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*St. Frank's
Magazine*

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JAPANESE CAFE

NO BOYS OF
ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE
WILL BE SERVED
IN THIS
ESTABLISHMENT
BY OUR NOTICE
MANAGEMENT



**THE
STIGMA OF SHAME;
Or, St. Frank's on
the Brink.**

DON'T MISS

this powerful school story of the
Boys of St. Frank's ; nor
The JEWELS of ILL-OMEN !
Featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper
versus The Green Triangle.



"Phipps!" murmured Archie, hopelessly. "This is where good old Phipps would dash about and do things! Why isn't there a frightful earthquake or something? Life has ceased to appeal!"

THE STIGMA OF SHAME!

or,
**ST. FRANK'S ON
THE BRINK!**

*A Top-hole Story Introducing
the Well-known Boys of
St. Frank's.*

NO BOYS OF
ST FRANK'S
COLLEGE WILL
BE SERVED
IN THIS
ESTABLISHMENT
UNTIL FURTHER
NOTICE
MAY BE GIVEN



St. Frank's is in a bad way. The good name of the school has been dragged into disrepute by a mere handful of cads. One of this number died during some midnight celebrations at the beginning of term, and the affair created a scandal in the newspapers. The tragedy was believed to have been the result of over-indulgence in liquor, although at the inquest it was definitely proved that the boy had died from natural causes. People spoke of midnight orgies as though they were of frequent occurrence at St. Frank's. The great majority of the boys were quite innocent of the vile calumnies levelled against them. As a result a great proportion of the boys have been removed from the school by their parents, and now practically only the Fourth remains. Pitt, the new captain, is desperately fighting against popular prejudice, and is endeavouring to save the school from complete dissolution. The Fourth Form stands loyally by him, and you will read in the story below how this determined band of juniors fight the biggest battle of their lives for the honour of St. Frank's.

THE EDITOR.

By E. SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

THE STIGMA!

JOHAN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS, of the Modern Fourth at St. Frank's, paused and carefully felt the money in his pocket.

"Yes, we can do ourselves well this afternoon," he said briskly. "Come on, my sons—my treat! We'll have tea, French pastries, and top it off with ice-cream!"

"Good enough!" said Bob Christine. "Lead me to it!"

"I don't need any leading!" said Percy Bray, grinning.

The three Fourth Form juniors were in

the old High Street of Bannington, and it was getting late in the afternoon. Being a half-holiday, Buster and Co. had indulged in the pictures.

And now they paused outside the Japanese Cafe.

It was a swell establishment—the one really high-class restaurant that Bannington could boast of. Whenever the juniors were particularly flush, they always patronised the "Jap."

Buster Boots led the way through the Oriental portals of the cafe. There were a good many people in the establishment already, but Boots spied an empty table, and made a bee-line for it.

Being Wednesday, it was market day in Bannington, and all sorts of people were indulging in light refreshment at the various dainty tables. The cafe was well-arranged, and well-organised, with little nooks and corners, and bead curtains, and so forth.

Buster and Co. sat down, and waited for a waitress to arrive, to take the order. The three juniors could scarcely help observing the remarkable behaviour of their immediate neighbour.

He was a large gentleman with side-whiskers, and he occupied the table almost completely. The little corner of it that remained to spare was filled in by a small boy. He looked even smaller than he actually was, by comparison with his mountainous companion—probably his father. There was a certain family resemblance facially, but it seemed impossible that the small boy would ever be able to assume his parent's elephantine proportions.

And yet the youngster must have had aspirations in this direction, for he was causing a pile of doughnuts to vanish at a startling speed.

But it was his father who acted so strangely.

The gentleman was glaring at Buster and Co. with so fierce an expression that it was rather surprising they didn't shrivel up on the spot and wilt away. Unfortunately for the glarer, the three juniors had their backs to him, and were unconscious of these strange attentions.

"Not a bad place, but the service is poor," remarked Grey, as he played a slight tattoo on the glass-topped table. "Come on, my lady, get a hustle on! We want some grub!"

"Oh, she'll come when it suits her!" said Boots, frowning. "These waitresses need some pep! If I had my way, I'd reorganise these places altogether. They're dead! The whole idea of publicity in Bannington is pitiful. I'd sweep away all these mouldy conventions—Eh? What's the matter with you, Percy, you ass?"

Percy Bray gave him a fierce look.

"Nothing—but there's something the matter with this old josser just behind us!" he hissed. "He's wild about something."

Boots glanced casually round and caught the stout gentleman's eye.

"Don't you dare to make grimaces at me, sir!" roared the gentleman loudly.

Boots gulped.

"Nothing of the sort, sir!" he replied. "I wasn't making grimaces—that's my natural expression! You can't blame me for that!"

"Impertinent young hound!" snorted the other.

This time Buster turned red.

"I say, draw it mild!" he exclaimed warmly. "No need to be so jolly personal, sir! It was you who started this argument, remember. I don't know what I've done to make you hoist the red flag like this!"

"Don't dare to bandy words with me,

sir!" stormed the fat man. "Eustace! Come over this side of the table! Don't go near those wretched boys from St. Frank's! Come this side, Eustace!"

"Go on, Eustace—do as daddy says!" said Christine solemnly.

The small boy seemed dazed. This was not surprising. The doughnuts had all vanished. Anybody might have been excused for being dazed under such circumstances.

"Eustace," said Boots, "has swallowed a doughnut whole, I believe."

"This is past all endurance!" roared the stout man. "Not only must I suffer personal contamination, but you have the audacity to insult my son! I will have you turned out, you young scoundrels!"

"Oh, will you?" snorted Buster. "Before we are turned out of this place, sir, we're going to have our tea! I can't help it if you don't like our looks. And don't call us scoundrels!"

"Where's the manager?" demanded the fat man furiously. "I demand to see the manager! These impertinent young hooligans are deliberately insulting me!"

"We're hooligans now!" said Bray excitedly. "Look here, this is getting a bit too thick——"

"Leave it to me!" interrupted Boots quietly.

He turned to the excited man of corpulence, and eyed him grimly.

"Look here, sir, there's no need for us to quarrel, but I'd just like to know why you've taken such a dislike to us," he said. "We haven't cheeked you, or insulted you, and yet you call us hounds and hooligans. As far as I know, we've never met before!"

The stout man puffed ominously.

"Thank Heaven we have not!" he snorted. "But it is enough for me that you boys belong to St. Frank's College! The reputation of that school is notorious! I absolutely refuse to sit in the same cafe with such known young rascals as you!"

Boots had opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. He had turned suddenly blank. And then a pained, bitter expression came into his eyes. He turned and glanced at his chums.

"I'd forgotten!" he said briefly. "We're social outcasts!"

The stigma of shame was as acute as ever.

CHAPTER II.

ORDERED OUT!



THE stigma!

It clung to St. Frank's persistently—doggedly. Ever since this present term had begun, the famous old school had been fighting a hard battle against scandal and rumour.

St. Frank's, in fact, was a school with a

bad name—and all her scholars were indiscriminately condemned.

Time, it seemed, only made matters worse. Since that notorious orgy on the first night, when a senior had unfortunately died of heart failure, there had been no peace for the St. Frank's fellows. Wherever they went they were looked upon with suspicion and contempt.

Buster and Co. had momentarily forgotten this stigma of disgrace when they had entered the Japanese Cafe—but now it came back with devastating force. The stout gentleman's anger was not directed against them personally—but was just an expression of his disapproval of the school itself.

The Fourth-Formers had been having a rough time of it.

The brunt of the burden fell upon them. For they were juniors, and possessed no particular dignity. And so they went about freely, only to be received everywhere with scorn and loathing.

It was not so bad for the seniors. They were bigger, and people were not so ready to insult them. This applied more than anything else to the younger set. Street urchins rarely hooted the seniors—whereas it was becoming a popular Bannington pastime to jeer at the juniors.

The Fifth and the Sixth were over half gone, for parents had become alarmed, with the newspapers full of the terrible scandal. The Fourth would have been halved, too, but for the sturdy, powerful leadership of Reginald Pitt. It was the redoubtable Reggie who had faced a host of angry parents—who had put it to them straight from the shoulder—and who had emerged triumphantly from the ordeal.

And the Fourth, of all the Forms at St. Frank's, was intact to a man.

"Is there anything wrong here?" inquired a flustered gentleman, coming up to the tables with an air of anxious deference. "Please, gentlemen! This disturbance is most distressing! Our cafe is quite select, and any—"

"Are you the manager, sir?" roared the stout man.

"Yes, I—"

"I am Mr. Jasper Huntley, of Midshott!" interrupted the other fiercely. "And I refuse to patronise this place again if you allow these infernal St. Frank's boys to sit at these tables! Do you understand, sir? It is perfectly disgraceful!"

The manager was greatly upset.

"Have the—the young gentlemen annoyed you, sir?" he asked.

"They are not young gentleman—they are young hooligans!" shouted Mr. Huntley.

"That's what he's been saying for the last five minutes," exclaimed Bob Christine hotly. "If anybody ought to be turned out, it's he! We've done nothing! We didn't even speak to him until he started shouting at us. We're not going out of the place!"

"Yes, yes—quite so," said the harassed

manager. "I beg of you, sir, to calm yourself. I am sure there is a misunderstanding. The St. Frank's boys are always most well behaved and gentlemanly—"

"Rubbish, sir!" stormed Mr. Huntley, thumping the table.

"Really, I—I—"

"Nonsense!" went on the stout man. "These boys are nothing more nor less than a disgrace to the district! Do you dare to assure me, sir, that you freely admit them to your cafe after the dreadful revelations of a fortnight ago? You know as well as I do that these St. Frank's boys are evil-living young reprobates! They are unfit to associate with decent society!"

Buster and Co. sprang up, furious.

"Better go easy, sir!" said Boots thickly.

The restaurant was in a turmoil now; a number of people had risen from their tables, and were gathering round.

"I quite agree with Mr. Huntley!" exclaimed one sour-looking man. "These boys should never be allowed to enter a place where decent people congregate. Indeed, if they are permitted in this restaurant, I shall permanently withdraw my custom."

The manager nearly had heart failure; the sour gentleman was a daily customer, and a good one.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed a number of voices.

Mr. Huntley looked round, pleased.

"I am delighted," he said, puffing. "I am delighted that so many ladies and gentlemen endorse my view! If these boys are ever allowed to enter again, I shall take my meals at one of the hotels!"

"Hear, hear!"

"These St. Frank's boys ought not to be permitted."

Buster and Co. stood there listening to this unanimous storm with a feeling of dull amazement. They had done nothing whatever; they were regular customers of the cafe themselves. And they were innocent of any wrong-doing—and had been all along. The manager turned to them in sheer despair.

"I am afraid, young gentlemen, that I must request you to leave," he said, in a sort of nervous whisper. "You see the position—"

"I see that you're confoundedly weak!" retorted Boots angrily. "You've got no right to order us out. We're willing to pay for our food just the same as these other people!"

"Rather!" said Christine and Bray.

"You hear?" shouted Mr. Huntley. "Absolute impertinence!"

The manager shook.

"Really, young gentlemen, I must insist upon your leaving," he said firmly. "I regret I cannot fulfil any orders you may give."

Buster and Co. were staggered. But at the same time they dimly realised that the

manager was in a painful quandary. To ignore his host of customers in order to please these three schoolboys was unthinkable. Therefore, it was the schoolboys who suffered. Once again St. Frank's was compelled to receive an unjust snub.

Buster Boo's glared round ferociously.

"Come on—let's get out!" he exclaimed. "If these people don't want us, I'm jolly certain I'm sick of them. Even if grub was brought to me I couldn't eat any; I'd choke!"

With that parting shot he strode out. Percy Bray and Bob Christine following. But they had no genuine satisfaction. Nothing could alter the fact that they had been ordered out.

CHAPTER III.

EVERY HAND AGAINST THEM.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, lounged elegantly along the High Street, toying with the thought of tea. He was

alone, for Alf Brent was busy with football practice.

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "The good old Japanese Cafe. I mean, just the absolute place for a brief period of quiet and meditation. It might even be possible to indulge in forty of the best, if I flow into a quiet corner."

He arrived at the Japanese Cafe, and was about to enter when he paused and adjusted his monocle. Then his attention became fixed and rigid.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated.

And there was certainly every reason for Archie's startled exclamation. Attached to the other side of the windows, so that all could see, was a big card. And it bore this legend:

"NO BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE WILL BE SERVED IN THIS ESTABLISHMENT UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

The Management."

Archie read the notice through twice, and his usual healthy colour increased until he was red to the roots of his hair. It was a flush of shame and anger that suffused him.

"This, dash it," he declared, "is the limit!"

He turned and walked away, aware of a horrible sensation of deep, burning humiliation. The sensitive Archie was shaken to the core. That such a thing as this could happen to him was tragic.

He thanked his stars that he had not entered the cafe, and thus laid himself open to an even deeper slight. If he had missed seeing that card his humiliation would have

been almost too great to bear. He walked away and crossed the road.

And when he paused he was literally trembling. Archie was probably the most inoffensive fellow alive, a gentleman to his finger-tips, and with a gilt-edged code of honour. To be subject to this kind of treatment was as bitter as gall to him.

"The dashed frightful blighters!" he declared hotly, addressing the thin air. "Gadzooks! I mean to say, oddslife! What, as it were, are things coming to?"

He was extremely thankful that nobody seemed to have noticed his movements. And then his eyes gleamed hopefully. For Buster Boots and Co., of the Modern House, had just emerged from a side turning.

"Greetings, old lads!" exclaimed Archie, hastening up. "I say, have you heard the bad news? That is, have you become aware of the ghastly slight that the Japanese Cafe has pushed across us?"

"Have we heard of it!" snorted Buster. "We were turned out!"

"Good gad!" gasped Archie. "Then I should have been turned out, too. But I happened to see the good old notice on the door. But only just in time, old teapot—only just in time!"

"Have they put a notice on the door now?" asked Bob Christine bitterly. "I'm not surprised. My only hat! Barred out, as though we were a lot of lepers. This affair's getting a bit too steep, you know!"

Boots and Co. were not inclined to talk. They walked off, leaving Archie still considering the position. Archie appeared to go to sleep standing, for he remained there without moving for several minutes. But then he was suddenly startled.

For he caught sight of three pretty, girlish figures on the other side of the road. They were young ladies of fifteen, neatly and attractively attired in school frocks, with wide straw hats. They were Irene Manners, Marjorie Temple, and Doris Berkeley, of the Moor View School. And they were obviously making a bee-line for the Japanese Cafe.

"How absolutely frightful!" murmured Archie helplessly.

He wanted to dash across and greet his girl friends. But he pulled himself up with a sudden shudder. They would ask him to go in. And, of course, he couldn't. This foul business was becoming somewhat ragged.

But he saw Irene and Co. pause just before entering. Irene was leading, and she suddenly turned round and looked at her companions with her pretty face flushed with indignation.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Have you seen this?"

Marjorie and Doris read the notice in astonishment.

"But why?" asked Marjorie. "What does it mean? Why should the St. Frank's boys be prohibited?"

Irene's blue eyes flashed scornfully.

"Because most people are snobs and wretchedly unjust!" she replied angrily. "Oh, it isn't fair! Just imagine treating the St. Frank's boys like that! Why, most of them are perfect gentlemen!"

