How trying!"

The voice was impatient, but quite sweet. And Handforth, glancing round, saw that Mrs. Stokes was standing rather helplessly in front of her neat little two-seater. Nobody else was near by at the moment.

The Head's wife was looking as sweet as over, and she was daintily dressed in tennis costume, with a light dust-coat for motoring. But there was a troubled frown on her brow.

"Anything I can do, ma'am?" asked Handforth gallantly.

"Oh, thank you so much!" said Mrs. Stokes, giving Handforth a smile that won him over on the instant. "But I'm really afraid we can't do anything. The engine won't work at all."

Handforth laughed.

"That all?" he said lightly. "Just leave it to me, ma'am! You go and sit down, and I'll have the motor going in two jiffs! I know a lot about engines!"

"That's simply splendid of you," said Mrs. Stokes. "Why, I'd no idea you were so clever, Handforth."

"Well, you see, I don't boast!" said Handforth modestly. "I'm one of those fellows who know things by instinct, ma'am. Jolly funny, but there it is! I've only got to look at this motor, and I'll locate the trouble in no time."

Handforth was in his element. There was nothing he liked better than airing his skill. And it was particularly gratifying to show off his prowess before a lady. He rolled up his sleeves with a businesslike air, and whisked up the metal bonnet of the car.

"H'm!" he said significantly.

As a matter of fact, the engine was almost a mystery to him, but he felt that he had to say something. And he really believed that he knew quite sufficient about

engines to put his finger on the trouble after a very brief scrutiny.

"Ah, here we are!" he said briskly. "I wouldn't mind betting there's something wrong with the carburetter! Got a small spanner, Mrs. Stokes? It won't take me a tick."

"But that's not the carburetter, Handforth," said Mrs. Stokes gently. "You've got your hand on the dynamo, or whatever it is that makes the electric light."

Handforth removed his hand in confusion. "Oh, rather!" he said hurriedly. "Of course, I meant the dynamo! I suppose you've tried to start the engine?"

"Yes, and it won't fire at all."

led her to believe. But the leader of Study D was so brisk and active that he gave his fair companion no time to criticise.

"Oh! The tank's full, eh?" said Handforth, in no way abashed. "Then I'll tell you what it is, ma'am—the gear-box has gone wrong! The only thing is to crawl under the car and put it right."

Handforth was becoming rather desperate, and to admit himself beaten was not to be dreamed of. And it struck him as rather a good idea to get under the car, so that he would be out of range of Mrs. Stokes's suspicious eye. Handy was sensing that she was losing faith in him.

Apparently he believed the gear-box to be

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Handforth nodded wisely, seized the starting-handle, and yanked it round vigorously. He had apparently overlooked the fact that the car was provided with an electric starter, and that this exertion was quite unnecessary.

After about a minute he desisted, breathless, and with perspiration streaming from him. Cranking up a car on a warm summer evening is no child's play.

"No wonder we can't get a start!" he panted. "There's no petrol!"

"Oh, but there is!" said the Head's wife. "The tank's quite full."

She was beginning to suspect that Handforth wasn't quite such an expert as he had

somewhere near the back axle, judging by the manner in which he wormed under the chassis. And in his haste he was unfortunate enough to rub his face against the oil tray, improving neither. And for some little time he fumbled about, trusting that he might hit upon something by accident.

But all his efforts were useless.

And at last, having received a large blob of oil in his open mouth, he felt that the time had arrived for him to emerge. So he wormed his way out, and sat up.

"Good!" said his younger brother. "So you're alive?"

"Who told you to interfere?" demanded

Handforth thickly, and in an oily kind of way.

Willy grinned. He had, as a matter of fact, strolled up a moment earlier with two or three other heroes of the Third. And now the fags gazed upon Handforth with complete satisfaction.

"We thought you'd got run over, or something!" said Willy. "Of course, there's no accounting for tastes, but when I lie down I prefer a couch!"

"Go away!" roared Handforth violently.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Stokes. "Please don't quarrel, boys—"

Handforth jumped to his feet, and glared round.

"Sorry, ma'am, but how can I do these intricate repairs while these young idiots are cackling at me?" he demanded. "And what is there to laugh at, anyway? I can't see anything funny!"

"You would if you looked into a mirror!" remarked Willy blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of Remove fellows had strolled up now, and Handforth turned red beneath the smears of grease and dirt and oil. He certainly hadn't reckoned upon an audience.

"Perhaps I had better call Dr. Stokes's chauffeur," suggested the Head's wife gently.

"No fear!" panted Handforth. "It's all right, ma'am—I'll have the engine going in next to no time!"

He turned back to the car, and pushed his head right inside the bonnet, and glared about him desperately. In the meantime, his minor and two or three of the other fags criticised him impartially, as though he were not within hearing. It was only Mrs. Stokes's presence that saved Willy from being slaughtered on the spot.

"Anything wrong here?" inquired Archie Glenthorne languidly, as he lounged up. "I sincerely trust there is nothing frightfully amiss? Kindly allow me to shove out the good old assisting fist!"

"Thanks very much, Archie, but Handforth is already helping me," said Mrs. Stokes sweetly. "The silly engine won't start, for some reason, and we're just putting it right."

"If it goes after Ted's done with it, ma'am, that engine must be enchanted!" remarked Willy. "He repaired my watch once, and by the time he'd done, the works rattled like castanets!"

Handforth withdrew himself, all patience at an end.

"Have I got to stand this?" he asked, appealing to the heavens.

"What-ho!" observed Archie. "I say, dash it! Oddslife, old gargoyle, but the countenance is somewhat besmeared! I mean to say, you're looking absolutely streaky, if I may say so!"

"I didn't ask you to say anything!" howled Handforth.

He jerked Archie's handkerchief out of his

pocket, and wiped his face—Archie looking on with a kind of fascinated horror. But he was too well-mannered to protest.

Instead, he bent down, and peered at the engine.

Archie knew more about motor-cars than the juniors suspected. But the trouble here was absurdly simple. An ignition wire was loose, having become detached from the magneto. Without even soiling his delicate fingers, Archie connected up the wire.

"All serene now, Mrs. Stokes," he said blandly.

The Head's wife jumped in, depressed the electric starter, and the engine purred musically. And Handforth clutched at the air for support, while the audience yelled with laughter.

And after Mrs. Stokes had driven serenely out of the Triangle, the juniors airily let themselves go. But, curiously enough, Handforth quite failed to see the joke.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCREAM FROM THE TRIANGLE.



BEDTIME in the Remove dormitory was usually the occasion for a general chat. And on this particular evening the chief subject of conversation was a letter that had just arrived from Reginald Pitt.

Pitt and Grey were away—in Central Africa, to be exact. And Reggie was faithfully keeping his promise, and was sending regular batches of his diary for publication in the St. Frank's Magazine.

"They're getting almost beyond the limits of civilisation now," I remarked. "And this batch of stuff is particularly interesting, because the expedition is getting into the cannibal country."

"It strikes me this exploring game can be carried a step too far," said Tommy Watson. "What's the good of going among cannibals? For all we know, the poor chaps are eaten by this time!"

"Well, they can't say I didn't warn 'em!" said Handforth, as he got into bed. "I distinctly told Pitt it was a mug's game, and I advised him not to go to Africa at all!"

We grinned. Handforth's memory was rather faulty. As a matter of fact, he had been green with jealousy because Pitt and Grey had gone off on the tropical trip. But it was no good bringing up an argument—Handforth was too ready to carry on with it.

Even as it was, the discussion went on until ten o'clock, but after this hour the fellows began to drop off to sleep. And by ten-fifteen the dormitory was quiet. The last lingering rays of daylight were still in the western sky.

I didn't go to sleep at first. Archie had told me, in confidence, of what had happened in the lane, and I knew Archie well enough to be assured that he had not exaggerated. And that account of Dr. Stokes's brutal treatment of the Chinaman was disconcerting.

In all his dealings with the juniors the Head had proved himself to be a real sportsman. Could it be possible that he had another side to his character? Was he a bully when the mood took him? I couldn't help remembering, with an uncomfortable start, that Teddy Long had circulated a strange story a few days earlier. According to Teddy, he had seen the Head ill-treating his wife. Nobody credited the yarn, and Teddy was severely dealt with for telling such lies. And this was rather hard lines on Long—for, in all truth, the incident had really happened.

I told myself at length that there was nothing in the suspicion, and I settled myself for sleep. I was soon slumbering soundly, and the whole Remove dormitory was quiet.

But at eleven o'clock Alf Brent suddenly awakened. He had been dreaming—he had, in fact, had a nightmare, in which all his efforts to post an enormous letter were in vain. The letter had been small at first, but it had grown larger and larger, until it was as big and heavy as a great slab of paving-stone. And Alf had staggered about with his burden until he awoke with a mighty start.

And after a few moments he knew why he had dreamed of a letter. He remembered, with a jerk, that his study mate had given him a letter to post that evening—and Alf had forgotten all about it!

He sat up in bed, rather worried. Archie had positively declared that the letter was vitally urgent, and it was most imperative that it should be sent by the evening post.

"My hat! And I completely forgot the thing!" muttered Brent. "What a rotten memory! That's the worst of putting a letter in your pocket! It's too late now, anyhow."

But this didn't console Alf. His conscience pricked him. And at length he slipped out of bed, padded softly to the door, and slipped down the corridor towards Archie's bedroom—the elegant junior having the luxury of private sleeping quarters. Brent shook Archie's shoulder vigorously.

"Absolutely not!" mumbled Archie. "It's no good, old boy—I positively refuse to venture forth clothed in a bally chunk of sacking—Eh? What the—Hallo, hallo! Alf, by gad!"

"Wake up, you chump!" whispered Brent.

"Rather!" said Archie, sitting up in bed and gazing at his disturber in the faint moonlight. "Dash it all, old lad, what's the

enormous scheme? I mean, it's a long time from dawn, and I might mention that you aroused me out of a pretty foul dream. Handforth was absolutely pushing me out upon the public gaze attired in a bally sack—"

"Never mind your dream now," said Alf. "I'm worried, Archie. You know that letter you gave me to post?"

"Who, me?" asked Archie vaguely.

"Yes."

"Did I?"

"Of course you did, you duffer!"

"Oh, well, if you say so, I suppose it must be a fact!" murmured Archie. "But, candidly, old gargoyle, I haven't the faintest recollection."

Alf looked at him indignantly.

"No recollection!" he snorted. "And I worried so much that I had a beastly nightmare. I got up especially to come and ask you about that letter!"

"Good gad!" gasped Archie, suddenly sitting bolt upright. "The letter, what? My dear old laddie, it all comes back! You don't mean to absolutely tell me that you forgot the thing?"

"Yes; I kept it in my pocket by mistake."

Archie sank back with a groan.

"Then, dash it, I'm undone!" he said feebly. "This, if I may say so, is the end of all things. I don't revile you, dear old boy, but you have wounded me deeply."

"I'm awfully sorry the letter was so important—"

"It was vital!" groaned Archie. "In fact, everything depended upon that letter. It's useless, Alf—you can't console me. Nothing on earth matters now, dash it!"

Brent was duly penitent.

"I suppose it was to your people?" he asked gently.

"My people?" repeated Archie. "Odds-life! What gave you such a frightfully ridie. idea? My dear old blighter, that letter was a bally important order to my tailor!"

"Your tailor!" gasped Alf, reeling.

"Absolutely!"

"Dash it! There's really no need to jump down the old throttle department, laddie," protested Archie. "I'm dashed if I know what Phipps will say to-morrow. Two suits, don't you know—a grey one and—"

"Blow your giddy suits!" snorted Alf warmly. "I might have known! You—you giddy dummy! You fatheaded josser! You tailor's last hope! You dithering lunatic!"

Archie was horrified.

"I mean to say, what?" he murmured. "Really, Alf, old dear, your vocabulary is foully personal. And I must be allowed to remark that it's a bit on the jagged side for a cove to come here in the middle of the night and bally-well insult me after for-

getting to post my letter! I mean, it strikes the old bean as being somewhat mouldy."

"Good!" said Alf with relish.

"In fact, not only mouldy, but positively putrid!" went on Archie. "I'm an easy-going blighter, but, dash it, there's a limit! Kindly retire from the old bed-chamber, you painful disturber of the peace, and allow me a few hours in which to recover."

Alf's quick anger left him, and he chuckled.

"You'll be the death of me one of these days, you funny fathead!" he said candidly. "All right, Archie—I'll go! But I'm blessed if I shall worry any more!"

CHAPTER VI.

VERY MYSTERIOUS.



"WELL, I'm jiggered!" murmured Alf Brent.

He stood there, watching, momentarily astounded. His first impulse was to shout for help; his

second impulse to rush down and go to the Head's assistance.

But he obeyed neither.

For he saw something else that startled him ten times as much. By this time Archie Glenthorne had leapt out of bed,



The Head bent over his victim, lifted him bodily as though he were a sack of rubbish, and pitched him with a strenuous heave into the ditch.

"I shall send Phipps to London," said Archie firmly. "I shall shove the old lad off by the first bally train, and—"

Archie broke off abruptly, for a strange sound floated in through the open window from the Triangle. It was a kind of scream—half smothered at the outset.

And the two juniors in the bed-room had a vague impression that the scream had been preceded by a quick run of footsteps and a scuffle. Alf Brent went quickly to the window and glanced out.

It was faint moonlight, and just below Dr. Beverley Stokes was struggling with somebody.

and was by his chum's side. The pair were looking straight down upon the remarkable struggle. But Dr. Stokes was totally unaware that there were witnesses.

"What's up?" breathed Archie. "Burglars, what?"

"Shssssh! It's the Head!" whispered Alf, clutching his companion's arm. "He's having a row with Mrs. Stokes!"

"What!" breathed Archie faintly.

"Look! Can't you see? I tell you—"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie, with a start.

"Impossible, laddie!"

But now that his attention had been concentrated by Alf's words he could see

that the other figure was that of a woman. Even without his famous monocle Archie recognised the form of Mrs. Stokes.

And, in any case, recognition was not even necessary, for the voice of the Head's wife came clearly up to the two juniors.

"Let me go—let me go!" she was panting breathlessly. "Oh, Barry! Why don't you let me go?"

"For Heaven's sake keep quiet!" came the Head's voice, tense and strained. "Do you want the whole school to know of this?"

"You won't keep me here—you shan't!" said Mrs. Stokes, her voice rising with anger and anxiety. "Let me go, Barry!"

But the Head apparently held his wife even more securely than before, for the two juniors could see them still struggling. The moonlight was just strong enough to make the two figures stand out.

And finally Dr. Stokes lost all patience, and he lifted his wife bodily and carried her swiftly away towards his own house. She kicked and struggled, and even screamed slightly. And Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent stood at the window until the two figures had vanished, and until the last sounds had died away.

Archie turned back into the room and carefully pulled the curtains.

"How absolutely ghastly!" he said huskily.

"I can't understand it!" muttered Brent. "The Head's such a brick, you know—and Mrs. Stokes has always been so fine, too! I never dreamed that they were like this!"

"It's dashed disturbing, old thingummy, that's what it is—dashed disturbing!" said Archie, deeply distressed. "I mean to say, it's shoved us into a simply horrid posish, if you know what I mean. Watchers in the dark; eavesdroppers, and all that sort of thing!"

"Oh, don't be silly!" said Archie.

"I feel like a bally spy," declared Archie, sitting on the edge of the bed and pulling his dressing-gown round him. "If the other chappies get to know of what happened the whole dashed school will ring with the affair. And that would be foul!"

"There's no reason why the story should get any farther—we'll keep it to ourselves," said Alf. "Not that we're obliged to," he added thoughtfully.

"What on earth do you mean, old dear?"

"Well, I'm not altogether sure that we ought to hush up the Head's beastly behaviour," said Brent. "It's all very well to say he's a good sort, and a brick, but to-night's business puts a different complexion on his character."

"Oh, I say!"

"Well, don't you think so?" demanded Alf, point-blank.

"The fact is, Alf, my dear old sausage, I'm not absolutely sure," said Archie cautiously. "What I mean is, it hardly seems the thing to judge the Head by a trifling incident—"

"That won't do, Archie, and you know it!" growled Brent. "It wasn't a trifling incident in the first place, and in the second place, it's far easier to judge him by what we saw to-night than to judge him by his previous actions."

"I must confess, laddie, that I don't follow."

Alf grunted.

"Whenever you're getting the worst of an argument, Archie, you pretend to be dull," he said grimly. "It's a good thing I know you!"

"Oh, really—I mean—"

"In public the Head's everything that could be desired—cheery, genial, and a sportsman to the finger-tips," went on Brent. "In other words, he's made himself tremendously popular since he's been at St. Frank's. But when you come to consider it, how much do we know about his private life?"

"His private life?"

"Yes."

"Whose, the Head's?"

"Yes, fathead, of course!" snapped Alf.

"Well, old dear, practically nothing," admitted Archie. "I mean, when it comes to the Head's private life, it isn't exactly, if you follow me, his public life. Therefore, it's really a dashed impertinence for us to talk about these intimate affairs at all!"

"You've got too many scruples!" growled Alf impatiently. "You know as well as I do that the Head was treating his wife rottenly. Didn't we see it? Didn't we hear?"

"Oh, rather! That is, we saw something—"

"We saw Dr. Stokes struggling with his wife—keeping her back by sheer force!" snapped Alf. "We saw him carry her indoors, struggling and screaming. Is that what you call being decent?"

"Absolutely not!" confessed Archie, more distressed than ever. "But we don't know the precise facts, old lad. I mean, Mrs. Stokes may have wanted to go out to order a new hat, or something, or perhaps to invite her mother down— By gad! I'll bet that's it!" said Archie firmly. "The Head was so startled at the ghastly prospect of having his mother-in-law here that he positively laid hands on the fair thing!"

Alf gave Archie a violent push.

"I'm fed-up with you!" he exclaimed angrily. "All you can do is to make fatheaded excuses. What about this evening?"

"This evening?" repeated Archie vaguely.

"Yes. Didn't you tell me about the Head and that poor chap in the lane?" demanded Alf. "Without any provocation, Dr. Stokes knocked the fellow down, kicked him, and threw him in the ditch!"

Archie scratched his head.

"I'm compelled to acknowledge, old sandwich, that the whole position is somewhat

noisome!" he remarked. "I mean to say, on the face of things the Head has acted like a poisonous blighter. And it would be a frightful disappointment if he turned out to be a cad and a brute, what?"

"Oh, well, it's no good talking all night!" said Brent, preparing to go. "We don't know all the facts, so we'll give the Head the benefit of the doubt. And I'm going back to bed."

"A brainy proposition," said Archie stoutly. "But, dash it, I'm afraid I shan't have any more slumber to-night, old boy! I'll dashed well have a shot at wooing the good old forty winks, but a wave of pessimism whispers that I shall have a foul night."

He crawled into bed, and Alf went back to the Remove dormitory. And Brent was very worried. He liked the Head immensely, in common with all the other fellows, but he found it impossible to dismiss the feeling that Dr. Beverley Stokes was not all that he seemed to be.

And Brent felt hurt. It was such a disappointment to find that all was not as the school imagined. Happily, he and Archie were the only ones who knew of this midnight incident—and they would rigidly keep the secret to themselves.

But Alf was just a little too optimistic.

CHAPTER VII.

BROKE TO THE WIDE.



MR. MIKE BRADMORE grinned amiably.

"Sorry, kid; but your three kings don't stand a chance against my little bunch of aces," he observed, with a laugh.

"Thanks! Better luck next time, mebbe."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood breathed hard as thirty shillings in good money vanished from before his eyes. The rascal of the Remove was dimly aware of a turmoil within him, and he was feeling shaky and unsteady.

It was merely the after effect of the recent high bidding in which Fullwood had deemed himself the certain winner. And to suddenly find that his own cards were inferior to Mr. Bradmore's had left Ralph Leslie with a peculiarly sinking sensation within him.

The hour was late, and the little back parlour of the White Hart Inn, on the outskirts of Bellton, was very cheery. It was, of course, long after closing time, and the village was asleep. All the respectable folks were in bed.

But Mr. Porlock, the landlord of the White Hart, had no particular reputation to live up to. He was known as a fairly shady character, and it was nothing unusual for him to entertain a little party after the tap-room was closed.

Mr. Porlock was a bookmaker in his own

way, too, and the majority of his friends were questionable individuals connected with betting and the turf. Mike Bradmore, for example, was a particularly disreputable fellow, having served a term of imprisonment only a month or so earlier.

But Mike, having a thick skin, had returned to his old haunts, and was just as bold and impudent as ever. He knew Fullwood well, having rooked that junior of many a dishonest pound.

"Caught you that time, Mr. Fullwood," grinned the landlord, as he shuffled the cards. "Blowed if I thought you had three aces, Mike! Wish I could get a hand like that!"

"There was something jolly queer about that hand," said Fullwood, with a nasty inflection in his voice.

"What do you mean, queer?" demanded Bradmore sharply.

"Oh, nothin'!"

"If you're hinting that I cheated, you young swab, I'll—"

"Steady, Mike!" said Mr. Porlock hastily. "The kid didn't mean no insults. Did you, Master Fullwood?" he added.

"No!" said Fullwood sourly.

He picked up his cards, and examined them. But for the landlord's intervention he might have voiced what was in his mind—that Mike had had only two aces to begin with, and had introduced a third by certain sleight of hand methods which were only too well known to him.

And so the game proceeded without a flare up. Fullwood was under no misapprehension regarding his companions. They were quite capable of cheating right and left. And this made it all the more astonishing that the junior should so rashly risk his money.

But the explanation lay in the simple fact that Fullwood suffered from an exaggerated idea of his own cleverness. He deemed himself quite capable of detecting any attempt to cheat; he was so certain of his own smartness that he believed the others were afraid of him.

In addition to Mike Bradmore and the landlord there was a third man—the potman from the George Tavern, to be exact. And the party was quite a convivial one.

Fullwood rather fancied himself at playing poker, and for some little time had been winning steadily. But then a run of bad luck had set in, and his pile of winnings had vanished, and his own money was following it along the same crooked lane.

His eyes glinted as he observed that he had a pair of jacks. His other cards were useless, so he threw them in, receiving three new ones in exchange. He was overjoyed when he found that one was the joker, and the other two a pair of fours.

"By gad! A full house!" breathed Fullwood to himself.

He sat back in his chair, apparently indifferent. Here was a chance to get back everything he had lost—and over! Unfor-

tunately, the other three players had wretched hands, and threw in.

"Here, wait a minute!" gasped Fullwood frantically.

"Your deal, Mike," said Mr. Porlock.

"Look here, that's rotten!" shouted Fullwood fiercely. "I've got a full house here!"

"Hard lines!" grinned Mr. Bradmore. "If there's one thing makes me cuss more than another, it's when I've got a good 'and, an' everybody chucks in! Well, you've got the opening money, anyway—so you needn't grumble."

Fullwood snorted with disgust as he raked in the miserable coppers from the centre of the table. And this was all he got for a fine hand like that! He continued the game in a sulky mood.

He was beginning to feel that he had been a fool to drop in at the White Hart at all. But he had been unable to resist the temptation, and he swore that he'd get his money back before he left.

Fullwood had had rather an interesting evening.

One of his uncles had arrived unexpectedly—a boisterous gentleman who had had business in Bannington, and who had come to give his nephew a good time. There was no doubt about the excellent intentions of Fullwood's uncle.

He had obtained a pass for Fullwood to be out extra late, and had carried the junior off into Bannington, and they had partaken of an excellent meal in the Japanese Café. Furthermore, Fullwood's uncle had handed over a crisp five-pound note.

Soon after this he proposed a visit to the cinema, which Fullwood hailed with joy openly; but, within him, he was dismayed. He didn't relish the thought of spending the whole evening with the gentleman.

He had been lucky enough to meet one of the Bannington Grammar School boys—while his uncle was popping into a garage, to give some instructions regarding his car. And when Fullwood's uncle emerged, he learned from the Grammar School junior that a rather nasty accident had happened, and Fullwood was urgently required.

And so Ralph Leslie managed to escape—caring little whether his uncle discovered the truth later. He had the satisfaction of seeing his relative depart at once.

And Fullwood thought of the White Hart and the crisp fiver in his pocket. He saw no reason why he shouldn't double it, and thus have a clear tenner in his pocket for the purpose of a few bets during the week.

Unfortunately, Fullwood's scheme had gone a bit wrong.

The fiver, instead of being doubled, was now reduced to three pounds and a few odd shillings. And so he played recklessly, hoping against hope that his luck would turn. And he argued that the only way in which he could recover his losses was to go "all out."

He had a great and glorious half-hour.

And, certainly, some excellent hands were

dealt him. Again and again he indulged in heavy bidding, feeling that his cards justified big money. But in every case his opponents had better hands. It was exasperating to a degree.

If Fullwood had two kings and two queens, Mr. Porlock would have two aces and two tens; if Fullwood had three jacks, Mike Bradmore would blandly reveal three queens. And so on.

And at last, when the hour was not far from midnight, Fullwood's fiver was a fiver no longer, but a myth. In addition, his own supply of cash had gone with it.

"Care to keep on, young gent, or must you be going?" asked the landlord genially. "By the way, you'll be owing me a little matter of two shillings for cigarettes—"

"Confound your two shillings!" snapped Fullwood. "I've lost over six quid!"

"It's all in the game," said Bradmore smilingly.

"Well, look here, give me another ten minutes—to get some of it back!" growled Fullwood. "You're sportsmen, I suppose?"

"You bet we are!" said Mike, nodding. "You deal, Jonas."

The landlord nodded, and dealt the cards. But if Fullwood hoped to improve his position, he was disappointed. He might have known, from past experience, that he was merely flying in the face of danger to continue playing when he had no money.

The result, indeed, was inevitable.

Without the actual cash before him, he was singularly reckless—a disappointed gambler generally is when he's trying to recover lost money. And Fullwood was startled when he realised that he now owed Mike Bradmore the sum of three pounds and four shillings.

And Mike put his foot down firmly.

"It's no good, kid—your luck's dead out," he said finally. "If you keep on like this, you'll get worse and worse. I tell you what I'll do—I'll cut out the four bob, and you can write me an I.O.U. for three quid."

"An I.O.U.?" repeated Fullwood gruffly. "Can't you trust my word?"

"Business," said Mr. Bradmore, "is business."

"This isn't business!" snapped Fullwood.

"Mebbe not—but it's a debt of honour," persisted the other. "And you know as well as I do that between gents an I.O.U. is always the correct thing. Come on—don't waste time over it."

"You'd best do it, Master Fullwood," said the landlord. "I don't allow no tricky business in my house! Unless you act like a gentleman, I won't open my doors to you no more!"

Fullwood muttered an exclamation, and scrawled out the I.O.U.

"Thanks!" said Mike Bradmore, tucking it in his waistcoat pocket. "I'll give you until the end of the week to pay me back."

"I don't promise anything," said Fullwood scurly.

"That's awkward," said Mr. Bradmore, "because if you don't dub up at the end of the week, I shan't have no other course but to come up to the school, and show this bit o' paper to your Headmaster!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT FULLWOOD SAW.



"CONFOUND him—the infernal beast!"

Fullwood murmured the words with vicious hatred as he trudged disconsolately up the lane towards St. Frank's. And the object of his vituperation was Mr. Mike Bradmore.

Fullwood had had a most unfortunate evening.

In fact, he couldn't remember one that had been quite so bad as this. Over six pounds in cash gone, and three pounds in debt! It was alarming—it was positively staggering when he thought of it.

"How the dickens am I going to pay the beast three quid at the end of the week?" he muttered savagely. "Gulliver and Bell are nearly broke, an' I can't get any money on to-morrow's races, either! Hang it! Every darned thing's gone wrong!"

He didn't think of blaming himself for his present unhappy position. He seemed to imagine that he was the victim of a plot, and completely ignored the fact that he was the master of his own actions.

And he was greatly worried about Bradmore.

He didn't actually believe that Mike would be fool enough to approach the Head, but the man could certainly make things decidedly unpleasant. And Fullwood racked his brain for some solution to the problem.

He also had to think of a plausible excuse for being late. This, however, was a minor matter to a fellow of his inventive ingenuity. He had the good excuse of his uncle, and it would be easy enough to coolly explain that they had gone for a ride, and that something had happened to the car. And, anyhow, he had his pass.

But it was just a little after midnight, and Fullwood was hoping that he would be able to get in on the quiet—and leave explanations until the morning. They would be much easier then, for he would blandly declare, in answer to inquiries, that he had arrived home between ten and eleven.

He cautiously slipped over the Triangle wall, concealed by the trees. And he was just about to step forward into the clear moonlight when he came to an abrupt halt and caught his breath in.

Two figures were visible, apparently struggling.

In short, Ralph Leslie Fullwood witnessed precisely the same incident as Archie Glen-thorne and Alf Brent. Fullwood didn't know

it, but at that very minute the other two juniors were gazing down from the security of Archie's window.

It was soon over.

Fullwood, absolutely concealed in the shadows, gazed in blank astonishment as he saw the Head lift Mrs. Stokes from her feet and carry her swiftly indoors. Fullwood's curiosity was aroused, and he changed his plans.

Instead of going straight in, he worked his way along the wall until, finally, he was crouching beneath the window of the Head's drawing-room. This was the only window with a light behind it.

Fullwood was not observed by a soul. Archie and Alf had withdrawn their heads long since. And the rest of the school was silent and peaceful.

Fullwood could hear a murmur of voices coming from the room. But as the window was securely closed, he could not distinguish the words. The curtains were drawn, but there was one little opening through which a watcher could see.

And he cautiously raised himself and peeped through the curtains. He could just see the figure of Mrs. Stokes sitting on the couch. She was in a light summer evening dress, but somewhat dishevelled. Her hair was disordered, and her cheeks were wet with tears.

The Head's wife, usually so pretty and attractive, was now sobbing convulsively, and at swift intervals Dr. Stokes passed to and fro on the other side of the curtains.

It was clear to Fullwood that the Head was pacing up and down, and he was talking violently, too, by the sound of his voice.

Indeed, on one occasion Dr. Stokes paused and bent over his wife, talking rapidly and with considerable vehemence. The Head's usual cheerful expression was conspicuous by its absence. He was now haggard, strained, and in a state of considerable nervous excitement. To Fullwood it seemed as though the Head were furiously angry.

And once the Head seized Mrs. Stokes by the shoulder and shook her roughly. But she only cried even more pitifully than before, and it was perfectly obvious that the Head's words were bitter and lashing.

"The beast!" muttered Fullwood, not without relish. "I always knew he was a rotten fraud!"

It annoyed him exceedingly because he couldn't hear a word. He strained his ears to no purpose. The windows were soundly made, and only an indistinguishable mumble came out to the listener's ears.

At last, Mrs. Stokes rose to her feet on a sudden impulse, and fled from the room. And the Head hurried after her, switching off the light. So Fullwood crept cautiously to the Ancient House, and succeeded in getting inside without attracting attention.

A few minutes later he reached the dormitory and slipped in. It only took him a brief space of time to undress and get into bed. But the springs made a slight noise,

and the fellow in the next bed sat up with a start.

"That you, Fully?" he breathed.

"Yes! Shut up!"

"I say, you're jolly late, ain't you?"

"Go to sleep!" growled Fullwood.

"You ass, it's after midnight!" whispered Gulliver. "Bell and I have been anxious about you. We kept awake for hours, an' I was only just dozin' off even now."

"Pity you didn't sleep properly!" snapped Fullwood. "I didn't ask you to keep awake, did I? Like your cheek to worry about me! Think I'm a kid, that I can't look after myself?"

Gulliver looked at his leader closely in the dim light.

"You're a bit snappy, ain't you?" he asked. "What's bltin' you, old man? Did you have a row with your giddy uncle?"

"Mind your own business!" said Fullwood tartly. "It's a pity you fellows can't look after your own affairs, instead of buttin' into things that don't concern you! Go to sleep before I chuck a boot at your head!"

Gulliver grunted.

"Well, you're a nice chap!" he grumbled. "It's the last time we'll worry about you, I can tell you! After losin' all this sleep, you come here like a bear with a sore head! I'll bet you've been gamblin', an' you've lost all your cash!"

"Confound you, can't you keep quiet?" snarled Fullwood.

"Ha! So that touched you on the raw, did it?" jeered Gulliver. "I knew I was right! Well, you needn't expect to borrow anythin' from me—because I'm down to my last five bob!"

And Gulliver went to sleep, secretly pleased at the misfortunes of his leader. The chums of Study A were rather strangely constituted. They generally rejoiced over one another's troubles. There was no real affection among the trio.

Fullwood didn't go to sleep immediately. He lay in bed, thinking over an idea that had come to him—an idea that he wouldn't even confide to his own intimate pals.

This secrecy on his part was not entirely because he distrusted them, but because his newly formulated scheme was so unutterably despicable that he couldn't even tell his unscrupulous study mates.

And the keynote of it was cash. By hook or by crook, he had to have three pounds, or over, within the next day or two!

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING WRONG.



"GOOD-MORNING, sir!" said De Valerie smilingly.

Dr. Beverley Stokes walked straight past the junior without even noticing him—without taking the slightest heed of his cheery greeting. And this, to say the least, was unusual.

De Valerie had been one of the first down, and the morning was bright and sunny—a typical June day. And De Valerie gazed down the Ancient House lobby at the Head's disappearing figure.

"Rumny!" murmured De Valerie, puzzled.

As a general rule, the Head was all smiles and cheeriness in the early morning. It was his habit to greet the fellows with a hearty word, a joke, or some facetious reference to the weather.

But this morning the Head was a changed man.