"The innocent have got to suffer for the guilty," exclaimed Doris. "That's what it amounts to. Just like these narrow-minded Bannington rotters! Oh, I could fight some of them! Of all the unjust things, this just about takes the Huntley and Palmer. Somebody ought to be boiled in oil!"

So far they hadn't noticed Archie; and

CHAPTER IV.

NEARLY A RIOT.



"WHAT-HO!" exclaimed Archie, gazing round. "What exactly is the precise idea? Kindly allow me to break through the old ranks, dear chappies! I would wander further afield!"

The Grammarians grinned.

"This is that freak they call Glen-thorne!" said one of them. "You know, the son of old Glenthorne, up at the

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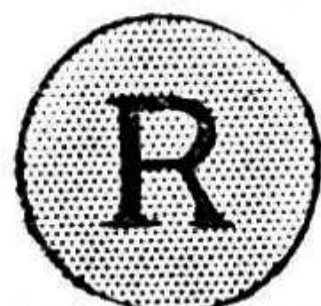
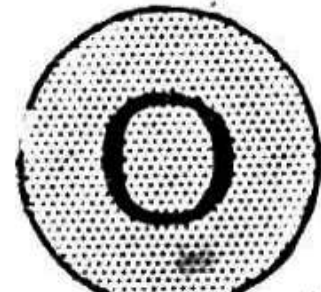
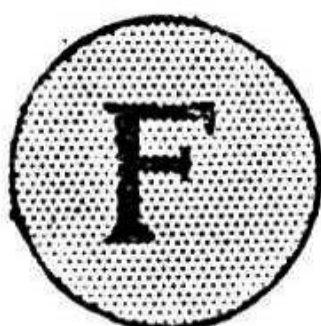
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it suddenly struck him that he would be safer if he got out of sight. But he waited just long enough to see the girls toss their heads and walk away from the cafe. The management has lost other custom as well as that from St. Frank's.

"Bally good!" murmured Archie delightedly. "Topping, by gad! The dear girls absolutely refuse to enter the pestiferous place. There's nothing like—"

Archie broke off, for he discovered, rather to his dismay, that he was surrounded by a crowd of Grammar School juniors.

They had appeared as though from nowhere, and Archie was hemmed in.

Manor. He's touched, in fact, he's as mad as a hatter!"

"Let's rag him!"

"Good idea!"

"He's only a rotten St. Frank's hooligan, anyhow!"

"Yah! St. Frank's beast!"

The tone of the Grammarians was by no means encouraging, and although Archie was inwardly alarmed, he showed no sign of it. He may have been a dandy, but he never revealed the white feather.

He inspected these juniors from the local Grammar School with interest. They were not the usual crowd—not the members of

the cricket or football teams. Archie didn't know it, but this particular gang had a reputation for being a mischievous, unruly lot.

And they were just as fierce in their condemnation of St. Frank's as any of the ignorant rustics. It really seemed that justice was a negligible quantity. Everybody condemned St. Frank's as a whole. They didn't take the trouble to single out the real culprits and place the blame where it was due. No, the whole of St. Frank's was included in the censure. The Saints were regarded as birds of a feather.

"We'll be as safe as eggs!" said one of the Grammarians. "Everybody hates these cads, and they'll approve. I vote we bash his hat over his eyes, turn his coat inside out, and make him walk in his bare feet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze!"

Archie had heard the verdict with growing horror. He, the elegant Archie, who took such a pride in his appearance! He would have preferred to lose a month's pocket-money rather than suffer such a public humiliation.

"Dash it all!" he gasped. "Look here, you dashed bounders! Look absolutely here. What I mean is—Oddslife! It appears that the old vocal chords are like the voice of Moses, or some such chappie, bleating into the good old wilderness!"

Archie went down struggling. In fact, he put up quite a good fight. He lashed out right and left, and more than one Grammarian gasped with pain and surprise. But the end was inevitable. A dozen to one against him, he couldn't possibly last for more than a few seconds.

And once in the hands of his tormentors the torture was quickly and cruelly performed. His elegant boots were removed and tossed away. His socks were torn off, and his trousers ripped up to the knee in ribbons, presenting a ludicrous appearance.

His top-hat was ruthlessly destroyed, the rim being torn completely off. The battered crown was wedged firmly on the back of his head. His jacket was turned inside out, with the striped lining of the sleeves uppermost. His collar and tie were removed and carefully placed round the hat. Altogether, poor old Archie looked a hideous sight.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians fairly howled as they gave him a tremendous heave and sent him staggering out into the open street. And Archie gave one horrible gulp as he came almost face to face with Irene and Co. The girls had been attracted by the noisy crowd of Grammarians—as indeed had many other people—but they had had no idea of the real explanation.

"Phipps!" murmured Archie hopelessly. "This is where good old Phipps would dash about to do things. Why isn't there a

frightful earthquake, or something. Life has ceased to appeal."

The Moor View girls gazed at Archie with utter indignation.

"Why, it's Archie!" cried Marjorie, running up to him. "Oh, Archie, you poor dear!"

"Oddslife!" murmured Archie, with a kind of gulp.

"This is wicked! Oh, it's shameful!" cried Marjorie, turning on the Grammarians and causing them to fall back startled. "You cowards! Oh, you miserable cowards!"

There was such scorn in the girl's voice that the excited juniors fell dumb. If any fellow had spoken to them like that they would have wiped him up. But this was a girl, and they could only gaze at her open-mouthed.

"You ought to be horsewhipped for this!" exclaimed Irene fiercely.

"Horsewhipped?" repeated Doris. "Oh, if I were a boy I'd knock them down! Why isn't Ted Handforth here? He'd punish them for this cowardly outrage!"

By a strange coincidence, Handforth and Co., the famous chums of Study D, had just ridden into the High Street on their bicycles. And it was only natural that they should ride up to the centre of commotion. Irene caught sight of them at once, and she gave a cry of delight.

"Ted!" she shouted. "Quick, Ted!"

Edward Oswald Handforth practically fell off his bicycle and ran up.

"My hat! This is lucky, Miss Irene!" he panted. "I didn't expect—"

"Look!" she interrupted breathlessly.

Handforth looked at Archie and staggered.

"What is it?" he gasped blankly.

"Dash it, old lad, don't ask me!" moaned Archie in misery.

"Great Scott, Archie!" roared Handforth. "What the dickens have you been up to, you ass? You look awful! Why, have these—these—By George!" ended up Handforth, in a perfect bellow.

"These boys did it!" said Marjorie hotly. "We've always accused you of bullying, Ted. But this time we want you to punch as you've never punched before! Oh, do make them smart!"

Handforth flung off his jacket.

"Watch me!" he panted. "Hi, Church, McClure! Come on!"

Church and McClure were only too willing. Indeed, they had already removed their own jackets. A Fourth-Former had been insulted and humiliated in public. The vile insult had to be avenged!

The Grammarians had no chance to escape, for a vast crowd surrounded the entire scene. And Handforth and Co. sailed in. Archie, with such support by his side, leapt into the battle.

And in less than a minute a kind of riot was in progress.

CHAPTER V.

THE POWER OF PREJUDICE.



THE Grammarians were dismayed.

They were only a paltry set of fellows, at best. The St. Frank's quartette hardly knew them—for they were not the

Grammarian sportsmen who occasionally visited St. Frank's for football or cricket.

And Archie's tormentors were caught in their own trap.

They had thought it great fun to rag the unfortunate swell, and to make him look ridiculous in public. But now that there was some real fighting to be done, the Grammarians had no liking for it. But they were compelled to defend themselves, for Handforth and Co. charged in with a vengeance.

Biff! Crash! Slam!

Handforth enjoyed himself as he had seldom done before. Here he was, fighting in his best style, and Irene was looking on! She had, indeed, urged him to enter the battle! It was a novel situation for the leader of Study D.

Two Grammarians went down, howling—one with a black eye, and the other with a swollen nose. And Handforth was deadly. The very fact that this fight had the official sanction of the girls made Handforth even more dangerous than usual.

Church and McClure, always ready to support their leader, were now doing so with great credit. They fought brilliantly. They enjoyed it, too. Any method of standing up for St. Frank's was welcomed.

As for Archie Glenthorne, he amazed the natives.

With his clothing utterly ruined, he had nothing to think of but revenge. And when it came to a pinch, Archie could fight in the most convincing manner. He knew how to use his fists like a professional.

"Take that, dash you!" he panted. "Good gad! I'll show you something, you frightful bounders!"

Crash!

Archie delivered an upper-cut that nearly lifted one of the Grammarians off his feet. All the Grammar School boys, in fact, were



Mr. Beverley Stokes sat up and removed a chunk of creeper from round his neck.

now weak and groggy, and were yelling for help. It was a pitiful display, after their former aggressive arrogance.

But the power of prejudice was at work.

The onlookers soon took a hand in the game. And, to the consternation and dismay of Irene and Co., the crowd was decidedly antagonistic toward the St. Frank's fellows.

"Young hooligans—that's what they are!" shouted one of them. "Ay, they're right about St. Frank's bein' a rotten school! These boys are naught but young ruffians!"

"They attacked first; our Grammar School boys wasn't doing a thing!" shouted another man. "Drag 'em apart! Come on, some of you! Drag these young varmints away!"

It was only necessary to give this brief advice. In a moment, over a dozen men were rushing into the fight, and pulling the juniors away from one another. And the condemnation of the crowd was entirely upon Handforth and Co. and Archie.

They were glared at, shaken, and hauled back roughly. By a sharp contrast, the caddish Grammar School boys were sympathetically treated, and found themselves the centre of gentle attention.

"Oh, it's too bad!" exclaimed Irene indignantly. "Why don't you leave these

boys alone?" she added, turning on three or four men who were holding the struggling Handforth. "It's shameful! It was the other boys who started all the trouble."

"Don't you believe it, missy!" growled one of the townsmen. "I was here, and I saw it all—these St. Frank's boys deliberately attacked the other youngsters."

"I know that!" cried Irene. "But why did they attack them?"

"Because they're young roughs—that's why!"

"It's not true!" shouted Irene. "Those Grammar School boys had ill-treated one of—"

"Don't waste your breath, Miss Irene!" panted Handforth grimly. "They won't believe you. Everybody's against us—everybody thinks we're gutter brats! But it doesn't matter, by George! We gave those rotten cads something to be going on with!"

"Absolutely!" gasped Archie joyfully.

The elegant junior was rather a sight. One eye was beginning to close, and he had a nasty gash at the corner of his mouth. But his knuckles were seriously bruised—a certain indication of the punishment he had inflicted. Archie regarded his hurt knuckles with real pride. The pain was a source of satisfaction to him.

A policeman had arrived, but he could do practically nothing against the tremendous crowd that had collected. And then another man came pushing through the throng—a big, burly individual, whom the Grammarians greeted with great satisfaction.

"Please, Mr. Cotton," shouted one of them, "these St. Frank's boys have attacked us! Look what they've done! I believe my jaw's broken—and I'm half blind!"

"Coward!" roared Handforth scornfully.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Cotton—who was no less than the master of the Fifth Form at the Grammar School. "What is this—a riot? Disgraceful! The culprits shall pay dearly—"

"It wasn't our fault, sir!" shouted one of the Grammarians. "These St. Frank's boys started it—they simply flew at us without warning! Ask anybody, sir!"

Mr. Cotton didn't need to ask. A dozen men vouchsafed the information that the Grammar School boys had been brutally attacked without provocation. Women, too, bore out these statements. So Mr. Cotton could scarcely be blamed for concluding that the St. Frank's fellows were guilty.

Most of the onlookers had only seen the fight itself; they hadn't witnessed the original provocation, the dastardly treatment of Archie. And so it was that the Grammarians received kindly sympathy, and the St. Frank's fellows were set down as ruffians of the worst type.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIMIT.



DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD entered the Form-room of the Ancient Fourth, and ushered in a companion. Mr. Crowell regarded the visitors with polite disapproval. He hated having his class disturbed in the middle of lessons.

It was the following morning, and the Bannington affair was still the talk of the school. Needless to say, the full truth was known at St. Frank's, and Handforth and Co. were warmly praised by all and sundry for their valiant behaviour.

The warriors were showing signs of wear this morning.

Archie Glenthorne had a real black eye. There was no doubt or question about it. It was quite closed, and the flesh all round had assumed an exquisite purple hue.

Archie didn't mind. It was a mark of honour, and he seemed to be rather proud of his disfigurement. Handforth was marked in one or two places, too. And Church and McClure were painfully battered.

They had heard nothing officially yet—although they had been expecting a polite but firm invitation to the Head's study ever since the previous evening. It seemed that the trouble had arrived.

"Pull your socks up!" murmured Church. "This is where we get it!"

"Get what?" growled Handforth. "If we're shoved on the carpet for billing those Grammarians I'll jolly well raise a storm! We ought to be publicly thanked, my lad!"

"You don't expect justice, do you?" asked McClure bitterly.

"Silence, there!" commanded Mr. Crowell hotly.

The Form fell silent, and a great deal of interest was shown when the Head's companion proved to be the burly Mr. Cotton. Lots of the Fourth knew him. He was not such a bad sort, but he had a rather unpleasant way of forming a hasty opinion, and sticking to it.

"I am sorry to disturb you like this, Mr. Crowell, but it is necessary," said the Head. "I have had a serious complaint from the headmaster of Bannington Grammar School, and Mr. Cotton has been sent over especially to investigate."

"Dear me! How extremely distressing!" said Mr. Crowell.

He adjusted his glasses and gazed suspiciously at Handforth and Co. and Archie. He had refrained from making any comment to the juniors, because he had already heard one or two slight rumours.

"Yes, Mr. Crowell, it appears that a most disgraceful scene took place yesterday in Bannington High Street," continued the Head. "Four of your boys attacked a

number of Grammar School scholars without the slightest provocation, and acted with astounding brutality."

"I can hardly credit such a thing, sir!" said Mr. Crowell stoutly. "I beg your pardon, sir! I do not wish to doubt your word—"

"You're not doubting my word, Mr. Crowell—I am merely repeating what Mr. Cotton has told me," interrupted Dr. Stafford. "Indeed, I share your opinion, and I think there must be some misunderstanding. That is why I have come here to have the matter thrashed out."

"By all means, sir—your policy is a wise one," said Mr. Crowell. "It is distressing in the extreme to have such matters left in any doubt."

The Head turned to Mr. Cotton.

"Will you be good enough to name the boys who took part in this affair of yesterday?" he asked. "I think you can pick them out, Mr. Cotton, if they are the actual culprits."

"I have already done so," said Mr. Cotton grimly.

He pointed to Handforth and Co. and Archie, and the juniors were ordered to stand up. They did so, fairly bubbling with eagerness to speak. The headmaster frowned.

"This is astounding!" he exclaimed, scrutinising the juniors closely. "I can well understand Handforth getting into trouble—and even Church and McClure. But it is not like Glenthorne to deliberately provoke a fight."

The Head walked closer, and took a nearer view.

"These boys have certainly been fighting very severely," he exclaimed.

"It was a terrible affair, sir," said Mr. Cotton. "When I arrived, I found them covered with blood, and some of our own boys were in a far worse condition. Indeed, two of them are in the sanatorium!"