Cecil De Valerie had noticed it at once. Dr. Stokes was wearing an expression of deep abstraction, and he appeared to be walking like a man who had the worries of the world on his shoulders.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Handforth boisterously.

The chums of Study D halted in the passage as the Head came striding towards them. All three juniors raised their caps. In this instance, it was impossible for Dr. Stokes to go by without noticing them—for the passage was blocked.

"Don't take up all the room, boys!" snapped the Head irritably.

He pushed past roughly, his face looking quite savage for a moment. And the chums of Study D stared after him blankly, and then stared at one another.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth.

"Didn't even say 'Good-morning!'" exclaimed Church.

"And nearly knocked me over!" added McClure. "I say, there's something wrong! Did you twig his face?"

"Rather!" said Church. "He's as wild as a giddy savage!"

"Rubbish!" said Handforth. "He was just a bit thoughtful—that's all. There's nothing much wrong, and I bet he'll be all right by breakfast-time. Somebody's been cheeking him, perhaps."

"Well, you're a fine chap to call yourself an amateur detective!" said Church scornfully. "Didn't you notice the Head's haggard look?"

"His what?"

"Didn't you see that he's pale and ill?" went on Church. "Why, he's got great bags under his eyes—and I wouldn't mind betting he hasn't had a wink of sleep. He's had some bad news, or something; he doesn't look the same chap as he did yesterday."

Church's description of the Head was an accurate one, and Handforth realised it. But he wouldn't admit that he had failed to see these signs in the first instance.

"Oh, of course, I saw all that!" he said carelessly. "You don't think I'm blind, I suppose? But these headmasters get worried over trifles, you know. I shouldn't make too much of it. As far as I'm concerned, I dismiss the matter."

Armstrong came along the passage, looking excited.

"I say, you chaps, what's wrong with the Head?" he asked. "I spoke to him just now, and he nearly bit my giddy head off! He looked so pale and drawn, too! I hope he isn't ill."

Handforth nodded gravely.

"Ill?" he repeated. "You fathead! If the Head was only ill it wouldn't matter! Being a bit of a detective, it's easy enough for me to form a hypothesis of these cases. Did you notice the bags under the Head's eyes? I deduce from that that he hasn't had any sleep!"

"My hat!" said Church faintly.

"I believe you're right!" agreed Armstrong, failing to understand the highly concentrated expression which Church bent upon his leader. "That's a pretty keen deduction, of course, Handy."

Edward Oswald waved his hand.

"Oh, it's nothing to me," he said casually. "And I don't mind telling you that I shall make it my business to find out the exact trouble, and put things right! The Head's worried and half off his head with anxiety. So I'm going to investigate the case and put everything in order."

"Better steer clear of it!" advised Armstrong, walking off.

"I thought you said you were going to dismiss the whole matter?" asked McClure pointedly.

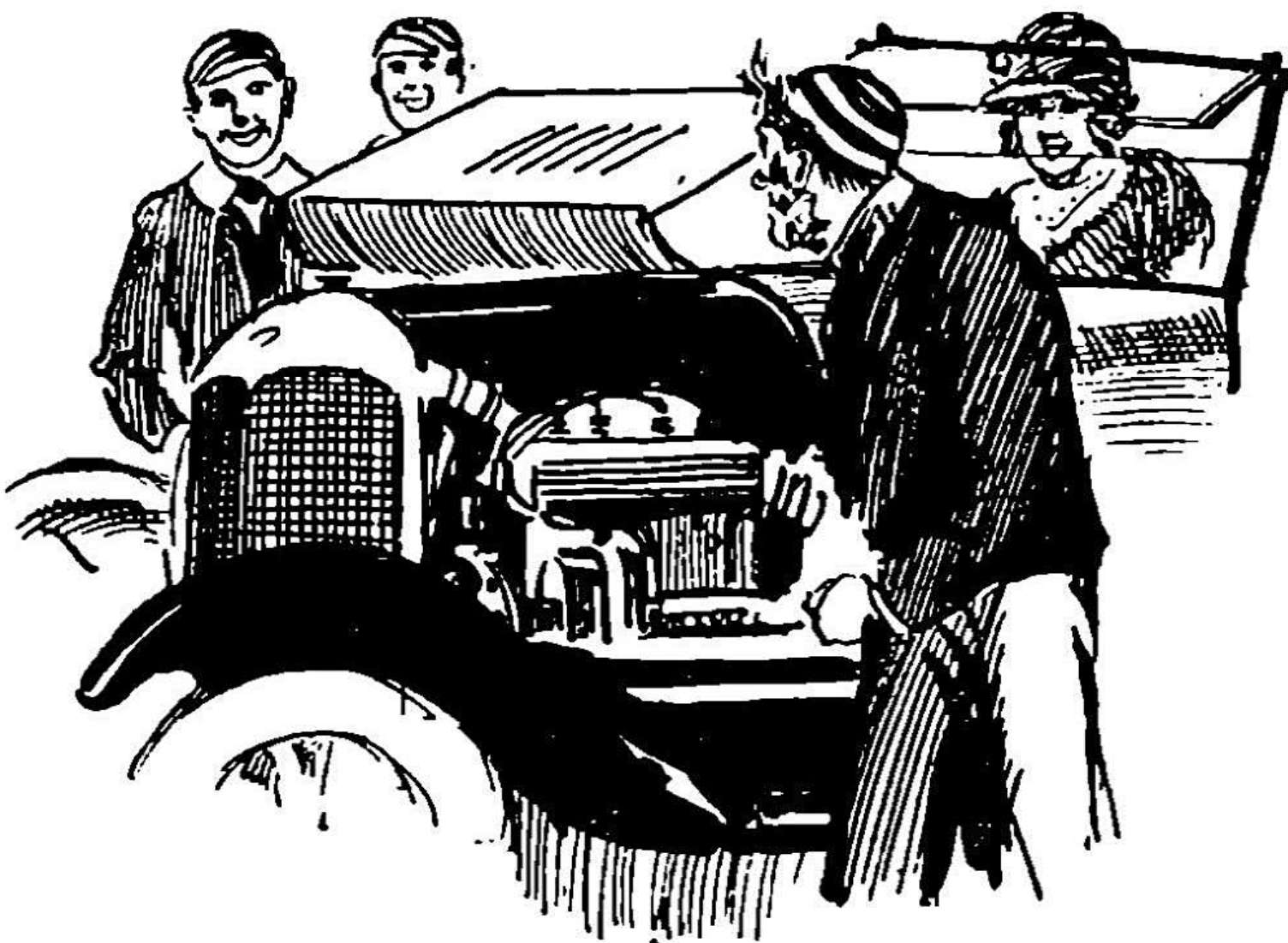
"Eh?" said Handforth. "Oh, that was only a figure of speech! We can't have the Head going about looking like an animated ghost! Leave this to me, and he'll soon be O.K."

The juniors were not the only ones who were struck by the extraordinary change in Dr. Stokes. Everybody detected the same difference. The Head's bubbling good humour had gone, and in its stead he was moody, absent-minded and irritable.

Fortunately for Handforth, he had no opportunity of putting his "investigation" into practice. And then morning lessons intervened, and the Head was forgotten.

But at mid-day the fellows found that Dr. Stokes was just the same.

He was only seen by three or four juniors for a brief spell, and they all reported that he was worse than ever, and entirely unlike his usual self. And yet he was not actually



"If it goes after Ted's done with it, that engine must be enchanted!" remarked Willy. Handforth withdrew himself, his face black with oil. "Have I got to stand this?" he asked.

nasty. His irritability seemed to be caused mainly by intense and acute worry.

It was noted, too, that Mrs. Stokes had failed to appear. Nobody had seen a sign of her to-day, and her non-appearance gave rise to further rumours. It was suggested by many fellows that Mr. and Mrs. Stokes had had a tiff.

Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent were not so puzzled as the others. Having seen that incident the previous night, they regarded the Head's change as quite in keeping with that scene.

Fullwood, too, was equally enlightened. But Fullwood didn't say a word to his chums. He was still thinking over that idea of his—an idea which he was half afraid to put into practice.

It was half-holiday, and the inter-House match was on the programme for the afternoon. But when the time came for starting the game, Dr. Stokes failed to put in an appearance.

"Dash it all, he can't have forgotten it!" protested Bob Christine, as he and I held a short consultation. "He promised to play for us, and he wouldn't fail on a thing like this!"

"Well, hardly," I said. "He'll turn up soon."

But we waited for a further five minutes, and by this time the rest of the cricketers were getting impatient. Handforth suggested that we should start the game without further delay.

But the Monks were firm.

"Not likely!" declared Boots. "The Head's promised to play for the College

Horse, and he's got to play! Besides, the game will be too one-sided if he doesn't turn out for us. We haven't got any miraculous players like Jerry Dodd."

"I'm glad you admit we're top house!" said Handforth.

"You needn't boast; it was only by a fluke that Dodd went into your mouldy old barn!" said Christine tartly.

"Our what?" roared Handforth.

"For goodness' sake, don't have a row!" I broke in. "What on earth's the good of--- Why, hallo! I say, the Head's just going out, by the look of it!"

"Going out!" shouted Christine, in alarm.

I pointed over to the Triangle, and everybody saw that Dr. Stokes was just in the act of stepping into his car. And he was attired in ordinary clothing, and had obviously forgotten his engagement. And this after he had made the promise so definite! Christine and Co. rushed across to the Triangle, and surrounded the car before it could get moving.

"Now then, boys, don't bother now!" said Dr. Stokes, looking impatient and angry.

"Don't get in the way—"

"What about the match, sir?" asked Christine anxiously.

"The match?"

"You promised to play for us this afternoon, sir," shouted half a dozen Monks.

Dr. Stokes started, and muttered something under his breath.

"We've been waiting for you for ten minutes, sir," hinted Christine.

"I'm awfully sorry, you fellows," said the Head, with a slight return of his usual manner. "I completely forgot your cricket match! I was just starting out for Bannington."

"Aren't you going to play for us, sir?" asked the Monks.

"A promise is a promise, boys," replied the Head quietly. "Certainly I will play. And please forgive me for being so inexcusably careless. Just give me five minutes to change, and I'll be with you."

CHAPTER X.

NOT QUITE A SUCCESS!



BOB CHRISTINE smiled with satisfaction.

"Good man!" he said approvingly.

"Somehow I thought the Head wouldn't let us down like that! But fancy him forgetting! Blessed if I can understand it!"

"The poor chap looked drawn and haggard with worry," said Buster Boots. "And he wanted to go out, too. I'm not sure that we oughtn't to release him from that promise."

"No fear!" said Christine firmly. "He's too valuable. We've seen him play, and we know what a marvel he is. He's not only a ripping bowler, but a glorious batsman.

But I must say it's decent of him to turn out, after all."

The Head soon appeared, attired in flannels. And he did his utmost to throw off his worry and join into the spirit of the game with the juniors.

"We hope there's nothing wrong, sir?" said Boots respectfully. "You're looking awfully worried, you know—"

"Am I?" interrupted the Head. "You mustn't take too much notice, old man. I'm a queer card, and now and again I get these moods," he added lightly. "Well, let's begin."

The Ancient House went in to bat first, and Bob Christine and his men took the field. Christine wanted the Head to open the bowling, but he asked to be excused, promising to bowl later. So Christine and Yorke were the College House bowlers.

The Fossils started well, Handforth and I being the opening batsmen. We were very cautious with Christine's bowling, but Yorke was knocked into every corner of Little Side. Handforth, indeed, grew reckless, and elugged away cheerfully at every one of Yorke's deliveries.

And it wasn't long before he made a blunder.

Yorke sent down an easy ball—so easy that Handforth let fly at it with all his strength, and the leather went soaring upwards in the most attractive fashion.

"That's done it!" said Church grimly. "The fathead!"

The catch was perfect; in fact, the ball was descending in such a way that no fieldsmen could possibly fail to capture it. And the leather was descending straight towards Dr. Stokes, whom we all knew to be a delightful fieldsmen.

But, to the horror of the Monks, the Head stood like a statue.

He was standing on the grass, his hands behind him, gazing abstractedly over towards the River Stowe. It was clear enough that he was in a deep reverie, and entirely oblivious of his immediate surroundings.

"Look out, sir!"

"Catch it, sir—catch it!"

Dr. Stokes started, looked about him quickly, and came to himself. But his brief abstraction had been fatal. The ball came thudding down, and rolled on the grass ten yards away.

"Missed, by George!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Missed!" roared the wicket-keeper. "You fathead, he didn't even try!"

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Christine, running up to the Head. "We made sure—"

"I'm terribly sorry, Christine," said the Head earnestly. "There's no excuse, so I'd better say as little as possible. I'll try to be more attentive."

"I wish you'd bowl instead of Yorke, sir."

"Oh, all right; just as you like," said Dr. Stokes.

Bob was greatly relieved—at first. But it

soon became evident that the Head's bowling was a mere shadow of its former self. He was so off-colour that his deliveries were erratic and absolutely easy. Both Handforth and I knocked the Head over the boundaries with ease. There was not the slightest trace of sting or trickiness about his bowling.

"My goodness!" said Christine, in dismay. "He's not so good as a giddy lag to-day!"

And this was literally the truth. The Monks were in a bad way. Try as they would, they couldn't dismiss the Fossils. Handforth and I were ultimately sent back to the pavilion, but Jerry Dodd proceeded to make hay while the sun shone.

And when the Ancient House score had mounted to 150 for four wickets I declared.

"If we can't get them all out for a hundred I'll eat my hat!" I remarked. "Jerry's in tip-top form to-day, and he'll make hay of these batsmen."

Jerry did.

Boots and Yorke, who went in first, were clean bowled for only five runs between them. Then the Head went in to bat, and the Monks became more hopeful.

He faced Jerry's bowling, apparently failed to see the first ball, and his middle stump was lifted neatly out of the ground.

"How's that?" grinned the wicket-keeper.

"Out!" yelled the crowd.

Dr. Stokes gave one glance at his wicket, tucked his bat under his arm, and walked away. There was a look of relief on his face. Christine and several other Monks rushed up to him as he approached the pavilion.

"I suppose you boys will excuse me now, won't you?" asked the Head.

"Of course, sir," said Christine bitterly. "We expected big things of you, sir, and we're horribly disappointed."

He failed to add what he would have been pleased to add—namely, that the Head had hopelessly messed up the whole game. Instead of being a help, he had been a ghastly hindrance.

"I'm sorry, you fellows," said the Head penitently. "Don't tell me how rotten I've been—I know it! Good heavens! Until this minute I didn't realise what a ghastly show I've made!"

"Glad you know it, sir," growled somebody.

"Forgive me, young 'uns, but I'm worried to-day," admitted Dr. Stokes. "I'll make up for this fiasco some other time."

He passed a hand over his brow, dropped his bat, and walked away.

CHAPTER XI.

FULLWOOD'S LITTLE SCHEME.



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD'S eyes glinted. He was lounging in the Triangle against one of the chestnut-trees. And the cause of his satisfaction was the unexpected appearance of Dr. Stokes. The Head walked

straight across the Triangle and went indoors.

"By gad! Now's my chance!" muttered Fullwood keenly.

He had been disgusted to see the Head playing cricket with the juniors. And he had resigned himself to wait until the evening. But now, on a sudden impulse, he marched to the Head's door, which was standing open, and walked straight in.

He tapped on the door of Dr. Stokes' study.

"Come in!" came the Head's impatient voice.

Fullwood hesitated. Now that the actual second had arrived, he had a momentary attack of nerves. But with a sudden strengthening of his determination he opened the door and walked in. Dr. Stokes was standing before the window, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his flannels.

"Well?" he said shortly.

"Am I disturbin' you, sir?" asked Fullwood respectfully.

"Yes, you are!" replied the Head.

"Oh! Then perhaps I'd better go, sir?" asked Fullwood, taken aback by that pointed reply. "I—I just wanted a few words——"

"All right; go ahead," said Dr. Stokes impatiently. "But only a few."

He walked over to his chair, and sat down. Then he glanced inquiringly at his youthful visitor. Fullwood was tongue-tied for a few moments. Impudent, brazen, collected as he usually was, the Head's very calmness rather unnerved him.

"Well?" asked Dr. Stokes impatiently.

"It's—it's about something that happened last night, sir," said Fullwood, taking his courage into both hands, and making a plunge. "I don't know whether you know it or not, sir, but I was out late last night. I had a pass, of course."

The Head looked at Fullwood swiftly.

"Late?" he repeated. "What do you call late?"

"Well, it was a little after midnight, sir——"

"Good heavens! Who gave you permission to remain out until after midnight?" demanded Dr. Stokes curtly.

"Nobody, sir, but I was with an uncle of mine, and we had a breakdown in the car," said Fullwood. "But I wasn't going to talk about that, sir. I happened to see somethin' as I came into the Triangle."

"Oh! You happened to see something?" said the Head slowly.

"Yes, sir."

"And what was this interesting sight?"

"Well, sir, I saw you and Mrs. Stokes!" replied Fullwood.

His heart gave a leap as he brought out the words—for at that second he realised the almost unbelievable audacity of his errand. Dr. Stokes started to his feet with an exclamation, and his face became suffused with instant anger. But he sank into his chair again, and compressed his lips.

"So you saw Mrs Stokes and myself?" he asked, with a smooth quietness that would have been ominous to any less self-satisfied fellow. "Well, Fullwood? And what now?"

"Oh, well, sir, it wasn't exactly nice, was it?" said Fullwood, emboldened by the Head's calmness. "Of course, I haven't said a word, and I don't intend to say a word. I'm not a sneak, sir."

Ralph Leslie saw an expression of relief on the Head's face.

"Your generosity is most gratifying, young man," he said, taking a deep breath. "So you have kept our little secret, have you? Thank you, Fullwood—it was very considerate of you."

"That's all right, sir—no need to thank me," said Fullwood coolly. "But the fact is, I— Well, I thought we ought to come to some little arrangement."

"Ah! An arrangement, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of what nature?" asked Dr. Stokes. "I don't want to be inquisitive, but I must confess that your proposition interests me. It was certainly unfortunate that you should have witnessed the little incident between Mrs. Stokes and myself."

Fullwood nodded.

"Yes—for you, sir," he replied. "You wouldn't like that yarn spread all over the school, would you?"

"I certainly should not, Fullwood."

"That's what I thought, sir," said the rascal of the Remove. "But you needn't worry a bit—your secret's perfectly safe with me."

"My relief is unbounded," said the Head, with a sigh.

"And, under all the circumstances, sir, I think it ought to be worth a little consideration for me to keep the thing mum," continued Fullwood boldly. "You can just imagine the scandal that would go about if the whole of St. Frank's knew of that affair."

"Which affair?"

"Why, in the Triangle last night, sir."

"And was it so very dreadful?" asked the Head mildly.

"I don't know about being dreadful, sir, but you weren't treating Mrs. Stokes very gently," said Fullwood. "And what would the school say when I told everybody that you lifted Mrs. Stokes up, and carried her screaming indoors? I can tell you, sir, that things would get pretty hot for you."

"Really?" asked Dr. Stokes anxiously.

"Too jolly hot!" declared Fullwood grimly. "Most of the chaps are pretty down on a man who illtreats his wife—"

He paused, as Dr. Stokes leapt to his feet.

"I—I mean, sir—"

"Go on! Finish what you were saying!" muttered the Head.

He sank back into his chair again, like a broken man.

"Well, that's all, sir," said Fullwood, openly gloating over the lever he was wield-

ing. It delighted his rascally nature to see the Headmaster of St. Frank's fairly cringing before him.

"And—and this proposition?" asked the Head huskily.

"Well, sir, I thought a fiver might settle it," remarked Fullwood easily.

"You—you mean five pounds?" asked Dr. Stokes, with eager relief.

Fullwood was quick to note the change.

"Five pounds to start with, sir," he said promptly. "If you hand over the cash now, I'll promise to keep my mouth absolutely closed. And you needn't worry yourself a bit."

Dr. Stokes passed a hand over his brow.

"I am glad you came to me, old man, before breathing a word to any of the others," he said. "I regard this visit of yours with acute pleasure. So you require five pounds now?"

"That's the idea!" said Fullwood, with easy familiarity.

Dr. Stokes nodded, and pulled open a drawer. He rose to his feet and withdrew his hand from the drawer—with an extremely serviceable looking birch in his grasp.

And the way Dr. Beverley Stokes gave the birch a preliminary swish through the air was, to say the least, ominous.

CHAPTER XII.

PAYMENT IN FULL.



FULLWOOD stepped back a pace, startled.

"What—what's that for, sir?" he asked, his gaze fixed firmly and fascinatedly upon the birch.

"I—I thought you were going to give me that fiver, sir—"

"Anticipation and realisation are two very different things, Fullwood," interrupted Dr. Stokes grimly. "Come here, boy! Here—at this exact spot!" he added, pointing to the carpet.

"But—but—"

"At once!" thundered Dr. Stokes.

Fullwood nearly collapsed. He hadn't heard the Head speak like that before—he hadn't heard that grim, terrible note. He had long since formed the opinion that Dr. Stokes was an easy-going, incompetent, nincompoop—far too young to realise the responsibilities of his position. Those ideas were knocked out of Fullwood's head in a flash.

"Yes, sir!" he said faintly.

"Before I give you the biggest thrashing of your life, I'd like a word with you," exclaimed Dr. Stokes, deadly calm. "Do you realise, Fullwood, precisely what your recent proposition amounts to?"

"I—I thought you wanted that incident kept quiet, sir, and it was a good chance to

get some cash!" faltered Ralph Leslie, thoroughly cowed by the Head's tone.

"Good heavens! Then you actually did know what you were proposing?" asked the Head, in amazement. "You infernal young blackguard. If I did the right thing I would expel you from this school without a moment's hesitation."

"Expel me, sir!" gulped Fullwood, frantically.

"Your scheme for obtaining five pounds from me amounts to nothing more or less than criminal blackmail!" said the Head furiously. "And blackmail, Fullwood, is the most atrocious—the most contemptible—the most unutterably vile crime under the face of the sun."

Fullwood felt his knees going saggy.

"But—but——"

"You wretched young cur!" thundered Dr. Stokes. "You came here with the one intention of blackmailing me——"

"But—but I didn't realise, sir!" gasped Fullwood, frightened so much that he was as pale as a sheet. "I—I only thought I could make a bit of cash. I'm broke, sir, and I need some money badly—— So—so—I mean——"

"Fullwood, you had better be quiet!" said the Head, as the junior's words faltered and died away. "I will give you the benefit of the doubt. I don't believe you fully understand what blackmail is—I don't believe you appreciated the utter blackguardism of your suggestion."

"Please, sir, I—I——"

Fullwood was absolutely terrified, and he burst out sobbing like a child. He had been hauled before many masters in his time, and he had received many severe swishings—but no master had ever made him sob like this before. There was something about Dr. Stokes' tone—there was something about the scorn and contempt in his voice—that reduced Fullwood to a blubbing coward.

"If I did believe that you understood your criminal action, I would send you away from this school this very instant!" continued the Head grimly. "But you are young, Fullwood—you cannot possibly understand the enormity of your vile suggestion."

"I—I didn't know it was criminal, sir!" wailed Fullwood miserably. "I'm in a hole, sir, and I thought perhaps you'd pay up——"

"The less you say the better!" broke in the Head. "There is no question that you are not entirely innocent—and your punishment is going to be drastic. I intend to give you a lesson, Fullwood, that you will remember for many a day!"

Fullwood started back, regaining some of his pluck now that he knew he wasn't going to be expelled.

"But I didn't understand, sir!" he protested desperately.

"By the time I have finished with you, I dare say you will!" retorted Dr. Stokes. "Now, sir! If you are ready, we will begin!"

Fullwood wasn't ready, but the Head began. And he administered the most awful thrashing that Ralph Leslie had ever received. Severe is hardly the correct word—Fullwood's swishing was really tremendous. And he deserved every ounce of strength that the Head put into his blows.

"And now, young man, you can go!" panted Dr. Stokes, at last.

During the latter part of the birching, Fullwood had fairly howled for mercy—an unusual thing for him, for he was capable of taking a swishing with comparative stoicism. Even Fullwood's worst enemies would not describe him as a funk.

"All right—I'll go!" he muttered hoarsely. "But I'll write to my pater about this! I'll write to the papers! I'll tell everybody in the whole school about last night——"

"Silence!" thundered the Head furiously. "Upon my word! Leniency is apparently lost upon you! Just one more word, Fullwood, and I will reconsider my decision, and expel you as you undoubtedly deserve."

Fullwood closed up like a trap, freshly scared by the possibility of being sacked. He staggered out of the study, and made his way upstairs—where he locked himself in a bathroom.

Half-an-hour later, he emerged—shaky, rather pale, but looking quite himself otherwise. There was an evil glint in his eye, and all his old viciousness had returned.

He was so sore that the very thought of sitting down made him shudder. He ached in every limb—in every joint of his body. He wouldn't get over this punishment for a week.

"By gad! I'll show him up!" muttered the cad of Study A. "I'll make the whole confounded school ring with that story!"

He went downstairs, and was pleased to find the junior common-room well filled. Tea was over, and a good many members of the Remove were chatting before getting out of doors again.

Some were writing letters at the tables, others were sitting in the big, comfortable chairs, reading. Fullwood's entrance created hardly any comment until Singleton happened to look at the newcomer closely.

"Feeling off colour, Fully?" asked the Hon. Douglas.

"Yes, I am."

"No need to jump down my throat——"

"An' I've got somethin' to say to you fellows, too," snarled Fullwood, bursting out violently. "The Head's a beast—a cruel, bullying, murderous beast!"

"Steady!" I said, turning round. "You'd better not use those terms about Dr. Stokes, Fullwood!"

"By George! I should think not!" roared Handforth.

"I'll use what terms I like!" shouted Fullwood fiercely. "Half an hour ago he nearly killed me! My back's a mass of weals and bruises! He treated me worse than any dog!"

"I'll bet you deserved everything you got!" snapped Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"I did nothing!" said Fullwood thickly. "But I happened to know of somethin' that occurred last night. I saw the Head ill-treatin' his wife, an' because of that he's dropped on me like a ton of bricks!"

Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent exchanged startled glances. The same thought had occurred to both of them. Each knew that he himself hadn't breathed a word, and it was only natural that they should momentarily suspect one another.

But Fullwood's next words relieved them, for Ralph Leslie proceeded to explain how he had dropped over the Triangle wall just after midnight, and how he had seen the whole incident between Dr. and Mrs. Stokes.

The crowded Common-room listened, dumb-founded, but before any comments could be made the door opened, and the Head himself walked in.

CHAPTER XIII.

ARCHIE HAS A VISITOR.



"HURRAH!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

The shouts broke out at once, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood started back, scowling. If he had needed anything to convince him that his story had carried no weight, this demonstration sufficed.

"Hallo, hallo!" smiled Dr. Stokes. "What's all the enthusiasm about now?"

"We don't believe a word of it, sir," shouted Handforth.

"Eh? You don't believe a word of what?"

"Fullwood's been telling us that you treated him brutally, sir; but we think he deserved everything that came to him," said De Valerie. "As for his rotten lying yarn, we're going to send him to Coventry for daring to even breathe it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, it's very decent of you fellows to have such confidence in me," said the Head. "Thank you—I am gratified. But I shouldn't send Fullwood to Coventry; he's had his punishment. And I might as well tell you at once that I have never caned any boy so severely before. Please let the whole matter drop," added the Head quietly.

"All right, sir."

"If Fullwood breathes another word, sir, I'll smash him!" said Handforth.

It was clear enough that nobody believed the things that Fullwood had been saying. Indeed, coming from such a source, it was hardly surprising that the fellows discredited

the story. Fortunately for Fullwood, the Head refrained from mentioning precisely why he had been birched.

And Fullwood himself realised that he was done. He had only to open his mouth after this and he would be jumped on. A single syllable would be sufficient for the Form to send him to Coventry—a whole sentence would probably earn him a frog's-march, running the gauntlet, and various other forms of violent ragging. And Ralph Leslie didn't quite feel in the mood for such recreations.

Very wisely he slunk off and kept his mouth shut.

And so the incident passed over. The Head was quite like himself again—bright, cheerful, and full of jokes. He had made a swift recovery from his deep depression.

At least, so it seemed.

But underlying his jovial manner I detected the Head's real demeanour. His cheerfulness was forced; he was doing all this just for the sake of keeping up appearances.

And after he had gone out of the Common-room, Archie Glenthorne and Brent went off to their own study, to discuss the situation.

"Of course, it's absolutely foul," said Archie. "I mean, that dashed blighter spotting everything last night!"

"As it happens, it doesn't matter," said Brent. "I wouldn't mind betting, Archie, that Fullwood went to the Head to blackmail him—"

"Impos., old saveloy!" protested Archie, horrified.

"Don't you believe it," replied Alf. "If you don't know Fullwood's character by this time, you ought to. He's as unscrupulous as a professional crook. He probably doesn't realise what he's doing, but he's got the makings of a fine waster in him. Of course, the Head turned down his proposition and swiped him. A good thing, too!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie firmly. "I mean to say, it would be a dashed good thing if Fullwood had a swishing every day—a kind of regular exercise, what? The good old daily dozen, as it were!"

"Well, I'm going out to the cricket," said Alf, making for the door. "Coming, old son?"

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, I rather think not," said Archie, sinking on to the lounge. "The truth is, Alf, the good old tissues feel somewhat exhausted, and the only cure is a dose of the famous old forty! Frightfully sorry, laddie, but nature, so to speak, is nature, what? The old couch calls me!"

"You lazy, slacking boulder!" grinned Alf. "Oh, all right! Have your sleep! You'd only be in the way, anyhow."

He went off, and Archie contentedly lay back and dozed off. Phipps appeared soon afterwards, but the valet quickly withdrew when he saw that his young master was sleeping. It was quite a usual thing for Archie Glen thorne to spend an hour in this way.

As a matter of fact, he spent over two hours, for he went soundly into a happy slumber, and didn't awaken until a curious sort of tapping came vaguely to his ears.

"What-ho!" mumbled Archie. "Why, oddslife! What the— Good gad!"

He blinked about him in deep gloom. It was much later than he had expected. In fact, the hour was after eight-thirty, and everybody had already come indoors from

astonishment, for he was gazing into the face of Mrs. Stokes! And it certainly was an extraordinary proceeding for the Headmaster's wife to visit a junior's study in this singular fashion.

"I mean to say— That is— What?" murmured Archie.

"Please lock your door, Archie," said Mrs. Stokes quickly. "Yes, the door of your study! Please!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, confused.

He crossed the study, locked the door, and was then utterly startled to see that Mrs. Stokes was lightly and actively climbing through the window. Once inside, she lowered the sash and pulled down the blind.



But, to the horror of the Monks, the Head stood like a statue. He was standing on the grass, his hands behind him, gazing abstractedly over towards the River Stowe.

the playing-fields. The evening was prematurely dark, owing to heavy banks of thunder clouds obscuring the sky. Outside, the twilight was nearly merging into blackness, although no rain fell.

"This," observed Archie, "is not only thick, but bally-well poisonous! Where's Phipps? Where's Alf? Why didn't they drag me out of the good old embrace of Morpheus?"

Again came that tap, and Archie suddenly realised that it was from the window. Puzzled, he got up, crossed over, and pushed up the lower sash.

"Hush!" whispered a voice. "Don't raise your voice, Archie!"

The elegant junior started in blank

CHAPTER XIV.

ON A STRANGE ERRAND.



"DON'T leave us in the dark, Archie!" came a soft voice through the blackness.

"Oh sorry—frightfully sorry, Mrs. Stokes!" faltered Archie, fumbling for the switch and pressing it down. "The—the fact is— Oh, I say! I mean— Well, it—it's hardly—"

Archie broke off, exceedingly embarrassed. Now that the light was on, he could see that Mrs. Stokes was attired in a light summer evening frock, something of shimmering silk, and she looked wonderfully

attractive. After all, she was only a girl of about twenty-two, and very pretty.

"I am really awfully wicked to come here like this, Archie," said Mrs. Stokes quickly. "But I do so want you to do me a favour, and I felt that I could trust you more than any other boy. You'll smile when you hear what I want you to do, but it's of much greater importance to me than you could possibly imagine."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie feebly.

He was gradually recovering, although he still felt nervous and shy. After all, it was a bit extraordinary for the Head's wife to come into his study in this secretive manner. And he now noticed that she was looking excited and highly strung.

"Do you see this note?" she asked, producing a neatly sealed envelope, and handing it to the junior. "I want you to run down the lane to the stile. You know where I mean, don't you? It's just against the wood, where the lane curves——"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "The stile, what?"

"Yes. It's nearly nine o'clock now, and you will find a man waiting there," went on Mrs. Stokes hurriedly.

"A man? Gadzooks!"

"He will be expecting this note, and all you have to do is to hand it to him, and wait for an answer," said the girl. "Do you mind, Archie? I'll be waiting in the cloisters for your return."

Archie stuffed the note into his pocket.

"Dear old thing, it's done!" he said stoutly. "Er—I mean, rather! Anything to oblige you, Mrs. Stokes! Dash it all, I shouldn't be much of a chapple if I refused a fair lady's request, what? I'll stagger forth at once and meet the laddie by the stile."

"And remember—bring the answer!" urged Mrs. Stokes. "I'll be waiting in the cloisters. And please say nothing to your friends, Archie—I'm trusting you. There's nothing dreadful about this, but I can't explain, and you wouldn't understand if I did!"

"Dash it all, surely a cove can do a bally service without wanting to know all sorts of dashed inquisitive things?" said Archie warmly. "You can trust me, Mrs. Stokes; I'll absolutely fill the old contract to the bally letter!"