"Good!" said Handforth.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie stoutly.

The Head started.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "Boy, what is the meaning of this attitude? Glenthorne, I am going to question you. I am convinced that I can rely upon strictly truthful answers."

"Thank you, sir," said Archie. "Absolutely, old teapot— Good gad! That is to say—"

"Did you attack any Grammar School boys yesterday afternoon in the Bannington High Street?" asked the Head, interrupting.

"Absolutely, sir!" said Archie.

"Did these boys strike the first blow, or did you?"

"As a matter of precise fact, and all that sort of thing, I rather think Handforth got in the first cannonade," replied Archie. "A somewhat priceless yorker on the old chin. One of the Grammar School chappies abso-

lutely turned a somersault, and ceased to participate in the action."

"You see, the boys even admit it!" exclaimed Mr. Cotton.

"No, we don't!" shouted Handforth. "Archie's right in a way, but he hasn't told you everything yet! We smashed into the Grammar School chaps, and we're proud of it! But what did they do first? What did they do to Archie? He's too modest to go into those details—"

"Handforth, be silent!" commanded the Head. "I think there is not the slightest doubt that this disgraceful fight was precipitated by you boys. I have no alternative but to inflict severe punishment."

"But—but—" began Handforth.

"You will all be confined to gates for the period of two weeks!" said the Head curtly. "Furthermore, I shall cane you with the utmost severity now—in the presence of Mr. Cotton!"

CHAPTER VII.

PENTON TO THE RESCUE.



THE Fourth gasped with blank dismay.

This was nothing more nor less than rank injustice. Even Mr. Stafford himself was turning against the juniors! It was

so totally unexpected that the Fourth could hardly catch its breath. Even Reggie Pitt was momentarily at a loss.

But the Head was not greatly to blame.

He had heard a very one-sided account from Mr. Cotton, and Glenthorne and Handforth had clearly admitted that they had started the fighting themselves. The case, on the face of it, seemed clear enough. Further investigation, indeed, was apparently a waste of time.

"Glenthorne, I shall cane you first!" said the Head. "Step forward, sir! I am amazed that a boy of your good character and fine record should stand before me with such a charge of ruffianly behaviour proved against you."

Archie drew himself up straight.

"Kindly allow me to differ, dear old soul!" he said stiffly. "Dash it all, the Glenthornes aren't the kind of bounders to do anything dirty. I mean to say, we pride ourselves—"

"I must compel you to be silent," interrupted the Head.

"All in good time, sir—at the moment the old chest is bursting to be relieved," said Archie. "I feel compelled to point out that this is nothing more nor less than a poisonous miscarriage of justice! No offence to you, sir, but there it is! There, to be exact, it absolutely is!"

"Be silent!" commanded Dr. Stafford angrily.

"But you don't seem to understand, sir,

that these Grammar School cads absolutely molested me in the first old place," went on Archie, taking not the slightest notice of the command. "There I was, trickling down the old High Street, thinking of this and that, and I'm dashed if a cargo of these priceless cads didn't absolutely surround me——"

But Archie was not allowed to continue. He was on the point of reaching the very root of the whole matter. But, unfortunately, he spoke with such long-winded eloquence that the Head did not even trouble to follow him. And Dr. Stafford swished his cane ominously.

"Now, Glenthorne, your right hand, please!" he said curtly.

"Just a minute, sir!" said Fenton, from the doorway. "I don't think it's quite fair to punish these boys for nothing. I don't like butting in, sir, but I can't help it!"

Edgar Fenton, of the Sixth, had entered the Form-room without anybody noticing him. He had stood by the door for two or three minutes, listening, and looking on. He had come to borrow some trifle from Mr. Crowell, and he now realised that his advent had been timely.

"What do you mean, Fenton?" demanded the Head, frowning.

The Captain of St. Frank's looked at Mr. Cotton with a cold eye.

"I think you know, Mr. Cotton, that these boys are quite innocent!" said Fenton grimly.

"How dare you?" demanded Mr. Cotton. "Are you deliberately accusing me of bringing a false accusation?"

"Hardly that, sir, but the Grammar School boys who took part in that affair in the High Street are known to you as incorrigible young rascals who are constantly getting into disgraceful scrapes. Am I right, Mr. Cotton, or not?"

The Grammar School master flushed.

"Well, in a way, possibly you are right," he admitted grudgingly.

"And I think you are equally well aware that the four boys now in front of you are very well known for their high character and good behaviour," went on Fenton. "In any case, I am in a position to prove quite clearly that these boys acted under intense provocation. In my opinion, their attack was fully justified."

"Did you witness this appalling affair, Fenton?" demanded the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"And you took no steps to stop the fight?"

"None whatever, sir," said Fenton steadily. "The Grammar School boys so thoroughly deserved a horsewhipping that I gladly stood by and watched these four juniors deliver a sound trouncing. Instead of being punished, they deserve the highest commendation for their sporting spirit."

"Good old Fenton!" roared the Fourth delightedly.

Mr. Crowell was greatly flustered.

"Boys—boys!" he protested. "Silence at once!"

"I must confess, Fenton, that you have completely bewildered me," said Dr. Stafford tartly. "Perhaps it will be as well if you state, clearly and concisely, exactly what took place."

Fenton did so. It appeared that he had been visiting the dentist's, in the High Street—and had been sitting in the waiting-room—this latter being situated on the first floor. So Fenton, looking out of the window, had witnessed everything from an ideal position.

He had seen the Grammarians attack Archie and brutally rag him. The Head became grim and cold as he listened to this part of the story. As for the rest, he knew most of it.

"Handforth and his chums came up soon after the Grammar School boys had released their victim," went on Fenton. "I was quite pleased when they attacked the young ruffians on the spot. Perhaps it was distinctly opposed to discipline, but human nature cannot always hold itself in check, sir—particularly when the provocation is so overwhelming."

Dr. Stafford nodded slowly.

"Needless to say, Fenton, I accept your version of the affair without question," he said quietly. "The fight takes on a new complexion, and in my opinion there is only one course to adopt. Glenthorne, you may return to your seat."

"Are you going to abandon this punishment, sir?" demanded Mr. Cotton blankly.

"I advise you, Mr. Cotton, to return to the Grammar School at once," said the Head coldly. "I regret that your Headmaster should send you here with such an untrue version of the actual happening. I shall communicate with your Principal myself."

"Hurrah!" yelled the Fourth.

"Mr. Crowell, you may continue your lessons in peace," said the Head, turning to the door. "I will leave you to deal with these Form boys as you think fit. The punishment hardly comes within my own scope."

Mr. Crowell bowed.

"You can rely upon me, sir, to attend to the matter," he said quietly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CREEPY BUSINESS.



WILLY HANDFORTH'S eyes sparkled.

"See it?" he asked eagerly. "A real beauty!"

"Eh?" said Chubby Heath. "What's a beauty?"

He and Juicy Lemon looked round in

wonder. The three Third Formers were in the Triangle, and Willy was gazing intently at the wall of the Ancient House. He appeared to be particularly attracted towards a certain section of the ivy-covered old masonry.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Lemon.

"There it is—just crawling behind that ivy leaf!" shouted Willy. "Look! My hat! It's a regular whopper! I can't miss an opportunity like this! Hold my cap, you chaps!"

Willy was excited. And his chums saw the object which had attracted their leader's attention. Something was crawling lazily and leisurely up the wall, nine or ten feet from the ground.

"My goodness!" snorted Heath. "It's only a spider!"

"Only!" roared Willy. "Look at the size of it!"

"Ugh! I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole!" shuddered Lemon.

"Funk!" sneered Handforth minor. "What's the good of being a naturalist if you don't go after specimens? I wouldn't care if I saw a spider as big as a chicken! I'd catch it on the instant! Keep your eye open for the enemy!"

Handforth minor commenced climbing the ivy, and his chums gazed at one another in a helpless kind of way. It was all very well to tell them to look out for the enemy—in other words, a possible master—but here, in the open Triangle, there wasn't much chance of giving Willy a warning if the enemy suddenly approached.

It was nearly teatime, and St. Frank's was quiet. Afternoon lessons being over, most of the juniors were either in their studies, or on the playing-fields. And the Triangle wore a deserted look.

The Fourth had been congratulating itself on the signal victory over the Grammarians. Mr. Crowell had caused general satisfaction by inflicting a merely nominal punishment upon the four culprits. He had, in fact, ordered them to write fifty lines each. And this, as everybody knew, was tantamount to nothing. For it was a peculiarity of Mr. Crowell's that whenever he gave a junior fifty lines, he never expected to see them. And, needless to say, he never did.

But these matters interested the Third but little. The fags lived in a world apart from the Fourth, and their doings were of no interest to the other juniors. For example, the Fourth Formers would never think of taking the slightest notice of Willy's efforts to obtain possession of a spider.

The fag climbed steadily, taking no notice of one or two ominous creaks from the straining ivy. He got within easy reach of the spider, and then made a sudden grab.

But the spider was no fool.

He gave a half turn, and then, with con-

temptuous ease, he slid softly under a projecting root, and vanished from sight. To make matters worse, the creature actually turned, and looked out at Willy with derision.

"You rotter!" snorted the fag. "Come out of that!"

The spider took no notice of this command, and so Willy produced a pencil with fell intent, and fiercely prodded it beneath the root. Naturally, the spider was no longer there. He had scented the danger, and had scooted backwards into the groove of the next slab of granite. Here he ran leisurely along, and investigated the wall higher up.

"If you think you're going to slip out of my fingers, you've made a mistake!" roared Willy indignantly. "I'll get you, you bounder!"

"Come down, you ass!" shouted Heath, from below.

"Anybody in sight?" asked Willy.

"No, but that ivy looks a bit wonky——"

"Blow the ivy!" snapped Willy. "And don't speak to me again, or I shall slip! I'm going to get this spider, if I have to chase him all over the giddy roof! I'm not going to be dished by a spider!"

Willy gave one or two swift jerks upwards, and this time he caught the spider off his guard. One grab, and Willy had the luckless creature in his fingers. He closed his hand, and could feel the spider squirming about inside, quite unable to escape.

"Good!" said Willy triumphantly. "Got him! Now—— Oh, my only Sunday topper;"

He uttered the last words in a breathless gasp. For at that very moment Mr. Stokes strolled round the angle of the building, and Heath and Lemon had no opportunity of giving a warning. But they made a valiant attempt to do so.

"Cave!" they hissed, in one voice.

"My dear kids, what's the good of shouting that now?" asked Mr. Stokes cheerfully. "You're too late—I have spotted the culprit. Handforth minor, what are you doing up there?"

"Nun—nothing, sir!" replied Willy.

"Indeed! Just a little exercise before tea, eh?" suggested Mr. Stokes, standing beneath the wall, and gazing upwards. "Come down at once—and never let me catch you at this game again."

"Yes, sir," gasped Willy. "I mean no, sir!"

Unfortunately the ivy gave a little creak at the moment, and Willy thought he was falling. He made a wild grab to gain a better hold, and the spider got free from his grip. It descended with legs waving, and alighted cleanly and neatly on Mr. Stokes' waistcoat.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Housemaster. "What on earth——"

He broke off with a gulp. The spider whizzed upwards, encircled Mr. Stokes'

collar, and then dashed up into Mr. Stokes' hair. Finally it dropped with a plop to the ground, and shot off for safety.

"Come down, sir!" shouted Mr. Stokes angrily.

Willy came down—but not in the way he intended. He was so startled by the Housemaster's tone that he commenced descending too hurriedly. The ivy gave way, and Willy came hurtling to the ground.

He landed upon the Housemaster in a heap, and a second later Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were gazing with horror upon a tangled mass, which consisted of Mr. Stokes, Handforth minor, and a perfect forest of ivy!

CHAPTER IX.

TRYING IT ON.



A HEAD emerged from the mass of creeper.

"Where are we?" gasped Willy Handforth breathlessly.

Mr. Beverley Stokes sat up, and removed a chunk of creeper from round his neck. Then he rose to his feet with as much dignity as possible—which was precious little, considering that he was festooned with creeper. When he took a pace forward he rather resembled the Old Man of the Sea in a pantomime.

"Sorry, sir!" said Willy briskly. "Let me give you a hand!"

He grabbed at the ivy, and gave a terrific tug, nearly strangling Mr. Stokes in the process. But somehow they managed to get themselves free of the tangle at last.

"You young rascal!" said Mr. Stokes angrily. "I've a good mind to take you indoors and swish you!"

"It was an accident, sir!" protested Willy.

"I know that—so I shall be lenient," said Mr. Stokes. "At the same time, you had no right whatever to climb that ivy. Don't you know that such tricks are absolutely forbidden?"

"Ye-es, sir," admitted the fag meekly.

"Very well then!" said Mr. Stokes with a frown. "You will write me two hundred lines, Handforth minor, and I shall require them this evening. And never let me catch you climbing these walls again!"

"I was only trying to catch a spider, sir."

"I am well aware of that—I nearly caught it, myself!" replied Mr. Stokes grimly. "If you must have spiders, young man, confine your activities to the ground. Or, better still, go in for beetles. I won't have this ivy-climbing any more. Look at the damage you've done!"

"Oh, that's nothing, sir," said Willy lightly. "I'll soon tear this stuff down and clear it away—"

"Oh, will you?" interrupted Mr. Stokes. "And what would the Head say to that?"

The roots are quite intact, and this creeper has got to be nailed to the wall again. Just think of the work you've given the poor gardeners!"

"I expect they'll survive, sir," said Willy.

Mr. Stokes walked off, and proceeded indoors to brush himself down, and have a wash. And Handforth minor turned to his chums to inflict the punishment they deserved. To his chagrin, they had gone. Scenting trouble, Chubby and Juicy had streaked off indoors.

But Willy routed them out in no time, and his anger had subsided. He found the pair in their little study, assuming warlike attitudes.

"It's all right; you needn't worry," growled Willy. "I'm not going to biff you. I don't suppose you know any better—and a chap's got to go easy with harmless lunatics."

"We couldn't see Mr. Stokes round the corner, I suppose?" snorted Chubby.

"No; but if you had had a grain of sense, you'd have stood at the corner," retorted Willy. "But what's the good of talking? I've got to do two hundred rotten lines."

"They won't take you long—you've got your special machine in the cupboard!" grinned Lemon.

But Willy didn't respond to the grin. During the previous term he had invented a wonderful machine for writing lines easily—a kind of mass-production affair. But, owing to excessive overwork, the contrivance had got completely out of order.

On the last occasion it had been used half the lines had come out all right, but the others were not decipherable as words at all. Mr. Suncliffe, the Third Form-master, had rightly investigated—with the sad result that the line machine was no longer workable.

So Willy sat down, and plodded away at his imposition by the ordinary method. And as he wrote his hopes grew higher. He was a confirmed optimist, and he knew that Mr. Stokes was a good sport. By this time he would have cooled down, his anger all gone.

"I'll take him a hundred," Willy murmured, as he finished the hundredth line with a flourish. "Perhaps he won't notice the difference—and if he does, he'll probably let me off the rest. No harm in trying it on, anyhow!"

And so, five minutes later, Willy calmly presented himself in Mr. Stokes' study, and handed over the imposition. Mr. Stokes examined it with careless indifference.