"Thank you ever so much; you're a dear!" whispered Mrs. Stokes.

Archie had no reply to that, and a moment later his visitor left by the same way as she had come, after Archie had switched off the light. The junior himself passed out into the passage, wondering if he was on his head or his heels. Indeed, he paused in the lobby and wondered if he had dreamed the whole occurrence.

For it seemed so fantastic, so strangely unreal. But the letter was in his pocket, as he made haste to ascertain. It was no dream; the strange request had actually been made.

And Archie had given his promise.

He hastened out into the Triangle, and was relieved to find the big space deserted. So he was not questioned, and he was able to climb over the wall without attracting any attention.

There was no other person in St. Frank's who could have got Archie to climb over the wall in his spotless flannels. But he did it for Mrs. Stokes without even a thought. And, sure enough, when he arrived at the stile there was a dim figure lurking near by.

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "Were you expecting——"

He paused before betraying his errand, and gazed at the other closely. And he was startled to see that the man was foreign-looking. It was impossible to be certain in the gloom, but Archie fancied that he was facing a Chinaman—the very fellow that Dr. Stokes had kicked into the ditch on the previous day.

And this discovery was a fresh shock.

"You come from Mrs. Stokes?" asked the man, in a soft voice.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie, thankful that the fellow had paved the way. "The fact is, I've brought a note——"

"Yes, I expect note—give me!" said the stranger.

Archie Glenthorne handed it over, and he had to wait only a few brief moments before he was placed in charge of a bulky letter. It was heavily sealed, and before he could say anything, the stranger turned, and vanished into the wood.

"Well, dash it all, what?" murmured Archie blankly.

He put the bulky letter into his pocket, and hurried up to the school. Again he was lucky, for nobody saw him enter the Triangle, and he succeeded in getting into the cloisters without trouble. A figure emerged from the shadows.

"Have—have you got the reply?" asked Mrs. Stokes, her soft voice rendered strangely discordant with anxiety. "Archie! Have you got it?"

"Absolutely! You see, I——"

"Let me have it!" broke in Mrs. Stokes huskily. "Oh, thank you—I shall never be able to repay you for this, you splendid boy! You don't know what you've done for me, Archie!"

To Archie's utter horror, Mrs. Stokes suddenly grasped his shoulders, and gave him a light kiss on the cheek. Archie went all hot, he felt shaky, and by the time he had recovered, Mrs. Stokes had gone.

She ran indoors—and came face to face with her husband just inside the hall.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. STOKES' STRANGE BEHAVIOUR.



JOYCE! Where on earth have you been?" asked the Head anxiously. "I've been looking everywhere——"

"I—I was just getting some fresh air!" said Mrs. Stokes, trying vainly to control her agitation. "It—it was so close—— Oh, Barry! Why are you looking at me like that?"

The Head was gazing at his wife with a kind of fierce, intense anxiety—intermingled with tender pity. And Mrs. Stokes was trembling in the most alarming manner.

"Good heavens, Joyce, don't you realise that you are driving me mad?" demanded Dr. Stokes tensely. "Why have you been outside? Is it necessary for me to watch——"

He broke off abruptly, for he had caught the sound of a slight rustle in Mrs. Stokes' right hand. She attempted to put the hand behind her, but the Head seized her arm, and almost brutally pulled it forward. He drew his breath in with a hiss as he caught sight of the letter.

"Then—then you——" He paused, choking. As pale as a ghost, he wrenched the letter out of her grasp. She stood swaying for a second, as though she was fainting. And then, with a sobbing little scream, she ran to the stairs, and vanished. The Head heard the door of her little sitting-room close with a slam.

And the sound aroused him. He had been standing like a statue, his face still pale. The old haggard expression had returned with double its former intensity.

He walked into his study like a man demented, closed the door, and roughly tore open the letter. He drew out the contents, and uttered a husky cry of horror.

He was absolutely aghast at what he saw. And then, sitting down, he stuffed the letter into his pocket, and remained there with his chin sunk upon his chest. For full five minutes he didn't move an inch, didn't make the slightest sound.

Then, with a start, he got to his feet and walked heavily to the door. He went upstairs slowly and falteringly. Arriving at his wife's sitting-room, he tapped, and entered.

The room was dark, and when Dr. Stokes switched on the light he found the apartment empty. He was about to go, when he caught sight of a piece of notepaper, propped on the mantelpiece. He crossed the room, picked up the notepaper, and read what was upon it.

"Great Heaven!" he gasped hoarsely.

For a second he looked round the room in the wildest consternation. And then, with a cry of anguish, he rushed to the door. His former inertia had vanished—he was a bunch of live wires. And the way he tore downstairs was a remarkable sight.

And while this was happening, Handforth

and Co. had rather a curious little experience. The chums of Study D had utterly no right to be on the river—but they were on the river.

It was supper-time, and the dormitory-bell would soon be ringing. But Handforth was in one of his obstinate moods. He and his chums had gone for a long row up the river—Church and McClure, of course, doing all the rowing.

And notwithstanding the gathering darkness, and the obvious lateness of the hour, Handforth insisted upon taking things easy. His watch—a remarkable instrument—clearly declared that the time was eight-forty, and it was in vain that Church and McClure pointed out that Handforth's ticker was nearly forty minutes slow.

"Don't be asses!" said Handforth, dismissing the whole question. "My watch is right—it's always right! This darkness is caused by the clouds! We've got heaps of time yet!"

And so it happened that Handforth and Co. had just arrived within a hundred yards of the boathouse when the exact time was twenty minutes past nine. Church and McClure knew this, but had grown tired of repeating themselves.

And all three juniors were not a little astonished when they caught sight of a dim figure pushing a canoe out of the boathouse. They saw the occupant paddle into mid-stream, and go down with the current.

"Mrs. Stokes!" breathed Church, startled. "What of it?" growled Handforth. "She can go for a late paddle in her own canoe, I suppose?"

"Yes, but it seems a bit queer." "Rats! There's no need to make a mystery out of nothing," said Handforth tartly. "You know as well as I do that she and the Head have had a tiff, or something, and she might have got a headache."

"Well, it's a good thing she didn't spot us," said McClure. "It's nearly bed-time, and we shall get in an awful row if we're spotted——"

"Idiot!" snorted Handforth. "It's not a quarter to nine yet!"

"It's nearly half-past!" snapped Church. "I tell you——"

"Oh, chuck it!" growled McClure. "What's the good of starting the squabble all over again? Look out, Handy—swing her round to the boathouse! Do you want us to go for another cruise?" he added sarcastically.

Handforth operated the tiller, and Church and McClure shipped their oars. The rowing-boat leisurely drifted towards the bank. And at that moment the three juniors were quite silent.

There was no sound except the slight ripple of the water against the boat's sides. And during the brief spell of quietness, an unmistakable sound came from further down the stream.

Splash!

It was as though something heavy had fallen suddenly into the water. Handforth and Co. looked at one another, rather scared, and then gazed down-stream, into the thick gloom.

"What was that?" breathed Handforth.

"I—I don't know!" muttered Church.

"Sounded like somebody falling into the giddy river!" said McClure, with a catch in his voice. "I say! You—you don't think that—"

"Think what?"

"Well, Mrs. Stokes, you know—"

"Fathead!" said Handforth uneasily. "Don't be dotty—"

"Canoes are rummy things to handle!" said Church, straining his eyes into the gathering darkness. "They tip up before you know—"

"Listen!" gasped McClure hoarsely.

"What was that?"

"You ass! You gave me a turn—"

"Quiet—quiet!" hissed McClure. "Listen!"

The three juniors remained absolutely still, the nose of the boat butting against the grassy bank. At first there was no sound save for the distant barking of a dog.

And then, faintly but clearly, came a cry.

"Help!"

It was a frantic appeal, and the voice was a woman's! Handforth and Co. awoke to instantaneous life.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "It's Mrs. Stokes, after all!"

"She's drowning!" shouted McClure. "Oh, Handy, you idiot! Why didn't you take notice of me at first? We may be too late! Her canoe's upset, and she's—"

"We'll be too late if you keep jawing!" snorted Handforth.

His chums needed no urging. They took the oars and commenced rowing down stream as hard as their muscles would allow.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.



"FASTER—faster!" urged Handforth tensely.

"We can't—we're going all out!" panted Church.

"Help!" roared Handforth, at the top of his voice. "Hi, rescue! Help! Help!"

Always powerful, Handforth's voice was now like a megaphone, and it went echoing across the meadows and the playing fields in the stillness of the sultry evening. His idea was a good one. It was possible that he and his chums would be in time, but it was just as well to make doubly sure by getting further assistance to the spot.

And that cry of Handforth's was distinctly heard by Dr. Beverley Stokes, as he rushed aimlessly from the Triangle into the playing fields. The Head tore like mad towards the river.

Handforth and Co., their hearts in their mouths, kept a keen look-out for the victim of the accident. At least, they assumed it to be an accident. Obviously, the Head's wife had tipped the canoe over, and was in danger of drowning.

"We've come too far—she can't be all this distance down!" panted Church. "Oh, we're too late—she's gone—"

"What's that?" yelled Handforth, pointing.

He swung the boat round, and all three juniors saw something in the water, just where the current was treacherous, and where the depth of the river was notoriously great.

"If she's gone down there, there's no chance!" muttered Handforth hoarsely.

They saw now that the object which had attracted their attention was the canoe—floating bottom upwards. It was a silent, grim evidence of the tragic disaster.

The chums of Study D were frantic; indeed, almost panic stricken. And then they heard a sound over towards the left bank. And Church gave a yell as he caught sight of an arm raised above the water.

"There she is!" he shouted.

The boat was swung round, and a moment later Handforth and Co. saw Mrs. Stokes in the water—half-entangled in some reeds. And from the juniors' knowledge of the river, they felt certain that the water at this spot was comparatively shallow.

Mrs. Stokes had apparently drifted, and this had saved her life. For, although too utterly exhausted to utter any further cries, she was still conscious, as Handforth and Co. rapidly discovered.

"It's all right, Mrs. Stokes; you're safe now!" said Handforth crisply. "Stand by, you chaps; we'll soon have her in!"

Without another thought, Handforth jumped overboard, and found himself submerged to his shoulders. He supported Mrs. Stokes, and, helped by Church and McClure in the boat, got Mrs. Stokes to the bank. And the Head himself arrived just in time.

"Who is that?" shouted Dr. Stokes hoarsely, as he ran up.

"Thank goodness you've come, sir—"

"Handforth!" broke in the Head. "What has happened— Good heavens! Is—is—"

He broke off, the words choking in his throat, for he had just caught sight of the limp, inanimate form of his wife. Seeing her dragged ashore in this way was very significant.

"Boys," shouted the Head in anguish, "didn't you arrive in time? Oh, this is dreadful—"

"It's all right, sir—Mrs. Stokes is only just a bit exhausted!" interrupted Handforth quickly. "She drifted into the reeds, and they saved her life! We got here as quickly as possible—"

By this time the Head was knee-deep in the shallow water of the bank, and he tenderly lifted Mrs. Stokes into his arms, and

then laid her on the grass. She was breathing heavily, but there was no evidence of fatal consequences. Her eyes opened, and for a moment she looked into her husband's face in a terrified kind of way. Then she seemed to swoon.

"Will you boys hurry to the village and get the doctor?" asked the Head quickly.

"Rather, sir!"

"We'll go like the wind!"

"Tell Dr. Brett to come straight to the school," said the Head, lifting that frail form into his arms again. "And wait! Boys—just a moment!"

The juniors, in the act of rushing off, paused.

"Do me a favour, and keep this to yourselves!" said the Head quietly. "We don't want a sensation over such an incident. With the aid of Providence, Mrs. Stokes will be out again in a day or two."

"All right, sir," said Handforth promptly; "we promise."

"Thank you; you're good sorts!" said the Head gratefully.

Handforth and Co. were puzzled as they raced into the village, Handforth completely forgetting his own soaked condition. The brisk exercise did him good, and saved him from catching a chill.

They did not discuss the Head's rather peculiar request. But they told themselves that it was just as well, perhaps, that the story of the accident shouldn't be spread about.

Handforth and Co. certainly could not be aware of Dr. Stokes' real reason for desiring privacy. For, in all truth, the Head had a dreadful suspicion that the "accident" had not been as accidental as the juniors believed.

For Dr. Stokes remembered his wife's wild, hysterical look as she fled upstairs, and he had good reason to believe that in such moments she was hardly responsible. In addition, there was that note which had been left on the mantelpiece, and which would never be revealed to any living person.

Handforth and Co. found Dr. Brett at home, and they rushed him up to the school with such haste that the worthy practitioner was quite out of breath by the time he arrived.

Nelson Lee happened to be in the Triangle when they reached the school. The famous schoolmaster-detective said nothing, but he stood looking after the Doctor for some moments.

Perhaps Nelson Lee was putting two and two together; perhaps he knew more than anybody suspected. It was certainly a fact that the detective had been out for a walk; and it was equally certain that he had seen the strange Chinaman. And Nelson Lee, although he made no inquiries whatever, seemed content. But he told himself that this mystery concerning the Head's wife was one that deserved his closest attention.



"You come from Mrs. Stokes?" asked the man in a soft voice.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "The fact is, I've brought a note——"

Dr. Brett's report was cheering.

Mrs. Stokes had suffered more from shock than anything else, and after a good night's rest and a thoroughly quiet day on the morrow, she would probably be herself.

And Handforth and Co. went to bed, satisfied and pleased with themselves. Dr. Stokes, of course, had made no inquiries as to why they had been on the river so late. It was better, all things considered, to ignore such a trifle. For in the absence of the chums of Study D, a merely exciting incident might have become a terrible tragedy.

But in spite of themselves, Handforth and Co. were puzzled.

"It's jolly queer—all this giddy secrecy," said Handforth, after he was in bed. "I can't see why the school shouldn't know——"

"Shush!" whispered McClure. "Don't tell everybody!"

"Why the school shouldn't know what?" demanded Armstrong, yawning.

"Oh, nothing!" said Handforth.

And he took care to remain silent after that. But Armstrong's very curiosity was enough to show him what a sensation would have been caused if the story had got about.

Dr. Stokes had thanked the chums of Study D in a quiet, earnest way that had left an indelible impression. There was not the slightest doubt of the Head's great affection for his wife.

But how could this be reconciled with his strangely rough behaviour towards her at times? And who was the sinister, mysterious Chinaman who had felt the weight of the Head's boot, and who had sent a secret letter to Mrs. Stokes?

In all truth it seemed about time that Nelson Lee took an active hand in this puzzling affair!

THE END.



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

By the Author of our St Frank's Stories.



No. 29. ON THE CALIFORNIA LIMITED.

MY first glimpse of Chicago was from the window of an alleged express train from New York, which was just about two hours late in arriving at its destination. It was a big disappointment to me, because I had been looking forward to seeing Chicago fairly clearly.

But in consequence of the lateness, darkness had practically fallen as we travelled through the suburbs. But there was still sufficient light for me to see that the country was as flat as a billiard-table—and Chicago, consequently, somewhat unpicturesque on this account.

The trains run straight into the heart of the city, not underground, as in New York, but on the surface. I saw a good deal of Chicago on my return journey, but that will be described in due course. So perhaps I had better give Chicago a rest until then.

It certainly wouldn't be fair for me to enter into any description of what I saw on the outward trip. The train finally arrived, and everybody got out. It had been raining rather heavily, and the station was not exactly a palatial one.

You mustn't picture anything like one of our British stations. When I emerged from the train it struck me that we had come to a halt in the goods yard by accident. There were no platforms, no brilliant lights, and scarcely any bustle or activity.

All the passengers stepped out of the train, right on to the permanent way, where a maze of lines was to be seen. I simply followed everybody else, considering that I couldn't go wrong if I did this. At the same time, I was surprised at the barn-like appearance of the surroundings.

A gentleman in a peaked cap was walking up and down asking if there were any passengers for the 'bus service which connects the various termini of Chicago. This 'bus ride is paid for in the full ticket, I had better explain.

Being in America, I rather expected something sumptuous in the way of a motor omnibus, and was greatly disappointed. For the 'bus proved to be an old-fashioned affair, where the passengers for the Santa Fe terminus were packed in like sardines,

facing one another, with scarcely an inch of knee room.

The interior was practically unlighted, and soon we were careering off out of the station-yard, and into the wet Chicago streets. The journey proved to be absurdly brief, and if I had known, I would have walked the distance, in order to obtain a glimpse of the city before starting off on the second part of my trans-continental journey.

However, I consoled myself that I should see Chicago thoroughly on my way back—for this was in my programme. And, in any case, there was not a great deal of time to be lost, for it was almost seven o'clock.

The Santa Fe depot was far from imposing—and having seen to my baggage, I easily located the train, which was already waiting beyond the barrier, but the latter was closed. So there was nothing to do but to sit on a hard bench until the officials stirred themselves.