"That's all right," he said briefly. "Good lad! You can eat off!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Willy, with joy.

"Hold on!" put in the Housemaster, glancing at the fag with suspicion. "You look rather pleased with yourself. Just wait a moment until I've glanced over your work."

One glance, in fact, was quite sufficient.

"A hundred lines," said Mr. Stokes

mildly. "I thought I told you to write me two hundred?"

"Did you, sir?" asked Willy innocently. "Why, I thought—I shall be rather busy to-night, sir, so perhaps the other hundred will do another time?"

"The other hundred will not do another time, young man," said Mr. Stokes severely. "You will write them at once. The idea! I'm not quite so easy to get over as that, Master Handforth! Off you go, and let me see those other lines as quickly as possible!"

"Yes, sir," said Willy forlornly.

He saw Mr. Stokes toss the first hundred into the waste-paper basket, and he departed from the study, bitterly asking himself why lines should be written at all, if they suffered no better fate than to be thrown ruthlessly away. And then Willy gave a gulp and a start.

"My goodness!" he breathed. "Why not?"

CHAPTER X.

GRAVE NEWS.



WILLY paused abruptly.

He stood there in the passage, considering. After all, why shouldn't he try it on? Anything to save himself writing

another hundred lines! His scheme, of course, was simple in the extreme.

Mr. Stokes had thrown the first hundred lines away. Why not recover them and present the same batch a second time?

"These masters are all the same—they don't take any notice!" murmured Willy. "He'll never be any the wiser—and I shall save myself a lot of beastly swotting! It's a go! I'll do it!"

He hung about the end of the passage eagerly, and he was quite delighted when Mr. Stokes left the study, and sallied forth in the opposite direction. Willy lounged carelessly round the corner, and went to Mr. Stokes' study with his hands in his pockets.

And then, seeing the coast clear, he dodged into the room with such speed and agility that he seemed to vanish like some gnome. He made one dive to the waste-paper basket, and grinned with cheerful relief when he spotted the impot. lying there, uncrumpled and unsoiled.

"It's easy!" he murmured jubilantly.

He quickly folded the pages, and placed them in his pocket. Then he nipped to the door, and commenced to open it. But he paused, his expression blank. The voice of Mr. Stokes smote upon his ear! And, to make matters worse, the Head's voice was there also!

"Holy smoke!" murmured Willy, in dismay. "This has put the lid on it!"

He gazed round wildly. There wasn't time to get out of the window. But there was a

table in a corner—a table with a big flap in front of it. Willy simply gave one dive, and vanished. And as he did so the door opened and the two masters entered.

Willy roundly accused himself of being an idiot. Now that it was too late he realised that he had made a mistake. He ought to have boldly opened the door, and pretended that he had come back to ask Mr. Stokes a question. It was just fate that he should overlook an obvious excuse of that kind.

To reveal himself now would be fatal. He couldn't very well explain that he had come to ask Mr. Stokes a question by diving underneath the table. Even the genial Housemaster wouldn't swallow a yarn like that!

So Willy was forced to crouch there, keeping still and silent. He hoped with all his heart that he wouldn't hear anything very private. He hated eavesdropping, and here he was, in a terribly compromising position. There would be no excuse for him if he was detected.

Obviously Mr. Stokes had met the Head just round the corner, and so they had both come back. But how was Willy to have reckoned on such a thing? He frowned, deciding that these masters were not at all considerate.

"I'm glad I caught you, Stokes," the Head was saying, as he came in. "I just wanted a word with you, if you're not busy."

"Not at all, sir," said the Housemaster. "Sit down. I don't know whether you'd care for one of these cigars—they're quite decent."

"Well, yes—thank you," said Dr. Stafford.

Willy groaned inwardly. Apparently they were going to make an evening of it! And his position was fearfully cramped. He resolved that at the first hint of anything terribly personal he would make known his presence.

"I'm rather concerned about you, Stokes," said the Head slowly. "I think you looked upon your appointment here as—well, permanent, didn't you?"

"I was hoping for it, sir," replied Mr. Stokes. "You know, my wife is very much in love with the place, and we are both exceedingly comfortable here. I hope I haven't displeased—"

"Good gracious, no, Stokes!" interrupted the Head. "Not that, at all. But it seems more than probable that we shall all depart at the end of this present term. In other words, St. Frank's is on the brink!"

"On the brink, sir?" repeated Mr. Stokes curiously.

"In danger of being permanently closed down," said Dr. Stafford gravely. "So, you see, the prospect is far more serious for me than for you. I have lived half my life in these famous old precincts."

There was a momentary silence. Willy Handforth was startled. He had not made his presence known. After all, what he had

heard was not personal—not even private. For if St. Frank's was to be closed at the end of term, everybody would soon know about it. A thing of that sort couldn't be kept quiet.

"But are you really in earnest, sir?" asked Mr. Stokes incredulously. "I can't possibly conceive of such a thing! St. Frank's closing down! Why, it's an appalling thought."

The Head nodded.

"That dreadful scandal is likely to ruin St. Frank's for ever," he said sadly. "The seniors are but a handful, compared to what they were. Happily, the Fourth is intact."

"Thanks to the efforts of young Pitt," said the Housemaster approvingly. "That boy's a wonder, sir."

"Well, he is a splendid leader," agreed Dr. Stafford. "And he certainly saved the Fourth Form from being scattered. For the moment, Stokes, the situation is endurable. We may be able to carry on until the end of term—although even that will be an expensive business. With so many boys absent, we are losing money at a serious rate."

"That's bad, sir."

"It is fatal," said Dr. Stafford. "This is a great establishment, Mr. Stokes, and the expenses are enormous. Unless the school is at least three parts full, a loss is inevitable. Sir John Brent, our chairman, has been down to see me, and it really seems as though this will be the last term for the dear old school."

"Unless, of course, the position improves?"

"I am afraid that is too much to hope for," said the Head. "Quite a number of parents have intimated their intention of removing their sons at the end of this term. This applies particularly to the Fifth and Sixth. My dear Stokes, with practically all the seniors gone, what chance have we? And we shall certainly obtain no new scholars with such a black cloud hanging over us."

"It certainly seems very grave, sir," agreed Mr. Stokes. "I wish we could think of some— Come in!"

Tubbs, the page-boy, entered the room.

"If you please, sir, the vicar's waiting for you," said Tubbs, addressing the Head.

Dr. Stafford made a wry face.

"I'm sorry, Stokes, but I suppose I must go," he said regretfully. "I'll tell you what—come along to my study a little later on. We'll continue our chat then."

And the Head left—and still Willy was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XI.

A BRAIN-WAVE WANTED.



MR. STOKES accompanied the Head to the door, but that was all. Willy's hopes were dashed. But only temporarily. A minute later the Housemaster strode out of the study, but left the light on and door open. Obviously, he was soon coming back.

But it afforded Willy the chance he needed.

In a moment, he was out of the hiding-place, and he made for the door. But just as he reached it, Mr. Stokes hurried round the corner of the passage, and Willy took his courage in both hands.

"I wondered where you were, sir!" he said brightly.

"Hallo! Back again?" exclaimed the Housemaster. "Where on earth did you spring from, young man? I didn't meet you coming down the passage."

"There are two passages, sir," replied Willy calmly. "I've brought a hundred lines, sir, as you ordered."

He handed them over as bold as brass, and Mr. Stokes gave them a casual glance. He turned over the pages and nodded.

"All right, Handforth minor, you can go now," he said. "And remember—never try to get out of an imposition. It doesn't pay in the long run."

"Thank you, sir," said Willy gladly.

He scuttled out, and Mr. Stokes closed the door. Then the Housemaster tossed the impot into the waste-paper basket. But he suddenly looked again and investigated the basket closely. He found one hundred lines, but no more.

"Oh, so that was the little game!" grinned Mr. Stokes. "Of all the infernal young tricksters! But it was a smart dodge—confound him!"

The Housemaster sat down at his desk with a chuckle. And, being a sportsman, he dismissed the matter. Having accepted the lines, he couldn't very well question them now. But he stored the incident away in his mind—for future reference. Once bitten, twice shy!

In the meantime, Willy was in no particular hurry. He mooched down the passage with his hands in his pocket, and with an expression of dull care on his usually cheerful visage. He strolled into the lobby, and didn't even notice Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey.

"Whither bound, solemn one?" asked Pitt.

"Oh!" said Willy, with a start. "Nowhere. I was just thinking."

"You shouldn't indulge in these difficult exercises," said Reggie, shaking his head. "Thinking isn't in your line, my lad."

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"You'll strain a few muscles, or something——"

"You chaps busy?" interrupted Willy abruptly.

"No—why?"

"Lead the way to your study!" said Handforth minor.

"My lord commands, I can do nothing but obey!" exclaimed Reggie solemnly. "Escort his highness to the abode of learning, good Jack! And if the varlet hasn't anything to say, we'll kick him out of the window!"

They went to Study E, and Willy carefully closed the door.

"I've got something to tell you chaps,"

finance, and the blessed place is going bankrupt!"

Reggie Pitt patted Willy gently on the shoulder.

"This is what comes of thinking too much," he said gravely. "You get these hallucinations and delusions——"

"All right, you rotter—I'll tell you how I know!" said Willy grimly.

He stated the facts. He didn't mind admitting what he had done, for his eaves-dropping had been entirely unintentional. Pitt and Grey listened with changing expressions while they heard the full story.

"Well, something's got to be done, of course," said Reggie at length. "It's a good thing you brought this information



For Willy to reveal himself now would be fatal. He couldn't very well explain that he had come to ask Mr. Stokes a question by diving underneath the table.

he said, looking at them earnestly. "No, don't rot! It's serious! St. Frank's is going to close down at the end of this term."

"Marvellous!" said Grey. "Doesn't it always close down for the holidays?"

"This won't be for the holidays exactly—it'll be for good."

"For good?" repeated Reggie sharply.

"For good!"

"You're talking out of your hat!"

"I'm not!" insisted Willy. "I tell you St. Frank's is closing down for good at the end of this term. The old school's on the brink, and money's being lost like water every week. It's simply a question of

straight to me, Willy. You haven't told anybody else, I suppose?"

"Not a soul!" replied the fag. "The Fourth seems to be the only hope, so I came to you. What are you going to do?"

"Give me a chance!" protested the junior skipper. "A brain-wave is required here—and a pretty powerful one, too. We shall have to call a committee meeting, and we'll admit you to it, Willy, as a special concession."

"How can you be so kind?" asked Willy sarcastically.

"Now then, my lad—no cheek!" said Pitt grimly. "This thing has got to be kept secret, and the whole crux of the matter

is just this—finance. If only we can think of some means to raise funds, we might be able to keep the old school open."

Willy looked very dubious.

"I say, draw it mild!" he protested. "I know the Fourth can do a few miracles, but this is a bit too steep! How the dickens can we raise enough funds to make up for the school's losses? Ask our paters to pay double fees, or something?"

Reggie shook his head.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be much of a success," he confessed. "No, it's got to be more drastic than that. And we've got to raise the cash ourselves—the Fourth has got to do the job."

"With a little help from the Third," said Willy promptly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHOCOLATE MINSTRELS.



THE occasion was a solemn one.

The Fourth Form Committee was sitting. At least, some of the fellows were sitting. Others were standing about, or lean-

ing on the mantelpiece, or even perching themselves on the tables.

It was the following day, and Reggie Pitt had decided to form a committee, every member of which was pledged to secrecy. It was rather a large committee, and included Handforth and Co., Buster Boots, Christine, and a number of other prominent juniors. The Modern House was well represented.

Needless to say, Willy Handforth was in great evidence.

The facts were all known, and the meeting had been called to decide what methods the Fourth could take to ensure the safety of St. Frank's. If the Head himself declared that the famous school was on the brink—well, there was no question about it.

"It's rather a difficult proposition," said John Busterfield Boots. "Now, if it was a matter of publicity, I'd be on it like a cat leaps at the butcher's man. But what's the good of publicity when the thing has got to be kept quiet? It hampers me a bit!"

"I'm afraid you don't come in just yet, old man," said Pitt. "The first thing to decide is how we shall raise the cash. And it's no good talking about pounds and shillings. In order to stand any chance of success, we've got to raise hundreds of pounds!"

"Impossible!" said Handforth.

"Why is it?"

"Because there's no method of raising hundreds of pounds," replied the leader of

Study D. "Might as well suggest altering the course of the sun. We can't do miracles!"

"It's certainly a bit tall, you know," admitted Bob Christine.

Pitt looked round grimly.

"I don't say we'll do it, but we'll try!" he exclaimed. "And unless a fellow makes up his mind to do a thing properly, it'll never be done at all. Are we going to see St. Frank's closed up without making an effort to save the situation?"

"If there was any possibility of doing something—" began De Valerie.

"By George!" interrupted Handforth. "I've got an idea!"

"Trot it out!" said Pitt, without much hope.

"It's an absolute cert!" said Handforth. "We shall be able to raise money and save the school without any trouble at all. It only shows you what a real brain can do."

"I thought you said the whole thing was impossible?" asked Church.

"Rot! I—I was only pulling your leg," said Handforth hastily. "Well, here's my idea. We'll get up a concert party, book the town hall in Bannington, and give a series of shows. We ought to take a hundred pounds a night, and we'll simply hand the whole thousand to the Head."

"The whole thousand!" said Pitt.

"Yes, we shall last ten nights, at least."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid you're too much of an optimist, old man," said Pitt, shaking his head. "If we could raise a hundred quid by such a scheme we should be lucky. There's something in the idea, but it's hopeless as it stands."

"Hopeless?" said Handforth. "Why, you silly chump—"

"How many people do you suppose would come to a concert like that?" demanded Boots scoffingly. "Of course, the Bannington people love us, don't they? They'd flock to see our precious concert party—I don't think! You silly ass, we'd get the bird!"

"My only hat! I hadn't thought of that!" said Handforth blankly.

"Well, it's just as well to consider all these points," remarked Church. "In my opinion, we shouldn't even get the bird. There'd only be a few roughs come in, and we should be pelted off the stage."

"Of course we should."

"The idea's dud!"

"No, it isn't!" said Pitt thoughtfully. "It's a good idea, but we shall have to alter it a bit. Why not call ourselves the Chocolate Minstrels, or something like that? In other words, why not fool Bannington? It would serve the town right, for being so rottenly narrow-minded!"

Buster Boots looked keen.

"You mean—don't let on who we really are?" he asked eagerly.

"That's the idea," agreed Pitt, nodding. "The show can be advertised for one day next week, and the town hall can be rented for one night, and there's no need for anybody to be told that we're the concert party. We'll just appear with chocolate coloured faces—like coons. And if we can't fool Bannington, then we're not worth our salt!"

Handforth nodded.

"Well, of course, that was my idea all along," he said casually. "I didn't put it in that way at first, but it was lying sort of dormant—just waiting to come out. Of course, I shall be the leader of the show."

"We'll arrange all that later," said Pitt diplomatically.

The idea had caught on, and everybody was enthusiastic. And it certainly would serve Bannington right if the town could be hoaxed in the way Pitt outlined. There would be no swindle about it, since the minstrels would give a performance well worth the admission money.

Boots simply froze on to the scheme. He could see all sorts of possibilities, and he instantly appointed himself publicity chief.

"But what about money?" he asked. "We shall need some cash, you know. Must pay for the hall in advance, and have some money for advertising purposes. How's that going to be fixed?"

"Allow me to step into the old breach," said Archie Glenthorne gracefully. "Name the figure, laddie, and it shall be forthcoming. I happen to have a private banking account, you know, and— Well, any old time you like, and as much as you like!"

"Good man!" said Pitt briskly. "But don't forget, Archie—all these exes are to be paid back to you. We shall give the entire profits to the school, keeping nothing for ourselves. But there's no reason why anybody should be out of pocket."

And ways and means were entered into, and a hundred and one points discussed.

CHAPTER XIII.

REHEARSALS.



TEDDY LONG looked eager, as he approached Church.

"I say, Church, what's the game?" he asked softly. "What's all this secret excitement about?"

"You might let on, you know—I'm in the Fourth as well as you!"

Church was just crossing the Triangle, and he paused and frowned. Nearly a week had elapsed since the "Chocolate Minstrels" had been decided upon, and an enormous amount of work had been accomplished.

"What do you mean—secrecy?" said Church. "You're dreaming, you ass!"

"No, I'm not—I've got eyes, and I've got ears!" declared Teddy.

"You have!" agreed Church, with conviction.

"And I jolly well know that there's something in the wind," said the spy of the Fourth. "Why the dickens can't you let on?"

"Go and eat coke!" said Church curtly.

He shook Teddy Long off and marched on. Under no circumstances must this talkative junior be allowed to know the secret. Once in his possession, it would be all over the school, and then all over the village, and, finally, all over Bannington.

And, so far, the plans had been working with delightful smoothness.

Rehearsals had been taking place in the old ruined mill, the juniors reaching this rendezvous in batches. For they had never left the school in a crowd, for fear of arousing comment.

And Pitt was delighted with the results. The Fourth, of course, were no novices at entertainment. They had once got up a minstrel party to tour at the seaside and in the country. They had been surprisingly successful. The Remove, too, had assisted wonderfully when the famous Professor Onions' Circus had been in need of assistance.

And Johnny and Bertie Onions—both Fourth-Formers—were hosts in themselves—Johnny as an acrobat, and Bertie as a comedian. They would take a large share in the minstrel show.

Boots had concentrated on the business side of the affair. He had succeeded in renting the Bannington Town Hall for a night, and the town was already liberally plastered with posters announcing the minstrels. Bannington generally gave big support to such entertainments. So everybody was optimistic and cheerful.

It was nearly the eve of the show—for it was due to take place on the following night. And a dress rehearsal was the next item on the programme. This was to be held in the old barn—familiarily known among the juniors as Fort Resolute.

In order to be absolutely secure the final rehearsal was booked to take place after lights-out. Once over, the juniors could go to bed with perfect freedom. On the morrow they would turn up at the town hall already disguised—after parading the town.

It was about ten-thirty when the first move was made. Pitt and Grey slipped out of bed first, and noiselessly dressed themselves. It was not necessary for them to awaken the others. They were all so excited about this adventure that they hadn't even gone to sleep.

And so, just before ten-forty-five, the party stole out. And the Fourth-Form dormitory became still and silent again. A figure sat up in bed, and took a deep breath.

"I knew it!" murmured Teddy Long. "They're up to some fishy business! I wish I could——"

He broke off, and leapt out of bed with agility. After all, why shouldn't he? He hated the dark, and he was fearful about venturing forth after lights out. But why shouldn't he follow, and find out what these fellows were up to? It was a good chance!

Teddy didn't even dress himself. He just slipped his trousers on over his pyjamas, tore into a.s. coat, and padded to the door in his slippers. Then he crept silently downstairs—his nervousness returning, and making him wish that he hadn't left his comfortable bed.

But his hopes revived as he got downstairs, for he caught a sound of whispering voices, and saw one or two dim forms moving about. He halted, fearful that he should be discovered.

"Yes, of course—Fort Resolute!" came the unmistakable whisper of Handforth. "Don't be such a ass, Church! Of course, we're not going to the mill—we're going to Fort Resolute!"

Teddy Long didn't move an inch. He knew now! There wasn't any need for him to hurry. He waited, fairly quivering with eagerness. His first thought was to rush to the Housemaster's bed-room and sneak. But this might bring trouble on his own head.

So he made his way back to the Fourth-Form dormitory, and shook Fullwood into wakefulness. Ralph Leslie sat up, bad-tempered.

"Go away, confound you!" he snapped.

"I say, those other chaps are up to mischief of some kind!" whispered Long. "Pitt and Handforth, and all that crowd! They've just sneaked out, and they're going to the old barn!"

Fullwood was thoroughly awake now.

"How do you know this?" he asked quickly.

"I didn't go to sleep to-night—I thought there was something in the wind, so I kept awake," replied Long. "And they've just gone down—I saw 'em go."

"But you were afraid to venture out into the dark, I suppose?" said Fullwood contemptuously. "All right—I'll look into this."

He didn't say any more, but awoke Claude Carter, the new boy. He was several kinds of a rotter, and it was quite natural that he should have chummed up with Fullwood and Co.

Together they quietly slipped out, and made their way to the old barn. And within half an hour they were in full possession of the whole secret—although they did not make their presence known.

But it was rather significant that both Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Claude Carter should seek out Mr. Horace Pycraft—the first thing after breakfast, on the following morning.

And for the rest of that day Mr. Pycraft went about with an expression on his face which was as nearly pleasant as it could be. Apparently, there was some trouble in store for somebody.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HUGE SUCCESS



JOHAN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS rubbed his hands together with satisfaction.

"They're coming in like flies!" he said genially. "Over three parts full already! We look like being packed! It only shows what good publicity can do!"

Buster was rather justified in giving himself a pat on the back. For it certainly was publicity alone which had brought this big crowd into the Bannington Town Hall.

The people had no previous knowledge of Chocolate Minstrels, and paid for admission because the posters were exceptionally attractive, and because the minstrels themselves had created enormous interest in the town earlier in the evening.

For they had paraded down the High Street, and through the other principal thoroughfares before going to the hall. In this way widespread attention had been drawn, and the people were curious.

Nobody guessed the real identity of the entertainers.

The secret had been kept well, and by all appearances the show would be a complete success. Bannington, after all, was not accustomed to highly polished London shows. So this amateur minstrel performance would probably pass muster.

If it was a success, a return visit would be made a week later, and then the hall would be booked for three days. This first show was more or less experimental.

Buster was dressed up like a minstrel, as well as the others, although he was taking no actual part in the performance. But the disguise was necessary, for he was well known in his own personality.

He was peeping through a crack in the curtain, and the sight of the people flocking into the hall filled him with delight. And it gave the other juniors great strength and courage. It was their chance! And what a thrill it would be to hoax these people who were so blind with prejudice!

"How's it going?" asked Pitt, bustling on to the stage.

"Fine! Nearly full!" replied Buster gleefully.

The manager, in the front of the house, was quite as pleased as the juniors. For he liked nothing better than to see the place full. The hall had been paid for in advance, so the receipts made no difference to him. But it was a good advertisement for the Town Hall if it did good business.

The gentleman, of course, was in the know. This had been necessary indeed, without his co-operation, the thing couldn't have been done—as Pitt had quickly realised.

But the manager was a London man, and he was also a personal friend of Mr. Isaac Levi, who owned the Bannington Palladium. And as Mr. Levi was the father of Solomon Levi, of the Fourth, it was all an intimate affair. The manager of the Town Hall had pledged himself to keep the secret. And he had ably carried out Buster's extensive publicity schemes.

When the time came for opening the show the hall was practically full up, and the juniors were keyed up to a fine pitch of enthusiasm and excitement. They would certainly give their best under such circumstances.

The curtain went up and revealed the minstrels.

Nobody on earth could have guessed that they were schoolboys. In gay costumes, with chocolate-coloured faces and other make-up they seemed to be the genuine article.

And the opening chorus was well rendered, and well received. Perhaps the voices were rather youthful, but nobody took any notice of this. Nobody suspected an inkling of the real truth.

The second item on the programme was a solo by Reggie Pitt—a comic song. He was rather good at this sort of thing, and he caused much amusement by his capers before singing.

But Pitt was hardly overjoyed when a thin, weedy-looking man pushed his way forward down the central gangway, and approached the footlights. The man was none other than Mr. Pycraft, the master of the Modern Fourth.

"Oh, my only hat!" breathed Boots fearfully, from the wings.

Mr. Pycraft stared up at Pitt, and raised his hand.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, in a loud, shrill voice. "How dare you masquerade in this foolish fashion? You will all dress yourselves at once, and return with me to the school."

Even Pitt was at a loss for a reply. Before they had got really started, Mr. Pycraft was letting the cat out of the bag, and ruining every prospect of success! At that precise moment Reggie could cheerfully have hit Mr. Pycraft on the head with a hammer!

"Sit down, there!"

"Turn him out!"

The audience misunderstood, and shouted at Mr. Pycraft. But he turned, and faced the hall grimly.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you have been hoaxed—indeed, I might almost say swindled!" he shouted, with a note of gloating in his voice. "You have paid your money to see this performance, and it is nothing more than a fake!"

"That's not true!" shouted Pitt angrily. "We're giving a full show!"

"And a good one, too!" roared Handforth.

"These performers are no more minstrels than I am!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "They are St. Frank's boys, and I have come here to put an end to this ridiculous farce!"

There was an uproar at once.

"I had hoped to arrive in time to stop the performance altogether, but I was delayed. Ladies and gentlemen, I urge you not to let these young rascals fool you for a moment longer."

Mr. Pycraft turned back to the stage.

"Come, boys—enough of this nonsense!" he said curtly. "Get those absurd things off, and return with me to the school!"

The cat was out of the bag with a vengeance.

CHAPTER XV.

PREJUDICE!



REGINALD PITT thought swiftly.

The situation was hopeless, by all appearances. But many a disaster has been averted by bold action, and there was

no reason why Pitt shouldn't try to avert this one.

His feelings for Mr. Horace Pycraft were too deep for words. Ever since the new master had arrived the boys had loathed him. He was not a rascal in any way, but just plain nasty. Mr. Pycraft would always go out of his way to get a fellow into trouble.

Fullwood & Co were well aware of this, and so they had approached the master of the Modern Fourth with confidence. They knew they could trust him to ruin the minstrel show.

"Just a minute!" shouted Pitt, almost stepping over the footlights and holding up his hand. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to have a word, if you'll listen to me."

There was a momentary silence.

"I'll admit that we are St. Frank's fellows—it's no good denying it now," shouted Pitt. "But we haven't done this for the purpose of swindling you. You've paid good money to come in here, and we'll give you a decent show. By the time we've finished you'll say that—"

"Swindler!"

"Go back to your rotten school!"

"St. Frank's is clean!" roared Pitt angrily.

"Hear, hear!" thundered the minstrels in one voice.

"Everybody is labouring under a delusion!" went on Pitt quickly. "You're all prejudiced against us, and it's the most grossly unfair—"

Squelch!

Half an orange, hurled with great accuracy, struck Pitt in the face, and he staggered back, amid a roar of anger and indignation. The audience was thoroughly incensed. Mr. Pycraft had successfully set fire to the train. And now the explosion was taking place.

The master, having hinted that the people had been swindled, had done enough. The performance hadn't gone far enough for the audience to judge whether it was a genuine one or not. And such is the blind power of prejudice, that they instantly took it for granted that the whole thing was a swindle.

"Turn 'em off the stage!"

"Fetch the police and have 'em locked up!"

Pitt stood back, breathing hard. He knew that it would be impossible to gain a hearing now. He ran to the wings, and a roar of derision followed him.

"Quick—down with the curtain!" yelled Pitt.

The curtain came down with a run, and the minstrels were concealed from view. Mr. Pycraft smiled to himself as he witnessed the result of his action. He was quite pleased. He considered that he had performed a duty.

"We want our money back!" shouted somebody.

And a riot nearly followed.

"Yes, we'll have our money back!"

"If we don't get it we'll smash the place down!"

The whole audience stampeded out of the auditorium and pandemonium reigned. The box-office was literally besieged. And the unfortunate manager, who had been congratulating himself so shortly before, was now nearly off his head with worry.

There was only one thing to do.

The admission money had to be returned, and it was a ticklish business. But as soon as the crowd found that it was being paid the excitement died down somewhat, and a vestige of order was restored.

Behind the scenes the minstrels were dismayed and disappointed and intensely furious.

"It's Pycraft's fault!" roared Handforth. "Look here, what are we going to do? It's just like the Modern House to have a rotten master of that sort!"

"Look here, don't blame us for him!" snorted Boots.

"Peace, children—peace!" interrupted Pitt. "Get these things off as quickly as you can, and take that brown stuff off your faces, too. We can't leave the place like this!"

"Why not?" asked Watson.

"Because there'll be a huge crowd waiting for us, of course," said Pitt grimly. "Do you think they'll let us escape without a

ragging? We shall be mobbed, and half-slaughtered if we're caught!"

"Great scott!"

"What the dickens are we going to do?"

"Ring up the police!"

The minstrels were thoroughly startled. But Pitt insisted on his advice being adopted, and the costumes were quickly removed. This was an easy task, since they were worn over the juniors' ordinary Etons.

And in less than ten minutes the juniors were themselves.

"This is a fat lot of good!" growled Handforth. "We've got no more chance of escaping like this than we had the other way. When I meet Pycraft I'm going to punch him on the nose. I don't care if I get the sack for it!"

"Pycraft was only a tool," said Pitt grimly.

"A tool?"

"Yes. Fullwood and Carter and those other cads were the real culprits," declared Pitt quietly. "They just put Pycraft on to this because they were afraid to appear publicly themselves."

"Phew!"

"How did you know this?"

"Because I've got my eyes open," replied Reggie. "Didn't you notice Fullwood & Co. speaking with Pycraft this morning, in the Triangle? I thought there was something fishy about it at the time, but I couldn't prove anything. And that chap Carter, too—he was thick with Pycraft."

"But that doesn't actually prove it," objected Boots.

"No—but this does!" said Pitt grimly. "When old Pycraft came to the front of the stalls and gave the show away there were six people in the left-hand box. They kept well back, but I spotted them. And those six were Fullwood, Gulliver, Bell, Carter, Merrell, and Marriott."

"The awful rotters!" roared Handforth violently.

Pitt turned and sped out of the dressing-room. But he was back in less than two minutes. And his eyes were gleaming.

"They're still in the box!" he said significantly.

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL DETERMINED.



JACK GREY stared.

"Supposing they are?" he asked. "What about it?"

"The crowds haven't gone out yet; it's a slow business, giving them their money back," said Pitt. "Fullwood & Co. are

waiting until the mob's gone, then they'll probably slip away. At the moment they're sitting in that box, smoking."

"The awful cads!"

"It's certain, of course, that a huge crowd is waiting to greet us when we go out," went on Pitt. "Now what will the crowd do if six minstrels are suddenly pushed outside?"

"Murder them!" said Boots firmly.

"Hardly that; but those six minstrels will go through the mill beautifully," went on Reggie. "So that's what's going to happen."