There were no palatial halls and waiting-rooms as in New York, and I could hardly believe that I was in Chicago. Everything seemed more fitted to a comparatively "one-horse" town.

I was quite relieved when the barriers opened, for, frankly, I was getting just a little "fed-up" with the wait. It was too short for me to venture out sight-seeing, but tedious enough to while away.

I discovered that the California Limited—one of the crack trains of the Santa Fe system—was being run in two sections, and my berth was on the first. So I climbed on board, handed my baggage into the care of the Pullman porter, and settled myself for the four days' continuous journey to the Far West.

I was ravenously hungry, for I had eaten nothing since lunch-time—and the hour was now approaching eight o'clock. One cannot obtain tea on an American train, and I had not wished to spoil my dinner by indulging in a snack at the station refreshment-room.

So I celebrated my boarding of the California Limited by making a bee-line for the dining-car—where dinner, to my entire satisfaction, was already being served, even before the train moved out.

My American Note-Book

(Continued)

No. 30. THROUGH ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TO KANSAS CITY.

At exactly 8 p.m. the California Limited rolled majestically out of Dearborn Station, Chicago—bound for Los Angeles and San Francisco—nearly two thousand miles over the great Western States of America.

This train, which runs daily, Sundays included, is one of the most important links with the West, and when one enters the train at Chicago, there is no changing throughout the entire journey. The train runs straight through to the West Coast, and takes nearly four days.

It was a Sunday evening when I started, and we were due to arrive in Los Angeles at about half-past two on the following Wednesday afternoon. Being April, the weather was quite cool, and I was looking forward to the golden sunshine of California. There was something magic in the thought of reaching a land of perpetual summer within four days. And only on the previous night we had passed through a raging blizzard of snow and sleet!

The train was splendidly heated—indeed, rather too splendidly heated for my personal liking. But the Americans seem to thoroughly enjoy this hothouse-like atmosphere—which is not only found in railway trains, but in hotels, stores, and places of amusement.

However, I felt rather grateful for the warmth just now, because the evening was cold. And I mentally complimented the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co.—to give it its full name—on the luxurious equipment of the "No. 3"—the California Limited. By the way, this company is one of the few in America that uses the word "railway" instead of "railroad."

As we pulled out of Chicago into the night, I was fairly busy. Not unpacking my grips, but packing my interior. In other words, I was sampling the viands in the dining-car. And I should like to mention now that the food supplied on this train was not only excellent, but quite astonishing in its wide range and perfection of cooking.

Indeed, the dining-car was just like any first-class restaurant, with a perfect service, and wonderful comfort. And the charges were, to my mind, extraordinarily reasonable.

Thus, the table d'hôte dinner, consisting of many courses, was one dollar and fifty cents—about six shillings in English money.

Breakfast and luncheon were à la carte, and for eighty-five cents or a dollar I obtained even more breakfast than I could wish for. And a dollar generally provided me with a sumptuous luncheon. Tea, of course, was conspicuous by its absence. But I must add that I always ordered a pot of tea at breakfast-time, and found that it was better than any other I had tasted in America.

By the time the meal was finished, the train was speeding through the outer suburbs of Chicago, and I returned to my berth, and found the coloured porter busily making the beds.

So I resolved to have a little tour of investigation—for one can move from end to end of these American trains in the same manner as one can move about a ship. First of all I went to the library-car, and found this a very cosy coach, with numerous deep armchairs—with magazines, papers, and an endless assortment of railway literature.

Here there were writing tables, too, each provided with printed paper and envelopes for the use of passengers. I didn't stay, as I was curious to look at the observation-car. I had heard a great deal about this particular type of coach, but had never been on one. They are seldom provided on the trains East of Chicago—at least in the Northern States.

The observation-car proved to be a novelty. Here, again, there were luxurious armchairs and writing tables. But at the end a door led out on to the rear platform. I passed outside, and if I had gone much further, I should have dropped on to the track—for I had arrived at the end of the train.

This rear platform was electrically lit, with comfortable chairs. But as the air was chilly, and the night dark, I soon returned to the warmth within. Then I went to bed. I have called this little article "Through Illinois and Missouri to Kansas City"—but I am unable to describe any part of the journey.

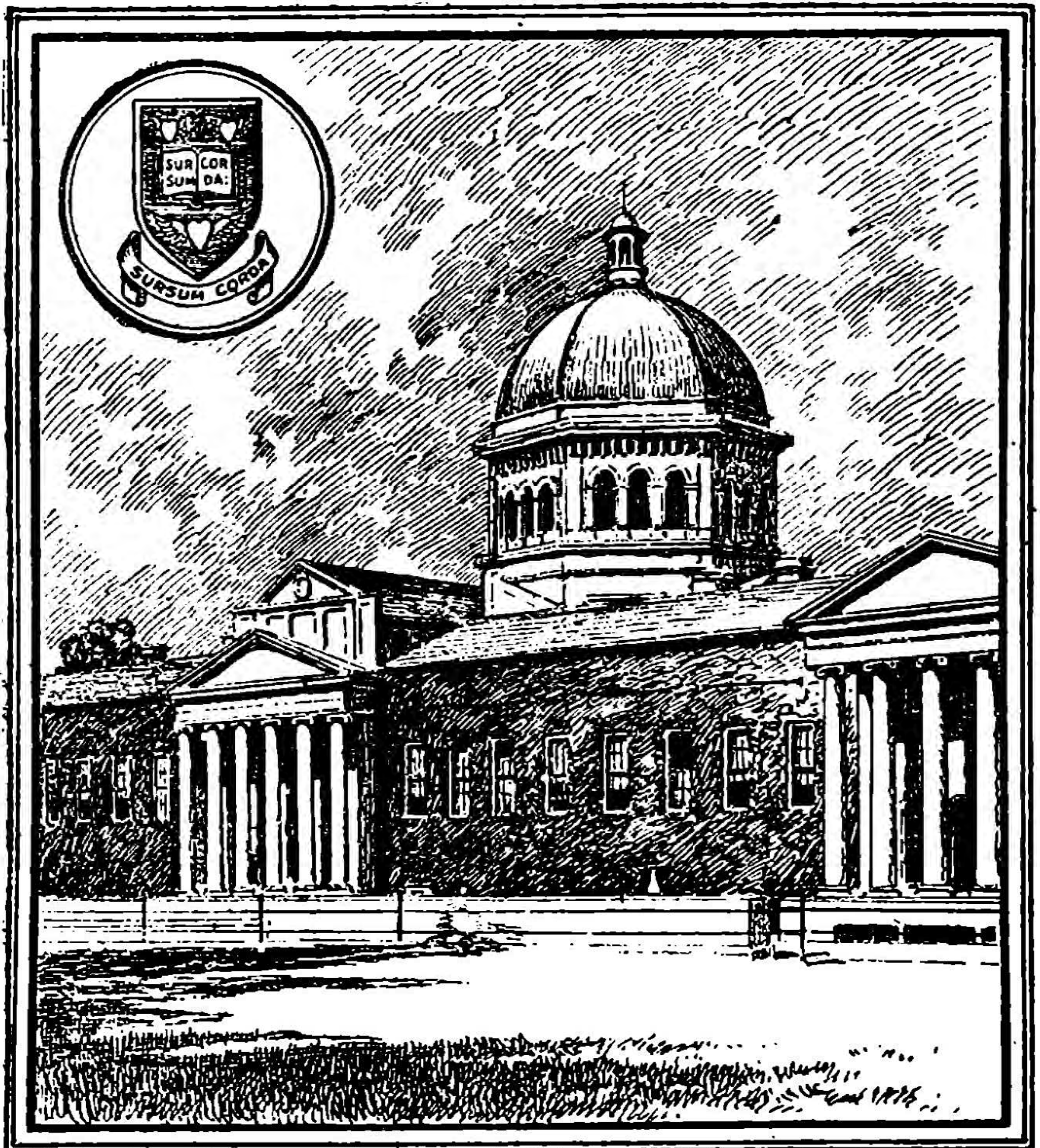
For not only was I asleep, but I couldn't have seen anything, even if I had been awake. And at breakfast-time on the following morning I found that we had arrived in Kansas City.

Next Week: "The First Glimpse of the Mighty West."

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SPECIAL SERIES OF ART SKETCHES BY MR. E. E. BRISCOE.

No. 33. HAILEYBURY COLLEGE.



This school was founded in 1862, and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1864. It is one of the most famous public schools of the Victorian period, and occupies the handsome buildings which formerly belonged to the Hon. East India Company. The school is situated in Hertfordshire. Religious training is given in accordance with the doctrine of the Church of England. The school is divided into Upper, Middle and Lower School. The Upper School is again divided

into Classical, Modern and Military Sides. The boys are boarded and lodged in ten houses on the hostel system—that is, each house is in charge of a house-master. But all meals are taken by the whole school together in the College Hall. The number of boys for each house is limited to forty-eight. The school possesses large playing-fields, and the games played are rugby, cricket and lives. The total number of boys in the school is about 520.



St. Frank's Magazine



CAREERS IN CARICATURE.

No. 2.—ARCHIE GLENTHORNE.

HIS CHARMING ELEGANCE SHOULD FIND HIM A LUCRATIVE POST AS A SHOPWALKER IN A FASHIONABLE WEST-END STORES.



A CUSHY JOB IN A GOVERNMENT OFFICE (HOURS—HBI and LULLY) WOULD BE RATHER TEMPTING.



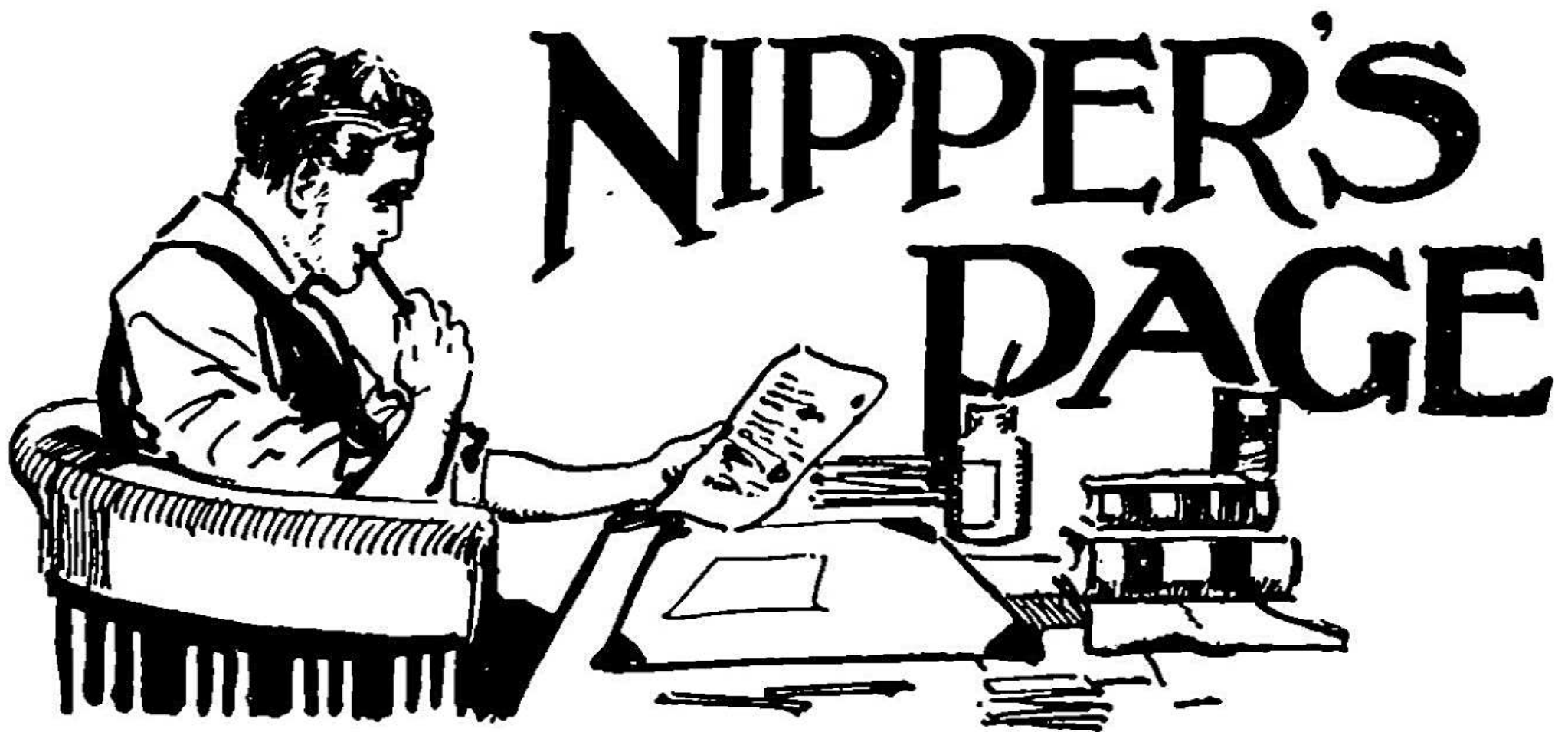
AS SULTAN OF THE BASHI-BAZOOKS IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO BEAT.



UNLESS AS A MAN ABOUT TOWN ON TEN THOU. A YEAR AND NOTHING TO DO.



In the above sketches our artist this week offers a few suggestions of careers, which he thinks would find favour with our old friend, Archie Glenthorpe.—THE EDITOR.



Editorial Office,
Study C,
St. Frank's.

My dear Chums,

Uncle Edward has been receiving so many letters during the last week or so that he considers himself the most important person on the Editorial Staff. Study D has been converted into an office, and here the great man thunders out his "Replies in Brief" to his private secretaries, Church and McClure. By what I hear, these poor fellows have a pretty strenuous time of it, and when their leader gets excited over some of the letters he receives, in a moment of forgetfulness, they frequently come in for a few dots on the nose.

A QUESTION OF SPACE.

Last week Uncle Edward handed me enough "Replies in Brief" to fill half the Mag. When I told him that I could not possibly find room for them all in that issue, he was most indignant.

"You're letting the readers down!" he bawled. "When they write to me, they expect a reply. You invited them to do so, and now you quibble about not having room to answer them!"

"I admit all that, my son," I said. "Only there's no need to get excited."

Handy was perfectly right, and so I decided to meet him half-way by giving him an extra page last week for his popular new feature. A certain number of "Replies" have had to be held over, but I can promise you, my chums, that every letter received by Uncle Edward will be answered in the Mag. with as little delay as possible. They will be dealt with in strict rotation, and, allowing for time occupied in going to press, you will not have to wait longer than a month or five weeks for the "Replies."

LAST WEEK'S CRICKET SENSATION.

Everyone will applaud the action of our new Head in discouraging the convention of not allowing a Junior, no matter what his ability may be, to play in the first eleven. Thanks to Dr. Stokes' intervention, Jerry Dodd last week practically saved the school from ignominious defeat at the hands of our old rivals, the Helmfordians. Of course, Christine and Handy did their share, but the palm must be awarded to Dodd, who is undoubtedly the best player in the school. There was some slight mistake in the account of the match appearing in THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, where it said that we won by seven instead of six wickets.

CHARACTERS' NAMES RESULTS.

The results of this competition have exceeded all expectations, and prove conclusively the extraordinary knowledge possessed by my readers of the numerous characters at St. Frank's. Out of the many hundreds of competitors, 240 sent in the correct lists of names. Since the original prize offered would not go far with so many winners, I have decided, at much greater cost, to present each of these successful competitors with a consolation prize of a handsome ever-pointed pencil, with refills. The correct solution and list of prize-winners will be published, space permitting, next week.

PITT'S GOOD FORTUNE.

An account of the journey from Lagos to Kano is the gist of this week's letter from Pitt. One cannot help thinking what a lucky fellow he is to be right away on the edge of unknown Africa, while we are poring over books at St. Frank's. I expect we shall learn more about Kano, the City of Mud, when his next letter arrives.

Yours as ever,
NIPPER.

REGGIE PITT'S AFRICAN .. LETTER ..

In this week's letter Reggie tells us that the party has only just arrived in Kano. The description of the journey from Lagos occupies most of the letter, but we are promised a more complete account of Kano next week.

THE EDITOR

Kano, Northern Nigeria.

Dear Old Editor-in-Chief,

Only just got here in Kano, so can't give many details about the place. Still, I've got heaps to write about on other subjects, and I can describe Kano in my next despatch.

I always had an impression that Nigeria was dense African jungle, with impenetrable forests and savages, and all that kind of thing. But it's quite different, really.

Of course, there's plenty of forest land, and a good deal of bush, but it's queer how the reality is so different from the pictures you get into your mind beforehand. And now that we've got to Kano, there's a very decided change in the aspect of the country.

Of course, the city of Kano itself is pretty high—about one thousand seven hundred feet above sea level, I think. It's not much, and you don't notice it in the train, because it's a very gradual rise. The country appears to be flat all the way along. And as the trip is seven hundred and four miles, you can bet we're all jolly pleased to be on solid ground again. I'd rather be on a ship any day in preference to a train.

On the whole, the railway is pretty good, considering the nature of the country. I could give the railway officials a few tips on management, but I don't suppose they'd take any notice of me, so I'll save my breath. And there's no alternative route, anyhow. Strictly speaking, we ought to be jolly pleased that there's a railway of any kind.

When we started out from Lagos it was like pandemonium let loose. The station was absolutely packed with natives, crowding about in the most fearful confusion, everybody as excited as though the world was coming to an end.

And it seemed to me that every passenger had brought aunts and uncles and sisters and brothers and every other kind of relative to see him off. To appreciate these natives thoroughly, you need to be at one of these Nigerian railway stations when a train is going to start!

I've never known such din and confusion. The railway officials couldn't do a thing, and

I wondered if the train would ever get a start. You see, the clerks and the other employees are natives themselves, and you can imagine the result.

And, mind you, this scene has been repeated at every blessed stop on the way—until poor old Jack and I thought we'd rather get out and walk. Dorrie took it all very calmly, because he's used to this sort of thing, but Jack's father has had an awful time, what with the heat and the jolting and all the other discomforts. As for Umlosi, the lazy old beggar has been asleep most of the time.

We've all been tremendously impressed by the possibilities. At every point on this journey we've noticed the wonderful nature of the country, and it's my belief that Nigeria will one day become one of the most important tropical countries. It is rich beyond all estimate—rich in natural resources of every kind.

In the train, we passed through great belts of coconut palms and oil palms, these gradually giving place to tropical forests as we came up country. But during the final part of our trip the forest land has been practically left behind, and we've mostly seen acacia bush.

And here we are in Kano, at the end of the line. From now onwards we shall travel on foot—with the kind assistance of camels. We shall soon be leaving civilisation right behind us, for Kano is a kind of outpost, a frontier city on the edge of the desert. And Jack and I are rather looking forward to the real exploration trip, which will soon begin.

But we shall probably be here for a few days, so I shall have heaps of opportunities for writing. Kano is a wonderfully ancient city, and it stands on a great plain of cultivated bush land.

But I'll tell you more about this in my next despatch—when I intend to fully describe this really astonishing city of mud.

All well—hope you're the same. Oh, by the way, don't forget to send a copy of the good old "Mag." along weekly to Winnie—my sister, you know. She'll be awfully cut up if she doesn't get it.

Your affectionate chum, REGGIE.

The Adventures of **TRACKETT GRIM**



THE TERROR OF TEXAS!

A Terrific Tale of Terrible Trials on the Trail of Ten-Shooter Ted, introducing Trackett Grim and Splinter.

By

E. O. HANDFORTH

"IT'S jolly hot, guv'nor!"

Splinter and his famous master, Trackett Grim, were hitting the trail. As a matter of fact, they were spending the week-end in Texas, and everybody in that neighbourhood hits the trail.

The great incriminator and his young assistant had been hitting the trail ever since nine o'clock that morning, and they were jolly hot. The terrific heat of the Western sun was streaming down upon their Stetson hats. The great warm winds of the prairies were sweeping across them, and the sand was rising in clouds.

Splinter and his master were riding bronchos, as horses are termed in the wild West. Often the bronchos stood on their hind legs and waved their fore-feet in the air. But Grim and Splinter did not care. They were used to any kind of horse, and were not in the least nervous.

"Splinter," replied Grim, as the two reined up under a banana tree, "the heat is caused by the rays of the sun. It is quite a usual phenomenon in these parts of the world."

"Is that so?" returned the lad. "What a wonderful knowledge you must have."

Grim nodded assent in his modest way, and began to consult his map, which was tied over his horse's ears. It was his idea to ride to Honkville, Honk, U.S.A., before nightfall. And he knew that it was a journey of over six hundred miles. They would have to travel fast, indeed, if they were not to be late.

"We must move on, Splinter," he said. "We must follow the trail that I see shining through the rocks."

No one but a trained observer could have spotted the trail, for it was entirely hidden by rough crags and bits of stone. It was also overgrown by grass and in places weeds.

But Grim was never at fault. He spurred on his mount, and Splinter followed at his side.

They had not progressed more than fifty miles when Grim suddenly pulled his broncho to a standstill.

"Halt!" he whispered. "I scent danger. Look at that object coming along the trail."

Splinter looked, and he saw some vehicle on wheels approaching. It looked like a coach, and was drawn by four big horses. There was someone on the box-seat who appeared to be holding reins in his hand. At once Splinter deduced that he was the driver.

"It is the stage coach," Grim announced. "I suspect that it will carry passengers and mails."

Almost before the words had left his mouth the coach came rattling by them. And at that very instant five mounted men rode out from behind bushes at the side of the road.

Each one wore a mask over his face, and presented a levelled revolver at the driver of the coach.

"Hands up!" cried their leader, a huge man with a bushy beard.

At once the driver threw up his hands, and the horses came to a stop. The coach swayed from side to side in a menacing manner, and then came to a stop, too.

From the door stepped a well-dressed man in evening-dress.

"Hands up, Mr. Samuelstein!" cried the leader of the bushrangers, as robbers are called out West.

"Mercy on me!" cried the passenger, falling on to his knees.

"That is Samuel S. Samuelstein!" muttered Grim, through his set teeth. "I wonder why he is doing this. Watch,

Splinter. I expect this is a usual custom in these parts.

Three of the bushrangers now covered the millionaire with their guns, while the other two went rapidly through his pockets. Grim and Splinter watched eagerly.

"Ah, Grim observed, "these quaint performances are most interesting—very."

By this time the robbers had taken all Samuelstein's money, and they now approached Grim and the lad.

"Excuse me," said the chief. "My name is Ten-Shooter Ted. I hope you have enjoyed my little performance. Perhaps you can spare a few coppers for me."

"Certainly," Grim replied. "It has been most enjoyable. I have only fivepence in coppers—"

"Silver and gold will do, my dear sir," went on the Terror of Texas.

"Oh, if you don't mind," Grim said. "I was afraid it might bother you."

He produced his wallet and counted out all the money he had, and handed it to Ten-Shooter Ted. Grim was a very generous man, and nobody loved a bit of amusement better than he did.

Ten-Shooter Ted thanked him politely, and then pointed his gun at the driver of the coach. He pressed the trigger, and the driver fell to the ground. He had been shot through one of his finger-nails. Then, with a laugh and a wave of his hand, the bush-ranger rode off, followed by his band.

Grim blew a kiss to the gang, and then felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Mr. Samuelstein.

"Vot vos you doing—yes?" growled the

financier. "I haf been robbed—no! I am ruined! Hein! Vy haf you led them go?"

In a moment Grim was his calm self again.

"What's that?" he ejaculated. "Do you mean to say those fellows have stolen something from you?"

"Yes!" cried the other. "Dey are bush-rangers! They have stolen all my moneys!"

"Great jumps!" Grim shouted. "And I never suspected it!"

At that moment the driver of the coach came up to Grim and touched the brim of his sombrero. He had quite recovered from his fatal wound, and a new finger-nail had quickly grown, for they do things very quickly out West.

"We've been sure held up some! Yep!" he said, in his countrified voice. "I guess our old pal hero has sure lost his dope. Yep!"

"Id is monstrous!" roared Samuelstein. "Shall I never see my moneys again?"

"You shall, sir!" Grim interrupted in a ringing voice. "For I myself will get it back for you! I am the greatest incriminator in the world, and I will see that you recover your gold!"

"Put it thar!" shouted the driver. "You're sure a real white man, bo!"

Grim shook the rugged hand, and nodded to Samuelstein, who climbed back into the coach. Then, followed by Splinter, Grim set out on the hard, hard trail.

It was the biggest task he had ever faced. He meant to capture the gang of bush-rangers single-handed. If he could not do that, he would capture them double-handed.

And if that failed, perhaps he would capture them red-handed.

Who could tell?

Anyway, the first thing to do, as Grim knew, was to hike along the trail. He therefore tied up the two horses to a tree, and set off afoot.

Taking out his pocket-telescope, he carefully spat on his handkerchief and cleaned up the mouthpiece. Then, with the instrument focused on the trail, he dashed along, Splinter at his heels, occasionally whooping like a cowboy.

The trail ran along a winding path, very badly paved. At times they would run through a little township, and at other times they had to swim across a river.

Once they came to a railway. The signalman was just about to shut the gates of the level-crossing over which the trail led. And as Grim and his



"Hands up, Mr. Samuelstein!" cried the leader of the bushrangers, as robbers are called out West.

assistant reached the spot the gates banged in their faces.

But Grim was not defeated. With a panther-like spring, he vaulted clean over the gates. And Splinter, in a desperate effort to do the same, slipped and fell on to the line in a crumpled heap. At that very moment the Continental express began to thunder by!

Without a second's hesitation, Grim vaulted back to the line. Would he be in time to save Splinter? The huge engine was blowing clouds of steam and sparks into his face. But Grim did not care. He threw himself at the form of the prostrate lad. His strong arms lifted him clear.

Saved!

Splinter was saved. Grim tenderly carried him to the signal-box. The train had drawn up and the passengers gave him three cheers.

Then, with a word to the kind old signalman, Grim set off once more across the lone trail to the Wild West. The tracks of Ten-Shooter Ted were still visible to him through the telescope. His sharp eyes picked them out from among the stunted bushes and rugged rocks of the vast prairie.

By this time night had fallen. In fact, it was quite dark. But Grim had now reached the end of the trail.

Right ahead he saw a little cottage where a light burnt in the window. He approached it carefully. Then, sitting in front of the door, he saw a big figure. It was Ten-Shooter Ted, the Terror of Texas!

Grim thought of the money the bush-ranger had stolen, and steeled himself to the task ahead. He hated having to hurt a man, but, after all, there was justice to be thought of.

So, with a shout, Grim hurled himself on Ted. He raised his hand and gave the Terror a resounding smack on the face. Desperate measures were indeed called for. Ted was no sportsman. He pulled Grim by the nose, and then completely forgot himself, and tickled the incriminator under his armpits.

This brutal action was more than Grim could stand. In a second Grim pulled out his handkerchief and knotted one corner. Then, whirling it above him, he brought the hard knot down with all his force upon the unprotected head of Ten-Shooter Ted!

The Terror fell like a log, and the money he had stolen fell out of his pockets. Grim stooped and collected it. There were no less than three half-crowns and several loose half-pennies. As Grim collected the last coin of this vast hoard, he heard a shout



With the telescope focused on the trail, Grim dashed along, Splinter at his heels whooping like a cowboy.

from the cottage, and saw the rest of the gang tearing towards him.

What could he do? There was not a moment to lose!

Ah! Ten-Shooter Ted had left his broncho tethered to a tree. Grim leapt on the animal's back, swiftly cutting the head rope with his cigar-cutter, without which he never went far.

Then out into the night he rode—with Mr. Samuelstein's fortune in his pocket.

But Grim's work was not yet finished. He had still to collect Splinter. So he urged on his tired steed towards the signal-box where he had left the lad.

At last the signal-box hove in sight. Grim rode straight up to it, and with a soothing word to his broncho, clattered up the wooden stairs.

On a chair by the signalman Splinter sat, dozing.

His left ear was in splints, he had a bandage over his nose, his arms were both in slings, and his legs stuck out stiffly. But at a word from his master he leapt to his feet, all his injuries forgotten.

Grim lifted him on to his shoulder and carried him tenderly down to his waiting horse. Then the two bade good-bye to the signalman. Grim leapt into the saddle, and off once more he set.

As dawn was breaking he cantered down the main street of Honkville, Honk, U.S.A. He went straight to the police-station and explained what had happened. Then he went to bed and slept soundly. Later that day Splinter had quite recovered, and that evening Mr. Samuelstein came also and received the stolen money.

Once more Grim had outwitted the cleverest thief in the world!

TRAVEL TALES



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 4.—SEA ROLLERS: A NARROW SQUEAK.

ONE of the most curious and dangerous coasts in the world is that of Guiana. Although there are no rocks, it is one of the most terrible coasts to be wrecked on. A vessel could be driven ashore there and broken to pieces, while from the masthead you couldn't see land.

If the shipwrecked sailors took to the boats, those boats would either be smashed up by the awful rollers, or else they would drift for leagues without finding land, for they would get entangled in the mangrove swamps.

This thousand miles of coast, lying between the mouths of the Orinoco and the mouths of the Amazon, has been formed by the silt brought down by those two big rivers, and so it is low and swampy, but extraordinarily fertile where it has been reclaimed from the sea.

The water there is thick and dirty, like soup, of a reddish brown colour. That is owing to the shoals. And these shoals cause the rollers which make that coast so dangerous—the most terrible rollers in the world almost.

My yacht, The Wanderer, got on to one of these shoals the first time we sailed those waters. Of course, we were all unacquainted with them. We found ourselves suddenly among these rollers, which stood up high and steep like walls of water, and then came crashing down and rushed along with tremendous force and speed.

It was touch-and-go for a minute or two, and the ship was jerked and pitched about, driven forwards and backwards in the most bewildering fashion. We heard afterwards that many vessels had come to grief on that shoal.



POTTED PESSIMISM

This Week's Josh

By CUTTLE
(The Porter)

No. 4.—DOWN WITH HOLIDAYS.

FOLKS was thinking and talking a lot about holidays. Why was they talking a lot about holidays? Ask me. Because they don't like work. Nobody likes work these days. All they thinks about was enjoying of themselves. When they works they only pretends to do it, and the one thing they think of was how soon they can get away from it. Their eyes was always on the clock. To find anybody who does work for the love of it was as rare as a miracle.

What I says was that there was too much holiday spirit about, and that it interferes with work being properly done. It was all moonshine to say as how folks need frequent holidays, and long holidays, because of what they call the pressure of modern life.

What about these 'ere boys? Ask me. Holidays was bad for 'em, I reckons. Keep the young varmint at work was my motto—then they won't get up to no mischief. And as for going home at Christmas for two or three weeks, and at Easter for two or three weeks, and in the summer for two or three MONTHS—why, blow me, the young 'uns never gets down to any real work at all!

And was they working when they was at school? Ask me. They was not! Being at school was play—and if I had my way, these 'ere schools would be more like prisons.

The youngsters won't come to no good with all these 'ere holidays, and such. Come to that, it's just the same with grown-up folks. I don't see no signs of nobody sufferin' much from pressure; they don't work hard enough for that. Why, our forefathers did four times as much work as we do, and they weren't always a-wanting holidays. But when they did get one, they enjoyed it more'n we do. We're a lazy crowd in these 'ere modern days.



IN REPLY to YOURS

Correspondence Answered
by **UNCLE EDWARD**

FELIX, BLACKROCK, IRELAND: I regard the insults at the beginning of your letter with amusement, because everybody knows I'm not a bully or a conceited ass. I won't repeat what you say because I haven't the space. I shall have to speak to Mr. Lee about calling our Editor Nipper instead of Dick Hamilton. I quite agree with your own remarks, and perhaps something can be done. No, I haven't the faintest idea which contribution you mean—the one you don't like. You say it's N.G., and I'm completely baffled—a most unusual thing for me, as you'll readily understand.

PAMELA, CHELSEA: I must say you seem jolly inquisitive—but that's not surprising, because you're a girl. But here are my answers to your questions: 1. Your writing is—well, as you're a young lady, I've got to be polite. It's wonderful. 2. No, certainly not. I haven't got pimples on my nose, and never have had. 3. Of course I know E. O. H. I should think I know myself, I suppose? 4. I think of the Trackett Grim plots by sheer concentration—by bringing all my brain power into play and working out the intricate deductions inch by inch to the very end of each mystery. 5. I got your letter by the first post. Well, there aren't any more questions to answer, and as for the rest of your letter, I heartily agree that Irene's pretty, and that Handforth is—oh, well, I don't want to say I'm handsome, do I? By the way, what do those two crosses mean underneath your signature? As for your P.S., I certainly don't believe in bullies and nose-punching. And I haven't the faintest idea who the portrait is meant to be on the back of your letter. Perhaps it's yourself?

D.K., HAMMERSMITH: No, Handforth isn't. And Church and McClure can't help themselves. And they print my Trackett Grim stories in the Mag. be-

cause these yarns are the best contributions of all. And it's like your nerve to call yourself my nephew. You know jolly well I'm not your real uncle.

CYNTHIA, GRAVESEND: Congratulations on your neat, well-written letter. No, I don't think Fellowe's father is a poet. If he was, Clarence's efforts would be more like poetry, and less like piffle. How on earth can you think he's clever? Glad you like Nipper. Yes, he's a pretty good skipper, although I know a chap who'd be a better one. Yes, I've certainly got a vivid imagination, as you've noticed, and it was like Archie's cheek to finish that Cunning Carl story of mine, some time ago. My description is as follows: tall, well-built, strong, determined features, curly brown hair, and steely grey eyes. Goodness knows why my minor came to St. Frank's—I never asked for him! No wonder you ask! Jack Grey lives with his father when he's on holiday, at Sir Crawford's mansion, Grey Towers, Berkshire. Timothy Tucker is as safe as houses—he's only a bit soft, you know. Thanks awfully for your love. I'm quite embarrassed, and I hope Irene doesn't see this.