"You fathead!" snorted Handforth. "We've changed now. Besides, you don't think we'll ask for trouble in that way, do you?"

"I don't," said Pitt. "But Fullwood and Co. are going to get the trouble, whether they ask for it or not. See the wheeze? We'll pounce on those cads now, drag 'em round here, and dress them up!"

Boots gave a roar.

"Reggie," he gasped, "when it comes to ideas you're worth a fortune!"

The task was quickly carried out, and easily. The minstrels numbered over a dozen, and they suddenly appeared in the box before Fullwood & Co. could even think of escape. The startled cads were pounced upon and hauled down the passage and then through a doorway on to the stage. The people who remained in the auditorium took little or no notice of this slight commotion.

"You rotters!" gasped Carter. "What are you going to do with us?"

"You'll see," said Handforth breathlessly. "Take that!"

He sloshed a great daub of chocolate coloured mess on Carter's face and proceeded to rub it in. It didn't worry Handforth a bit when a considerable amount of the stuff went into Carter's mouth.

After ten minutes had elapsed the six young rascals were transformed. With their faces browned, and attired in minstrel clothing they looked exactly like the genuine article. And they were taken in a body and collected at the stage door.

"Now then—out with 'em!" panted Pitt. "Sharp's the word!"



In rapid succession, Fullwood and Co. were hurled forth—straight into the arms of the waiting mob.

The door was flung open, and as the juniors had expected, a great crowd was waiting outside, mostly consisting of roughs and louts from the lower section of the town.

In rapid succession Fullwood & Co. were hurled forth, straight into the arms of the waiting mob.

"Hold on!" screamed Fullwood frantically. "We're not the minstrels—"

"You're making a mistake!" howled Carter. "Hands off—"

But they might as well have talked to a pack of wolves. They were not even listened to, but grabbed and carried away.

They finally arrived at the horse-trough, and here, one by one, they were ducked. If ever there was an example of poetic justice this was one. Fullwood & Co. had never bargained for such a climax as this when they had so joyfully approached Mr. Pycraft.

In the meantime the real minstrels calmly walked out without trouble.

For the waiting crowd had gone, and the juniors had no difficulty in slipping through the side streets to the station. But they were hardly joyful on account of the punishment that had been meted out to the culprits.

"You can't alter the fact that it's been a horrible frost," said Handforth gloomily.

"I didn't even have a chance to sing my song. And what about the money?"

"There isn't any money!" replied Pitt shortly.

"What about paying Archie back?" asked Boots.

"Kindly refrain from mentioning the old sub," said Archie gently.

"It's rotten, old man," exclaimed Pitt. "We hired the hall, and paid the money for it. We can't get the money back now. Whichever way you look at it the affair has been a dismal failure."

"Handy's idea!" growled Bob Christine.

"Look here, you rotter—" began Handforth.

"Don't blame Handy," interrupted Pitt.

"The idea was good, and but for a sheer

fluke it would have been successful. Well, we're not going to throw up the sponge because of a first defeat."

"What else can we do?" demanded Church.

"Fight!" retorted Pitt. "We'll stick to it all along the line, and fight as hard as we can. There's plenty of time left in this term, and if the good old Fourth doesn't save St. Frank's, I'll eat my necktie!"

But although Reggie Pitt spoke so enthusiastically, the others knew that the prospect ahead was very black. St. Frank's was in danger of being closed down—blotted out as a public school.

But the Fourth was just getting into its stride.

THE END.

By Your



Editor:

My dear Readers,

Any complaints this week? Any questions you wish to ask about the characters, or the stories? Then write to the author, for he wants to know exactly what you think about the stories he is writing for you. Opinions differ widely, and I have heard it said that the comparative few who trouble to write do not represent the great majority who never write at all. The task of discovering what most of you, my readers, like best is certainly made much easier when more of you write. After all, you buy the paper, and you should therefore see that you have some voice as to

its contents. So don't be afraid to send along your opinions, for every one will be taken into account by the author when he gets busy with his next story.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY.

I think the present St. Frank's stories become more absorbing every week. If you enjoyed the story above, you will like even better the one that is coming next week, entitled, "TRYING TIMES FOR ST. FRANK'S; or, Keeping the Colours Flying."

Your sincere friend,
THE EDITOR.

Result of Mystery Picture Competition No. 6.

In this competition the First Prize of One Guinea for the best inscription to the picture has been awarded to:

MISS I. BISHOP, 30, THE BROADWAY, WEST EALING.

for the following:

"Our friends will come, N'kose," said Umlosi. "Having escaped thus far, the fates will not allow us to perish in this miserable fashion."

The Twelve Consolation Prizes have been awarded to:

Harold Back, 12, West Mount Terrace, Dover.

S. Brown, 9, Hawkstone Road, Rotherhithe, S.E.16.

Jack Casswell, Bull's Head Street, Wigstone, near Leicester.

L. Cook, 2, Earl Street, West Bromwich.

C. Delaney, 113, Glenny Road, Barking, Essex.

C. G. Harris, 17, Epsom Street, Rupert Street, Norwich.

E. Hodgson, Regent Street, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Notts.

R. Kelly, 338, Winchester Road, Southampton.

A. Lugg, 200, The Grove, Stratford, E.15.

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THE THIRD EPISODE OF THE GREEN TRIANGLE SERIES, FEATURING NELSON LEE AND NIPPER VERSUS THE NOTORIOUS PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE.

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News reaches Nelson Lee of the discovery of the Crimson Eagle wrecked near Rochester. It was by means of this extraordinary aircraft that Zingrave's accomplice had pulled off a daring theft of jewels when it held up the liner, *Melania*, in mid-ocean. This week's thrilling narrative relates how the great detective gets on the track of the thieves and incidentally scores a few points against the Professor.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE CLOUDS.

WOODHOUSE chuckled with satisfaction.

"Ten thousand each, at least," he said gloatingly. "Probably fifteen, Hayes—it all depends upon the value of the jewels. But we've got 'em, and the Chief will simply hug us for this job."

"I wish these infernal clouds would disperse," growled Hayes.

He was in the pilot's seat of the *Crimson Eagle*—the wonderful aircraft which the League of the Green Triangle had used with such success during the past week or so.

Woodhouse was beside him, and both men were looking supremely happy. They had reason to be. Being two of Professor Zingrave's most trusted agents, they had been sent off on a delicate task. In brief, they had swooped down on the liner *Melania*, and had flown away with the celebrated Heathbrook jewels.

This collection was world-famous, and was worth hundreds of thousands. It may seem that the liner had delivered up the prize tamely. But this was not the case.

In the calm of the evening the *Crimson*

Eagle had swooped down, hovering just above the great vessel's foremast. The jewels had been demanded, and a point blank refusal had resulted. And then the *Crimson Eagle* had shown her claws. Circling round, two devastating bombs had been dropped in the sea across the liner's bows—a sinister indication of what might follow if the captain remained obstinate.

There had been only one possible course.

And the jewels had been handed over. Now they were safely in the *Crimson Eagle's* cabin, and the aircraft herself was winging her way over the West of England—bound eastwards. She was taking the trip easily, travelling at no greater speed than sixty miles an hour. When she chose, she could hurtle across the sky at the enormous rate of two hundred and fifty miles per hour.

But it was only just dusk, and "Major" Woodhouse had received strict orders not to descend until darkness enshrouded the land. He was planning to reach his landing spot by eight o'clock in the evening.

Hayes was at the wheel for the moment, and both men were in the *Eagle's* head, for this was the pilot-house. The great gleaming eyes of the bird were the lookout ports. For this aircraft was constructed in a

singularly lifelike imitation of a real, gigantic eagle.

"I'll take it over before long," said Woodhouse cheerily. "I'll just pop back to the cabin now, and have a cup of tea and a bite to eat. Then I'll come along and relieve you."

"All right; I can do with a smoke," growled the other.

Woodhouse opened a small door, and crept along a narrow passage which sloped downwards—this, in fact, being the neck of the Eagle. He was soon within the body, which contained the powerful engines, the cabins, and central saloon.

Here Woodhouse took another look at the parcel of jewels, chuckled over them, and turned his attention to tea. He busied himself with a vacuum flask, sandwiches, and other delicacies.

He took no notice of the Eagle's course. This aircraft was so different to any other, that her navigators never felt the slightest apprehension. They had supreme confidence in their vessel's air-worthiness. If necessary, she could hover indefinitely over one spot—noiseless, and as steady as a rock.

Woodhouse returned to the pilot-compartment and found Hayes in a grumpy mood.

"What on earth's the matter with you, confound you?" demanded Woodhouse. "We've pulled off the biggest coup we've ever attempted, and you're like a bear with a sore head!"

"Wait until you get in this seat—you'll be the same!" retorted Hayes. "These infernal clouds have covered the country from end to end! We're flying above them now, but they're about the thickest I've ever seen. We can only steer by compass. There's not a landmark to be seen."

"The cloudbank can't last for ever," commented Woodhouse.

He took a look through the observation ports, and softly whistled. Overhead the stars were already beginning to gleam, although the last flush of daylight was still in the sky. But beneath the smoothly-cruising aircraft, some two thousand feet below, lay a rolling, undulating mass of fleecy clouds.

As far as the eye could see, these clouds extended. They formed an impressive picture. Woodhouse glanced at one of the instruments, and noted that the Eagle's altitude was somewhere in the region of 15,000 feet.

"We've got enough height," he remarked. "Wouldn't it be better to drop beneath the clouds now—it's nearly dark?"

"I've tried it," said Hayes. "I can't find the finish of them! These clouds seem to go right down to the ground. Either that, or the instrument's at fault."

"You go and get some grub inside you, and I'll take the wheel," said Woodhouse. "We've got to make for Turtle Island, off the Essex coast. We can pick her out easily

enough because of the rocky prominence in the centre. It's about the only island of that kind off the whole coast. Most of the others are flat marshland."

Hayes relinquished the wheel, and Woodhouse took charge, and very soon he was actually as impatient as his companion. It was getting on towards eight o'clock, and if their navigation was accurate, the Eagle should now be somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Essex coast.

Yet nothing could be seen below. The darkness had closed down, and the whole country was shrouded in the great pall of the dense clouds. More than once Woodhouse cautiously dropped, only to find the aircraft diving deeper and deeper into dense, impenetrable vapour which seemed to have no ending.

"Well?" asked Hayes, when he returned. "Found our bearings?"

"Not yet," growled Woodhouse. "These clouds are about the thickest we've ever been up against. Still, they must hang somewhere. We'll drop gently until we come out. Then we might be able to pick up a few landmarks. It's quite safe now; the darkness will be intense on the ground."

The Crimson Eagle dropped lower and lower, and still the masses of vapour swirled thickly round the observation course. Both Woodhouse and Hayes were acute with anxiety.

"Better go easy," warned Hayes. "According to this instrument, we're only three hundred feet up, and that's dangerous. Better rise a bit—"

He reeled as he spoke, and the aircraft lurched over sideways. There had been a sudden, grinding crash. The Eagle sagged over, and dropped, her flapping wings no longer silent, but creating a creaking, grinding motion.

Woodhouse cursed madly; but the Eagle continued to drop like a stone!

CHAPTER II.

THE DISASTER.



CRASH! With a shattering, splintering noise of wreckage, the Crimson Eagle struck the ground and heeled over, scattering debris in every direction. Hayes

was caught between the shattered woodwork and pinned.

Woodhouse, by some Miracle, felt himself thrown sideways and forwards. He experienced no pain. His ears were throbbing, and his mind, for the moment, was a blank. He only knew that he was lying in a huddled heap, with his head far beneath the level of his feet.

For several moments he lay like this, and

complete silence enveloped the whole disaster.

The Crimson Eagle had crashed through no defect of her own.

Feeling her way down through the clouds, one of the flapping wing-tips had struck against the parapet of a towering factory chimney. With her equilibrium completely upset, and one wing a wreck, the Eagle had fallen headlong to the ground.

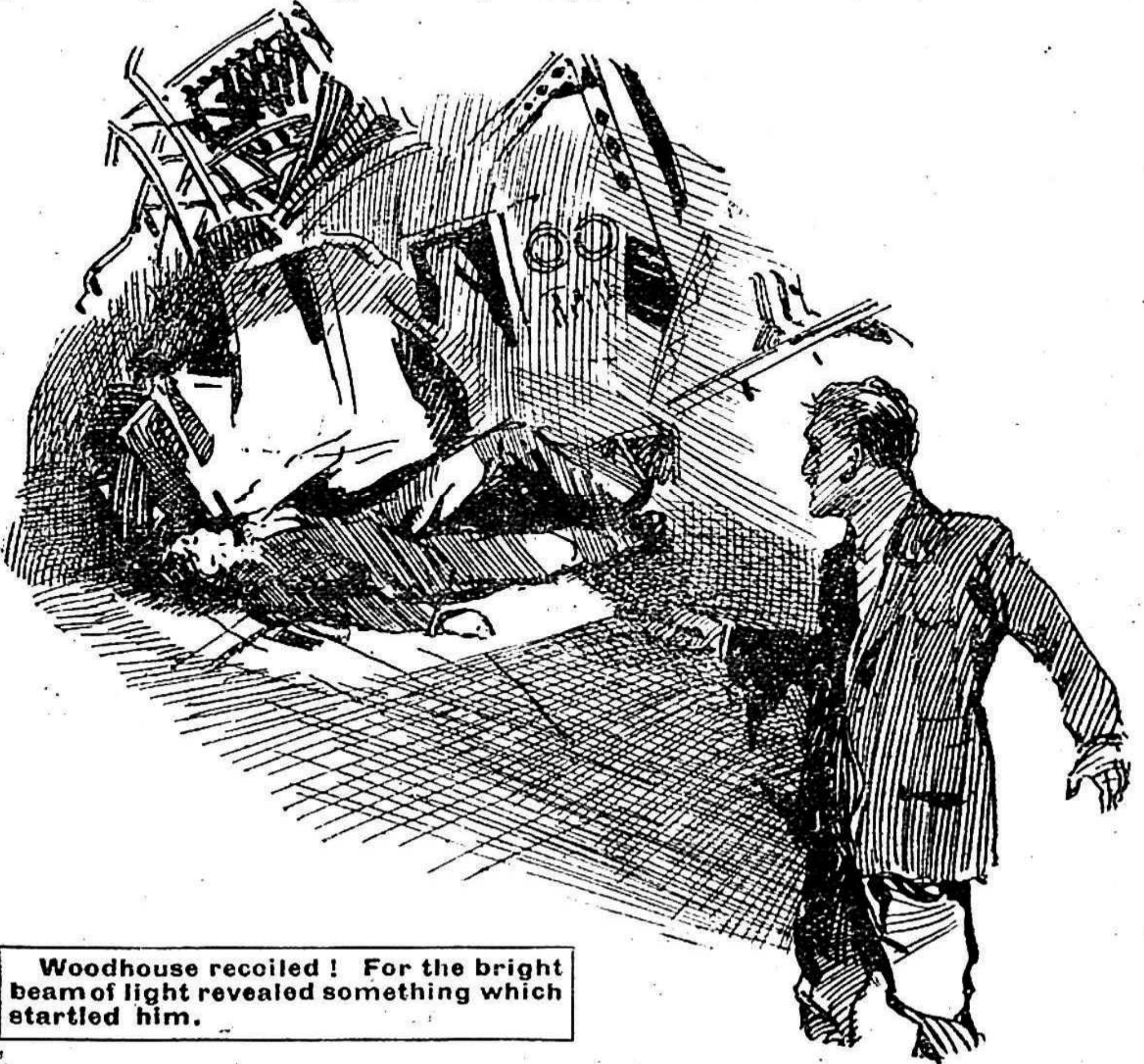
But nobody had witnessed the disaster.

And the reason for this was obvious. The entire countryside was wrapped in fog—the

ing; and the Crimson Eagle had fallen in a quiet side lane where there was practically no traffic. The fog concealed her.

Woodhouse made a movement at last. He wriggled round, pulled himself upright, and was astonished to find that his bones were whole. The dazed feeling was going. He knew that the aircraft had crashed; and his first lucid thought was for his own safety.

The Crimson Eagle was notorious. The whole country knew that there was only one craft of this kind in existence. And the



Woodhouse recoiled! For the bright beam of light revealed something which startled him.

clouds, in fact, descended completely to the ground. It was this unusual state of affairs which had caused Woodhouse to make a miscalculation.

He had believed his instrument to be at fault, whereas it was accurate. And the Crimson Eagle had hovered in the fog only a short distance above the house-tops. But for that factory chimney it might have escaped the crash. And now the mischief was done.

The wreckage lay in the road, for the factory chimney arose sheer from the build-

first people who came across the wreck would recognise her as the Green Triangle's infamous craft. And it naturally followed that her occupants would be seized and held.

The necessity for instant flight was paramount.

And Woodhouse remembered the jewels, too. Somehow or other, he made his way down the narrow passage of the neck—which was still intact. Being familiar with the vessel's interior, he felt his way into the central saloon. The Eagle was lying half on her side, and everything in the saloon was

scattered. More by luck than anything else, Woodhouse found the parcel of jewels and secured them. Then he reached the open air by means of a great rent in the Eagle's side.

He dropped to the ground, and took one look at the debris.

The fog was swirling about eerily. A street lamp was near by, shedding a pale, uncanny glow through the mist. Woodhouse felt a pang of keen disappointment. This wonderful craft—a wreck!

There was no question about the Eagle's condition. Her wings were shattered to fragments, and she presented a pitiable sight. Complete silence reigned. Woodhouse seemed to have the entire neighbourhood to himself. He glanced up at the ghostly factory shaft, and it was enough to tell him the whole truth.

He thought of Hayes, and he changed his mind about dashing off. There seemed to be no immediate danger of capture. He quickly stepped into the wreckage, and pushed his way through the pilot-house.

"Hayes! Hayes!" he called. "Are you there, old man?"

There was no reply. Woodhouse pulled a miniature electric-torch from his pocket, and flashed it on. Then he recoiled, for the bright beam of light revealed something which startled him. Hayes was lying there—a crumpled mass. His face was waxen, his eyes staring. A trickle of blood from his mouth accentuated the deadly pallor of his cheeks.

"Dead!" muttered Woodhouse huskily.

He turned and fled from the dreadful scene. He couldn't quite remember leaving the wreckage a second time. He only knew that he reached the road, and strode along it half drunkenly. And still he came upon no sign of humanity.

The truth was simple. This factory was rather an isolated one, situated on the outskirts of a town. And at this hour of the evening, and in such fog, the spot was deserted. But presently Hayes saw signs of life. He had turned several corners, and was now in a main road. There were even tramcars—grinding laboriously to and fro through the thick mist.

A man appeared out of the gloom, and Woodhouse stopped.

"I'm afraid I'm lost," he said huskily. "Can you tell me where it leads to if I keep along this road?"

"You can't go wrong, mate—you'll come right into Rochester," said the other.

"Rochester!" ejaculated Woodhouse, startled. "Rochester? Am—I in Kent?"

"Well, I allus thought that Rochester was in Kent," replied the other man, staring. "Keep straight on, mate—you can't go wrong. Best take one of these trams, and make sure," he added drily.

Woodhouse paced on, realising that the other had assumed that he was suffering from over-drinking. All the better. Wood-

house was soon lost in the mist, and he was deeply concerned.

Rochester! And he had believed himself to be in Essex. After all, the distance was not so great as the crow flies. But it was necessary to cross the Thames estuary in order to reach Turtle Island. And deprived of the Eagle's assistance, the task promised to be a difficult one.

But, somehow or other, it had to be done. Professor Zingrave was waiting, and by hook or by crook the parcel of jewels had to be delivered!

CHAPTER III.

NELSON LEE'S STRATAGEM.



NELSON LEE looked up as the telephone bell rang.

"See who it is, Nipper," he said briefly.

The famous pair were in their consulting-room, in Gray's Inn Road. It was evening, and in London the fog was scarcely noticeable. Curiously enough, the heavy pall had remained high, leaving the great Metropolis comparatively clear.

Nipper hastened to the telephone. Both he and his master were at a loose end. They had heard about the raid on the Melania, but so far Nelson Lee had been unable to get on the trail. In this battle against the Green Triangle Lee was severely handicapped. For he had practically no starting point, and even at this moment he was attempting to scheme out some plan of action which would lead to definite results.

"Hallo!" said Nipper, placing the receiver to his ear. "Oh, that you, Mr. Lennard? Want the guv'nor?"

"Yes—important!" came a voice over the wires.

"Anything about the Green Triangle?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Yes—the best of news!"

Nipper turned, his eyes gleaming.

"It's Mr. Lennard, speaking," he explained. "Something about the Green Triangle—good news. You'd better hurry up, sir."

Nelson Lee refused to be hurried, however, and he leisurely crossed the room and sat down by the telephone. Nipper was on tenterhooks. He wondered what news Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard would have to impart.

"I thought I'd give you a ring, Lee," said the Yard man. "I'm just off to Rochester, and I've got an idea that you'll wish to join me. The Crimson Eagle is down—a wreck!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lee sharply. "And the occupants?"

"One man killed—the other escaped," replied Lennard. "I don't know any details at

the moment, except what I've told you. We just got the information through from Chatham."

Lee arranged to meet the chief inspector at a spot in Holborn within fifteen minutes. Then he hung up the receiver, and turned to Nipper.

"It seems that Fate has opened the way for us, young 'un," he said quietly. "The Crimson Eagle is a wreck, and one man is dead. It is more than possible that we shall be able to pick up some valuable clues."

"We might find the Heathbrook jewels, too, sir."

"A possibility—but very remote," said Nelson Lee. "One man has escaped, and the chances are that he has made off with the booty. But we cannot be sure of anything until we arrive on the scene."

They met the chief inspector at the appointed time. Lennard had brought a big car, and had two Yard detectives with him. The journey to Chatham commenced at once.

"The wreckage was found by a casual passer-by," explained Lennard. "The aircraft fell in the street, by what I can understand—fouled a factory chimney in the fog. Anyhow, it's a wreck. The local police communicated with the Yard at once."

"That was very sensible of them," said Nelson Lee. "By taking swift action, it is possible that we shall get on the track while the trail is still hot. Thanks for ringing me up, old man."

The journey to Chatham was uneventful, and after arriving, some little time was spent in locating the exact scene of the disaster—which was in the lonely outskirts.

The fog had lifted somewhat, but the air was still murky. But at last the spot was reached, and the wreckage of the Crimson Eagle lay just where it had fallen. The roadway was roped off, and closed, a number of police being on duty.

The first piece of news of any importance was that Hayes was alive. He had been mistaken for dead when first discovered, but two doctors had succeeded in partially reviving him.

The man was badly injured, the back of his skull being fractured, in addition to other wounds. And he had only just recovered consciousness. And even this was brief. The man was more or less delirious.

Nelson Lee and Nipper found him in an ambulance. His eyes were open, but he recognised nobody. He seemed to imagine that he was still flying in the Eagle, and that Woodhouse was his companion.

"It's no good, Woodhouse—we'll never get out of these clouds," he muttered again and again. "They're too thick. They're too thick. We can't do it, old man."

Nelson Lee suddenly looked keen.

"Nonsense, Hayes," he said crisply. "We've flown in clouds before now—and you can trust me to pilot the old bus safely."

An instant change came over Hayes' face.

For a second it lost its vacant expression, and became nearly intelligent.

"You think so?" he murmured. "All right, I'll leave the wheel in your hands. I hope we get to the island all right."

Nelson Lee had adopted the voice of Woodhouse—for he had spent many hours with that polished rascal, and knew every intonation of his voice. The mimicry was startlingly accurate. In Hayes' delirious condition he was unable to recognise Lee by sight.

"The island?" repeated Lee. "What's the name of it?"

"The name?" repeated Hayes weakly. "The name—Oh, the island? Don't be so infernally mad, Woodhouse! You know we're bound for Turtle Island, off the Essex coast. Can't mistake it—rocky prominence in the centre. Only island like it—"

His voice trailed away feebly.

"Why, of course," agreed Nelson Lee, still mimicking Woodhouse. "All right, Hayes—you go to sleep for a bit. We'll make the island safely."

The injured man did not reply. But he had said quite enough to provide Nelson Lee with the information he wanted. He and the others left the ambulance, and outside they looked at one another keenly.

"Turtle Island!" exclaimed Lee. "I know it well—a deserted, barren spot off the low-lying coast of Essex. Very treacherous currents—and a more lonely place couldn't be imagined."

"Zingrave's new headquarters!" ejaculated Lennard.

"So it appears; but we shall know more when we arrive," replied Lee evenly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHASE IN THE ESTUARY.



WOODHOUSE was desperate.

He was in Sheerness, and, so far, he had wasted a good deal of precious time. Try as he would, he had been unable to hire any boat which would take him across the Thames mouth. The fog had been so thick that nobody would take the risk.

But now Woodhouse was beginning to hope again.

The heavy mist was lifting, and twinkling lights were beginning to appear across the water front. It was getting late now, and this was another reason for his anxiety. But, by fair means or foul, he had to reach Turtle Island that night.

Professor Zingrave was waiting—and the Chief of the League of the Green Triangle was not the kind of man to accept lame excuses. He expected his agents to overcome all difficulties.

And Woodhouse realised his own personal peril, too. He was a fugitive, and the police

would be on the look-out for him in every port. The Heathbrook jewels were on him, and once he got into the hands of the police the game would be up.

The very nature of his present quest was giving rise to suspicion. Several men he had applied to had regarded him with open hostility. For, as a rule, no honest man requests to be taken across the Thames mouth on a foggy night at such short notice.

But something had to be done—too much time had been lost already.

And Woodhouse had just heard of a motor-boat owner who had several excellent craft available for hire. If this man failed, the situation would be indeed desperate. But the man wouldn't fail. Woodhouse was resolved to use violence if all other means failed.

The motor-boat owner proved to be a wiry gentlemanly-looking individual named Ridgwell. He listened while Woodhouse explained his urgent need. The Green Triangle man had prepared a plausible story concerning a dying relative on the Essex coast. And his smooth, cultured voice and his refined manner were impressive, too.

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Ridgwell doubtfully. "It's not so thick as it was, and the weather looks like clearing; but I don't generally venture out in this kind of weather—"

"I'll pay your own price," interrupted Woodhouse urgently. "Man alive! You don't realise the seriousness—"

"I'm not thinking of that," interrupted the other. "No doubt you've got an excellent reason for wanting to get across, but I've got to think of my boat, and the safety of the pair of us. Well, it'll cost you ten pounds—"

"Done!" broke in Woodhouse eagerly. "Take me over in double-quick time, and I'll make it fifteen!"

Ridgwell looked at him suspiciously, but made no comment. After all, it wasn't his business to make inquiries. And fifteen pounds was a good sum. Within twenty minutes the motor-boat was ready.

The pair had gone down to the wharf, and now they set off out of the harbour. The boat was quite a good one, and her engine throbbed powerfully. Woodhouse sat in the stern, impatient and eager. Yet he was glowing with satisfaction.

Ridgwell, of course, was a nuisance.

He couldn't possibly remain—and the sooner he was got rid of the better. So far, Woodhouse had made no mention of Turtle Island. He had named Shoeburyness as his destination. Turtle Island was a considerable distance beyond, further along the coast.

Ridgwell left the control of the motor for a moment to adjust some gear, and Woodhouse seized his opportunity. With one swift movement he sprang upon the unsuspecting man, and exerted all his strength. The unfortunate Ridgwell gave a shout of

surprise and alarm, and disappeared over the side.

Woodhouse sprang to the throttle, and opened it wide.

The engine roared in answer, and the motor-boat sped away at a greatly increased speed. Woodhouse knew the Thames well, and this was by no means the first time he had handled a motor-boat, and now he was gloating openly. He had gained his end!

But there were other elements at work that night!

In the first place, Ridgwell was one of the finest amateur swimmers on the Kent coast. On two occasions, indeed, he had attempted to swim the Channel. His wiry, sturdy frame was capable of almost any exertion, and upon coming to the surface his first move was to swim for the dock with swift, powerful strokes.

He was nearly mad with rage and mortification.

His rage was directed against Woodhouse, and he railed at himself for having trusted the suave scoundrel for a moment. From the very first he had been half suspicious.

But Mr. Ridgwell was not such a fool, after all.

He had one thought in mind as he scrambled ashore. In readiness for instant use, he possessed another motor-boat—his own personal pet. This craft was far bigger than the one he had hired to Woodhouse, and capable of as much speed again.

Ridgwell was determined to give chase—to overtake Woodhouse, and obtain satisfaction. But almost before he could pull himself out of the water, he was faced by several figures.

They were Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Detective-Inspector Lennard. The trio had arrived on the dock in time to witness the grim incident, and were delighted to find they were so hot on the trail.

They had come to Sheerness in the natural order of things—because it was the nearest point from Rochester where a motor-boat could set off across the estuary.

Within five minutes they had explained Woodhouse's identity. They had heard Ridgwell's story—and the second motor-boat was being prepared for the chase.

CHAPTER V.

SUCCESS.



THE boat was indeed a flier.

Once clear of the harbour, Ridgwell opened the throttle wide, and the rakish-looking craft fairly lifted herself out of the water, and went hurtling through the darkness, roaring and swaying.

Nipper clung to the side, fascinated.

There was something exhilarating in this headlong rush through the night. And all

on board had the certain knowledge that they would reach Turtle Island long before Woodhouse. For their craft was so much speedier than the Green Triangle's man's start would not avail him.

Nevertheless, it was a stern chase.

Right across the Thames mouth they went, and the mist had now lifted so thoroughly that there was no danger in this speedy dash. The lights of shipping could be seen clearly. And Ridgwell was such an expert at the wheel of his craft that he gave his passengers complete confidence.

Fortunately, there was very little shipping in the river. Owing to the recent mist, most of the vessels had come to a standstill, and had not yet recommenced their voyages. And, once out of the recognised channel, the sea was barren and deserted.

The Essex coast loomed up dark and forbidding.

And so far there had been no sign of the quarry. But Woodhouse lay ahead—in the murky gloom he was at the steering-wheel of that other motor-boat—as yet ignorant of the hounds on the trail.

Nipper was keeping a keen look-out—as, indeed, were the others. But it was the youngster who first caught sight of the enemy. He suddenly flung out a hand and pointed.