MAG MAD, UPPER HOLLOWAY: Your letter is just as nicely written as Cynthia's, and if Mr. Crowell saw it he'd give you full marks. Yes, I'll bet Marjorie D., of Gravesend, is a jolly nice girl, as you suggest. I'll bet you are, too, and it's nice of you to call me "Ted dear." I'm glad you think the same as Marjorie D. about the Mag, and that Reggie Pitt is the nicest boy in St. Frank's. Reggie will be pleased. From your handwriting, I read that your character is a wonderful one. You are neat, painstaking, and highly intelligent, and it goes without saying that you're pretty. I've given your love to Reggie and the others, and I've told Archie what you say about that idiotic story of his. I'm disappointed you liked his better than mine—but you're quite right to be candid. You needn't sympathise with Church and McClure—they have a fine time, really. Yes, I think Irene likes me a bit—anyhow, she's got more sense than to make friends with the others. I mean special friends, of

course. I'm afraid I can't publish Pitt's photograph—that's for the Editor to decide.

D. M., LIVERPOOL: No wonder you can't answer that question of yours. Why does a wasp sit down to have its tea? Whoever heard of such a thing? You know as well as I do that wasps don't drink tea.

ARTHUR D., LOWER MITCHAM: It's like your cheek to say I've got swelled head. Bragging is the one thing I detest. As for my ventriloquism, I'll take it up again when I choose, without any advice from you. No offence, of course, but I never stand any rot, as you know. It's a good suggestion of yours that I should join Sexton Blake, but I don't think I'll do it. I mean to start entirely on my own later on, with Church and McClure as assistants.

MARJORIE RUNNACLES, BRIXTON: Thanks for your nice letter. Sorry to hear that your dog's hair is coming out. No, I don't think you'd better gently stew him for an hour, as this might seriously affect his health. You can't do better than give him a bath, and add half a dozen tubes of liquid glue to the water. As for E. O. Handforth—yes, I know him. A chap always knows himself, doesn't he? I'm tall and well-built, with curly brown hair, and steely blue eyes. I'd like to know the person who told you I was ugly. Thanks for not believing it—and thanks for all your other nice remarks.

CROWELL THE 2nd, NORTHAY: Nipper is a nickname, and everybody knows that our Editor was really christened Dick Hamilton. But he's been known as Nipper so long that the name naturally sticks to him. I don't think there's room in the Mag. for us to publish our readers' letters. Isn't it good enough for me to answer? Glad to hear you'll write again soon.

CYRIL MUNCRTON, FINSBURY PARK: Your postcard bucked me up wonderfully, because it arrived just when I was starting another Trackett Grim story. Glad you think these yarns are fine. Of course, when you call them funny, that's just your little joke.

DORIS M. It was jolly nice of you to write such a cheery letter. Yes, I've got a sister, and her name's Ena. She's about 14, and comes between Willy and me. In fact, she's always coming between us when we're at home! She's very handsome, and good-looking—just like me, in fact. But she tries to boss me, and it won't work. Irene Manners is gloriously pretty, with fair hair and wonderful blue eyes. Doris Berkeley is dark, with brown eyes. So glad you like them, and thanks awfully for your good wishes.

FRANK VOCE, Jr., LIVERPOOL: Nipper's given your letter to me to answer. All right, there'll be plenty of stories about

Handforth. In fact, I'm always in every story. They wouldn't be any good if I wasn't.

FRANK P., BRADFORD: So you've been a regular reader for three years? That's the stuff to give 'em! Thanks muchly for your appreciation—but it's all rot to say that Archie is your favourite character! That fathead? He's a bit touched, if you ask me, my son. Still, I expect there'll be some more stories specially about him one of these fine days.

ANNIE SKERRATT, BLACKPOOL: Do I think Handforth is funny? Certainly not! I don't like to contradict a young lady, but Handforth is the most serious chap at St. Frank's. And I'm not "gone" on anybody, either! The idea! Yes, I hope Miss Irene does like me as much as I like her. I've asked Handforth to write some more Trackett Grim stories, and he says he will. In fact, I'm in the middle of getting the next plot even now.

VIOLET DOBIE, EASTBOURNE: Of course I won't get wild at what you put in your letter. In fact, I think your letter is wonderfully clever, considering that you're only twelve years old. My hat! You seem to be a regular scorcher for boys' games, Miss Vi! As for being cross with you for writing that little play, I'm not such a rotter as all that. I think it's great. And I'll give it to Nipper at once, and next week I'll give you another "reply" on this page, and tell you what he thinks of it. How's that? You see how broad-minded I am—because that play is really a bit of a nerve, now I come to read it again. Jolly personal, I mean. By the way, what are the twelve crosses at the bottom of your letter, and why do you tell me not to go red? Give my regards to Harry and your other five brothers.

HARRY DOBIE, EASTBOURNE: Hallo, Harry, old son! Only ten years old, and a reader for two years, eh? You're a young marvel—that's what you are. But it's like your cheek to say you were disgusted because I edited the Mag. I just put it down to your extreme youth, my lad. I give Willy money to keep the young beggar quiet. Trackett Grim lives in London—at No. 10, Baker's Inn Road. Your little puzzle is just as clever as your sister's play, and I'll show it to Nipper—and give you his opinion next week on this page. So look out for your name. Willy sends his kind regards.

MISS I. COLLINS, PORTSLADE: It's ripping of you to praise the Mag. so highly, and thanks for all your nice remarks. You don't think I'll ever make an author, because I'm really a humorist? You silly ass—Oh, sorry! I forgot you were a girl! But I forgive you, and we'll be good friends, eh?



TUBBS ON THE TUB.

*Our Weekly
Speech*

By **TUBBS**, the Page-boy.

No. 4.—MY GOOD DEEDS!

THEY say as 'ow these 'ere Boy Scouts does a good deed every day. Supposin' they do? What are they Boy Scouts for, anyhow? An' you never 'ears the last of their doin's. But what about me? What about a bloke in my position, who's allus doin' good deeds, ten times a day? Do I get praised an' thanked for the good things I does?

Not 'arf I don't! It's about time I opened my mouth an' told the truth about this 'ere subject! I'm doin' nothin' but good deeds from mornin' till night, an' week in an' week out, an' I never gets so much as a word o' thanks!

Why, only last week Master Little gave me a bob to buy 'im a dozen tarts. They was rare temptin', an' so I scoffed three of 'em—not because I was 'ungry, but just to do Master Little a good turn.

'E's too fat, is Master Little, as everybody knows. An' if I could stop 'im eatin' three tarts, I reckoned I was performin' a good deed. But you should 'ave 'eard the way Master Little carried on! Fair jumped down my throat, 'e did, like as though I'd been a thief!

An' then there was Master Chambers. 'E gave me a tip to clean 'is bike, an' you never saw such a fine job as I done, either. I made that bike as clean as a new pin, so's you could see yourself in it. The 'andle-bars was all spotted with rust, so what did I do? Why, I took emery-paper an' rubbed 'em until they was all burnished.

An' then comes Master Chambers, a-ravin' like 'e was mad. Just because I done 'im a good turn like that! 'E said I'd took all the plate off, or some such silly notion, an' 'e kicked me out o' the bicycle-shed.

It ain't as if these are rare cases. It's allus the same. No matter what I do, there's gen'rally somebody to jump on me, an' make out as I'm no more good on this earth than a hinceet. I shall stop doin' these 'ere good deeds, an' then I can't get no blame.

WORDY WISDOM



Tangled Tosh - By Timothy Tucker

No. 4.—THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND.

DARWINISM is an excellent example of the extent to which a chimera may exert a too preponderant influence over the susceptible intellectual faculties of the philosophic mind. The philosophic mind is full of involutions, and still more of convolutions. And this

INVOLUTED AND CONVOLUTED MIND

elevates its eyebrows and corkscrews its lips in ineffable disdain at the obviousness of the thusnesses. That which can be easily understood of the people is not worth being understood by anybody. Only the esoteric and the ethereal is worthy of the concentration of super-minds.

Now, comrades, the philosophic mind, which is our subject,

EXPERIENCES COMPLEXES AND FEELS URGES

which impel it on and ever on towards its ever-receding goal. And here I speak feelingly. What is its goal—the goal of the philosophic mind, my comrades? On that point it is in a state of abysmal ignorance. It doesn't know whether it has got any goal or not, and it doesn't care. What are goals to it? It doesn't play football. But it does play games. Queer games, ingenious games, word-spinning games, cobweb-weaving games, which confuse and deceive both players and onlookers. And all it cares about is the game—not the finish or the prize. It delights in phantasms, and lives in

A WORLD OF PHANTASMAGORIA.

And if any comrade contradicts me in these philosophic reflections, I denounce him as one who casts upon my arguments the evil shadow of an anti-peristatis. He denies my deductions from the exalted logic, but I take leave to inform him that the conflux of his argument does not subvert the analogy of his case.



PEEPS INTO PEPYS DIARY.

By GUY PEPYS of the Remove.

MONDAY.—Did note a mighty change in the spirit and tempers of all the fellows, and indeed of everybody else, with the coming of real summer weather. Verily, sunshine hath a potent charm. To King Sol we owe everything. Yet, withal, too much heat or light from the sun is not good. I do confess that extreme warmth hath a killing effect upon me. Classroom grind becometh a misery.

TUESDAY.—The zest of certain fellows for food and sport, despite the heat, doth amaze me, and amuse me also. As trenchermen, they are as valiant as ever. And at cricket they are no less active and energetic than they were at football. I have it in me to envy them their prowess in these matters. With little appetite for food these sultry days, and mighty little for sport, I do seem to be a miserable creature. Clothing doth give me some trouble, too. To be content, I must be decently clothed; and to be clothed to my liking doth bring discomfort. Fell to envying Somerton again, and sorely tempted to follow his example. That ill-dressed youth remindeth me of that other duke, who, when remonstrated with by friends at home on the shabbiness of his apparel, said: "What doth it matter? Everybody knoweth me." And when abroad: "What doth it matter? Nobody knoweth me." A wise man, methinks.

WEDNESDAY.—I to Little Side. Spectator at cricket, to my great content. Some good play there was. Did fall into a reverie, pondering people's fondness for ball games. Balls at cricket; balls at tennis; balls at golf; balls on the bowling-green; balls at billiards; baseball; football; children's ball games. Verily much time and money and energy be spent upon balls, which seem to appeal to some universal instinct. Doth

not the key to the mystery consist in the fact that men and women are but grown-up children? A right merry evening, for I to Bannington with a number of other fellows, where we did revel and caper at the annual flower show. The flowers did interest me little, but the dancing and fireworks pleased me wondrous well. Home, light in pocket, but no matter.

THURSDAY.—Much affrighted by sounds in the night. Did awaken, disturbed, hearing strange noises, like unto grinding. Did think that burglars were breaking in, and I lay abed, wondering how best I could alarm the household without attracting the wrath of the miscreant upon myself. Did finally steal out of bed, and to my disgust the alarm proved to be but a false one. For it was naught but Fatty Little himself, sitting up in bed, munching biscuits. I did remonstrate, and urged the foolish youth to desist. The which he promised to do—but not until his supply had become exhausted.

FRIDAY.—I do find my resources perilously low. Twice to Bannington this week, and the money doth flow from my pockets right amazingly, with little to see for the expenditure. To move out of the school grounds doth mean to reduce one's capital. And when one's cash hath gone, it but remaineth that one stay at home. 'Tis best to be philosophic at such times, and seek pleasure with a borrowed story book.

SATURDAY.—On a review of the week, I do flatter myself that I have made good progress in my studies. Have had no strifes or contentions; on a pleasant footing with everybody—my own self included. An empty pocket the fly in the ointment; but this a mendable fault. And so to the week-end peace.



E. SOPP'S FABLES

By **EDGAR SOPP**, of the Fifth.

**No 29. THE FABLE OF THE SWELL
AND THE LOUT.**

NOW it chanced that one of the Dandies of the great school of St. Frank's, one Sir Montie Tregellis-West, to wit, travelling from the town back to the school on his cycle, was rudely accosted by the Village Lout known as Lumpy Bill, who did assail him with Violent Laughter as one of the Idle Rich, and did make Rude Mock of Sir Montie's immaculate neck-wear and his Spotless Linen. And he did also jest muchly at the Youthful Baronet's

PRICELESS CYCLING TOGS.

And Lumpy Bill was on this occasion by himself, whereas usually he was in company of a gang of Like Ruffians. Sir Montie he took to be what he called a Soft Mug. For he was a Great Swell, proud of his Neckties and Waistcoats, and fellows of that sort were always Milksops. So he gave Free Rein to his Coarse Tongue, and did let loose on Sir Montie an avalanche of Scurrilous and Unpleasant Chat. And, behold, perceiving that the Lout was alone, the Swell dismounted from his cycle and

SQUARED UP TO LUMPY BILL.

And he did ask him, with Sinister Composure, if his vile abuse was addressed to him—Sir Montie. To which the Boor replied that it Bloomin' Well Was. Whereupon Sir Montie did ask him if he were trying to provoke a fight. And Lumpy Bill did Laugh Unpleasantly, and did say that Swells of his sort didn't know how to fight. At which Sir Montie's fist did Shoot Out suddenly, and deliver a Hefty Blow in the Lout's face, which sent him Staggering. Recovering from his surprise, the Lout lurched forward with the intention of delivering what he called a Swipe on the Swell's nose. But when his fist reached

the place the Swell's nose was not there, and losing his balance the Village Ruffian

PLUNGED HEADLONG TO THE GROUND.

Then, behold, the Smiling Swell did ask him pleasantly if he had had enough. To which the Lout's answer was a Forward Rush, and a throwing of his arms round Sir Montie's waist. A tense struggle ensued, lasting some seconds, and then the Swell was Free, and began to rain Heavy Blows on the Lout's head and face—having, in fact, secured the said face and head in Chancery. At first disposed to be Mild and Gentle, he was now possessed by a Fierce Anger, and did Pepper the Hooligan unmercifully and unceasingly until he Howled for Mercy. To which Sir Montie did reply that the Frightful Bounder must

SUE FOR MERCY ON HIS KNEES.

And, lo! the Lout did so. And he did express his Sorrow in most Humble and Abject words, and did Vow that never again would he Insult the Young Gentleman, or any other of the Young Gentlemen of St. Frank's. Whereupon Sir Montie did release him and let him go, and he Slunk off, not without ejecting More Venom when he had got what he considered a Safe Distance away. And it came to pass that the Swell eyed his once immaculate but now disordered Clothes somewhat ruefully, but decided that the Damage done to his Clothes was more than counterbalanced by the damage which he had Inflicted on Lumpy Bill.

**MORAL: DON'T JUDGE A FELLOW'S
FIGHTING CAPABILITIES BY THE CUT
OF HIS JIB.**

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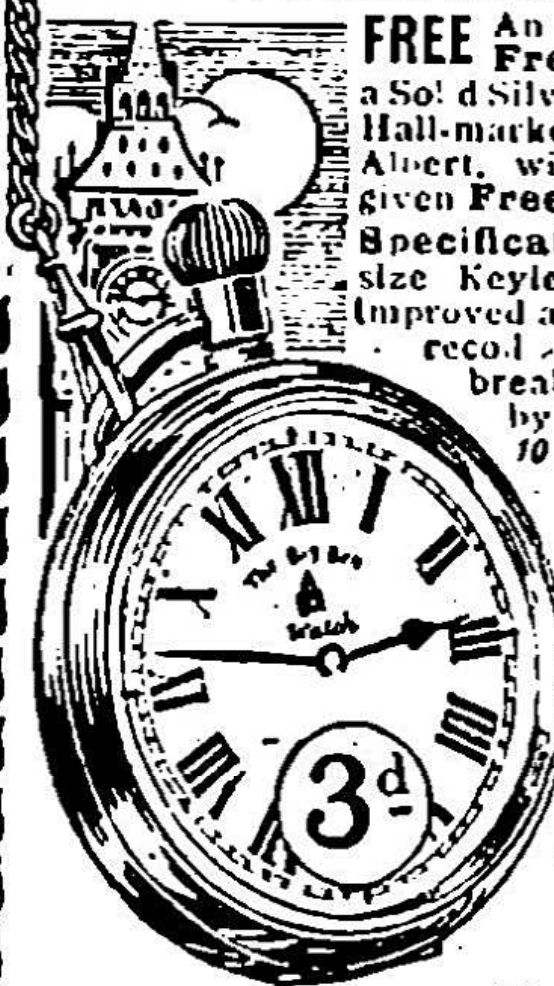
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