"There she is—over to starboard!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"We'll soon make certain!" growled Ridgwell.

Fixed just in front of the cockpit there was a searchlight, and as he spoke he switched this on. A dazzling beam of light shot out across the water, and Woodhouse must have known that the game was getting desperate.

Lee manipulated the searchlight, for Ridgwell was too busy at the wheel. The beam swung round, steadied, and became fixed. And there, picked out in the white light, was the other motor-boat. She was tearing along, leaving a creamy wake in her rear.

But the chasers were overhauling her rapidly.

"Better get alongside, and we'll leap on board and overpower him," suggested Lennard. "It'll be ticklish work, but there's nothing else for it. We've got him, anyway."

Ridgwell made no answer. He was concentrating on the steering. The motor-boat owner was keenly interested in this chase, and he looked a queer figure as he crouched there at the wheel. Just before starting

he had discarded his wet clothes, and was wrapped in thick travelling rugs, bound round him with rope. But a few discomforts of this kind didn't affect him at all. The heat from the engine was quite sufficient to guarantee that he would suffer no ill effects.

Woodhouse, in the other boat, was sick at heart with apprehension. This chase was the last thing he had expected. He had known nothing until that searchlight gleamed out. But now he could see that he was being rapidly overhauled.

In desperation he drew his revolver, and fired shot after shot.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Two of the bullets ripped across the cupboard forward deck of the chaser, and Nipper had a narrow escape of being hit. He dropped into cover at once. And Lee took out his own automatic.

Just as he was about to fire the fugitive boat swung round rapidly. Woodhouse was evidently attempting to outwit his pursuers. But he made a fatal mistake. For his new direction took him broadside across the bows of the chaser. And, before Ridgwell could alter his course, the crash came.

It was a terrific shock. The large boat cut clean into the fugitive as though it were made of paper. The chaser was practically unharmed, but Woodhouse's craft sank like a stone—cleaved into two.

Woodhouse himself was flung clear, and disappeared into the foaming, swirling waters. He came up, gasping and desperate. All the light was knocked out of him. It was a comparatively easy matter to swing round, and pull him on board.

Ridgwell was grim. He didn't lose sight of the fact that one of his boats had gone for good. But Lennard made him easy by declaring that he would receive full and complete compensation.

Woodhouse was taken below—into the tiny cabin. Here he was searched, and the Heathbrook jewels were discovered intact. And Lee was quite willing to allow the chief inspector to take the man in charge.

For the great detective had other plans.

He was convinced that Professor Cyrus Zingrave himself was on Turtle Island—waiting for his agent. And Zingrave knew nothing! He was unaware of the disaster to the Crimson Eagle, and he was equally unaware of Nelson Lee's proximity.

The famous detective had the advantage at last!

And he was determined to press on, and to capture Zingrave himself!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK:

The Further Exciting Adventures of NELSON LEE and
Professor ZINGRAVE in another Clever Story:—

"THE ISLE OF MYSTERY!"

OUR AUTHOR'S PAGE

Mr. EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Chats With His Readers and Comments on Their Letters.

(NOTE.—If any readers care to write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks that are likely to interest the majority. If you have any grumbles—make them to me! If you have any suggestions—send them along! Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can. All letters should be addressed to me personally, c/o, The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4—E.S.B.)

THIS week I'm going to deal with rather a sore point. At any rate, it is sore point with me—and I believe it is with some of you. I refer to the prejudice which exists in the minds of some parents and guardians against THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. Some of the letters addressed to "Uncle Edward" indicate that their writers are reading the Old Paper against the wishes of their parents—and this hurts me pretty deeply.

Now, all you loyal readers who are free from this handicap—well, you can just buzz away and amuse yourselves in any old way you please. My next remarks will be addressed solely to the few martyrs indicated above. Some of you, too, are old enough to read the Old Paper independent of anybody's approval or disapproval. It makes me feel rather "good" to know that heaps and heaps of adults take such an interest in my weekly stories. Now for the martyrs.

Needless to say, I'm jolly sorry that you should be in such a predicament. And now that I've brought this subject up I realise that my position is just a wee bit delicate. You see, I naturally want you to read my stories, but at the same time I don't want you to disobey your parents' wishes. So what's got to be done?

I'll tell you what. This is one of those occasions when we can all rally round, as Archie might say, and absolutely do something. I've been thinking for more than two minutes, and I'm feeling just a bit depressed. It pains me keenly to think that a few fathers and mothers and guardians take exception to my St. Frank's stories. It has always been my joyous task to write yarns that amuse—that help to pass away

a few dull hours. I've done my best to write clean stuff, with a healthy atmosphere about it. I hope I've succeeded. And you can guess how it worries me to hear that your parents regard my work with a sort of sinister suspicion.

Now, martyrs one and all, please mark the paragraph immediately below this one, and ask your father or mother or uncle or aunt or guardian or schoolmaster, or whoever has control over you, to read it carefully and without prejudice. I'm hoping that it's going to make a whole lot of difference to your peace of mind in the future. You are naturally young—the Old Paper wouldn't be forbidden to you unless you were—and I wouldn't dream of making the following proposition unless I thought it would be successful.

To all parents and guardians who disapprove of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. As the author of the St. Frank's stories, I'd like you to do me a personal favour. Take this copy of our little journal, and read it word-for-word from cover to cover. That's all. I'm perfectly content to abide by your decision. I'm not saying this in any spirit of self-praise, but because I KNOW that not one word of my work can offend any fair-minded man or woman on this earth—neither can it offend any healthy boy or girl. Please be sporting, and CAREFULLY READ this one issue—or any other issue that you like. I don't mind a bit which copy you choose. In common fairness, please DO read my stories before you condemn them, or before you ban them from your household. If there is the slightest word or phrase that gives offence, PLEASE WRITE TO ME, and I will instantly do my utmost to rectify the fault. But I pride myself that your decision will be entirely favourable. That's all.

How's that, martyrs I think it ought to do a bit of good. I hope so, anyway. Write and tell me the result, will you? I'm awfully anxious.

That's all this week. No more room, worse luck. But don't forget, general readers all, that I shall be on the look-out for your grumbles and suggestions. Have no mercy on me—let me have it straight from the shoulder!



St. Frank's Magazine.

No. 45. Vol. 2.

Edited by Pitt.

October 4, 1924.

ADVENTURES OF THE HANDFORTH BROTHERS

:: FISHING ::

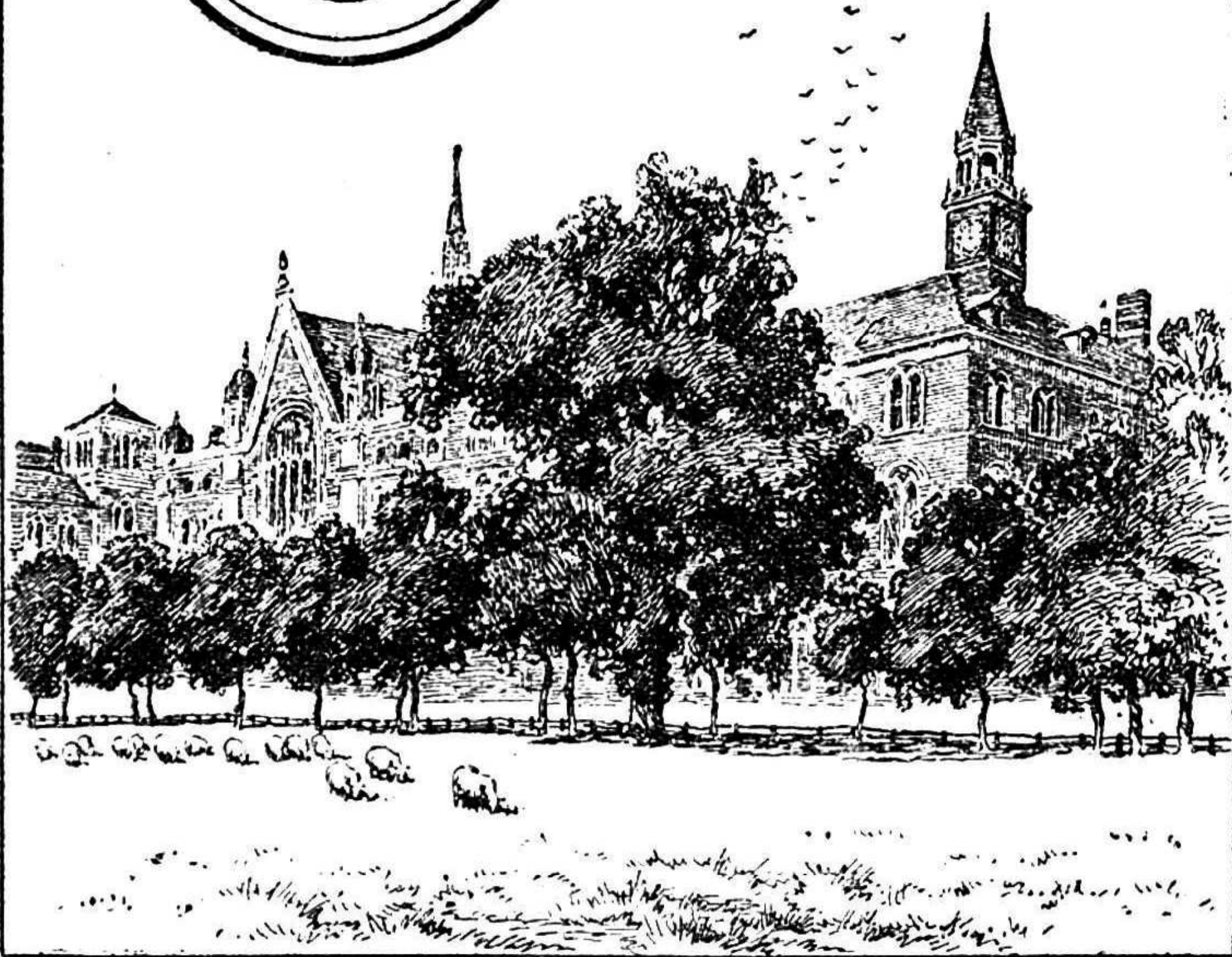
A Complete Story Without Words



OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 47.—DULWICH COLLEGE.



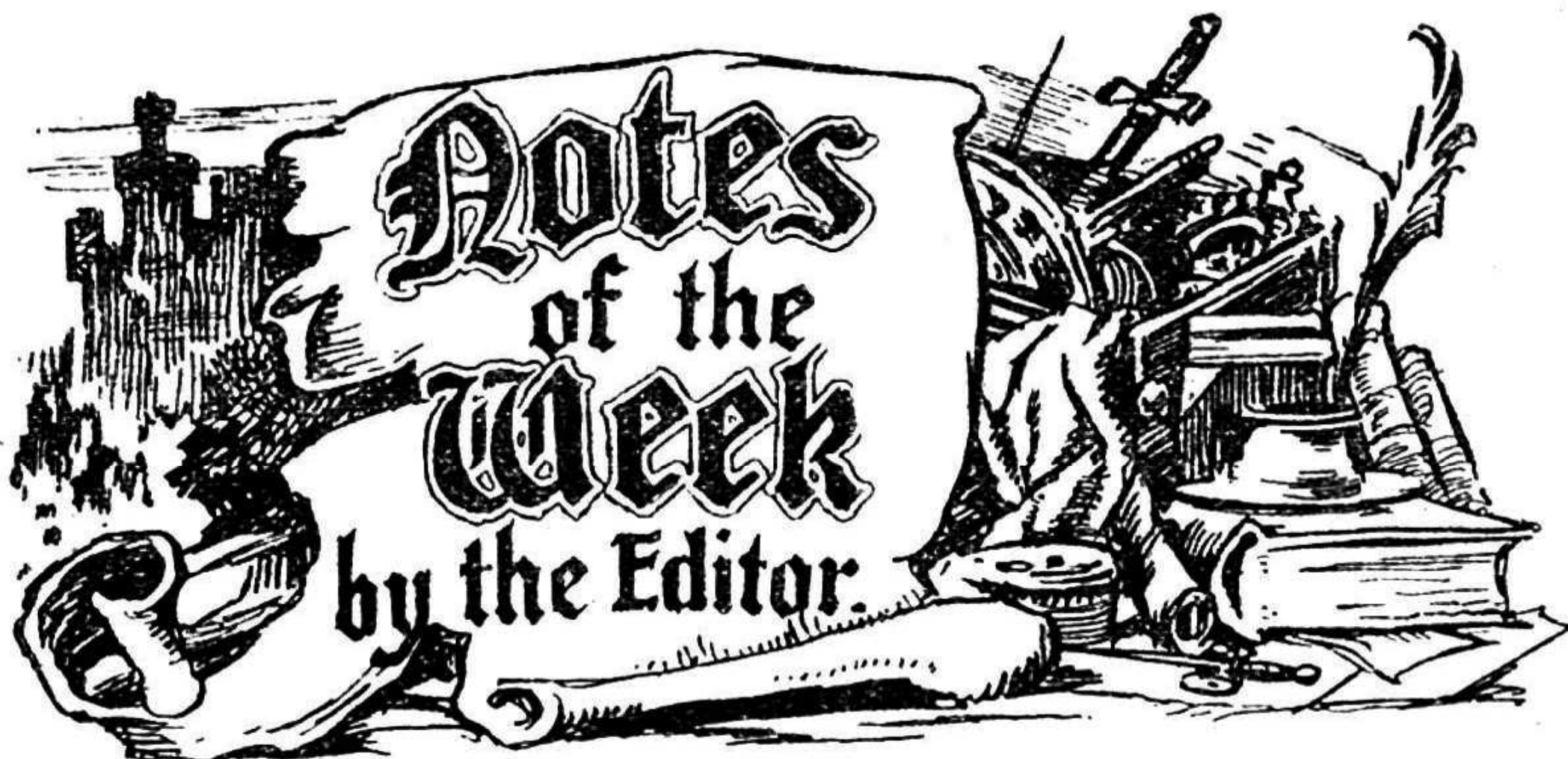
Founded in 1619, by Edward Alleyn, an actor and friend of William Shakespeare, Dulwich College was originally intended to educate the sons of actors. In 1857 an Act of Parliament was passed according to a scheme of the Charity Commissioners by which two schools were opened, known as the Upper and Lower Schools of Dulwich College. The Upper School is now called Dulwich College and the Lower School Alleyn's School.

Dulwich College is divided into four sides—Classical, Modern Science, and Engineer-

ing. There are 740 boys at the College, consisting chiefly of day boys. A few boarders are accommodated in four houses, each of which is controlled by a master of the College. The boarding-houses are limited to twenty-eight boys in each.

The College has extensive playing-fields, and Rugger is the chief winter game.

Five hundred pounds is allowed annually for maintaining scholarships at the College, and an annual sum of one thousand pounds is devoted for the maintenance of exhibitions at the universities.



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

My dear Chums,

Our fight against those who would drag St. Frank's deeper into the mire continues unabated. Not a day passes that some new attack, some fresh insults and hostile demonstrations, are launched at us. To take it all without protesting would be, in the eyes of the world, an admission of guilt. No, my chums, we must stand up to our traducers and prove to them the injustice of their accusations. We must not allow an insult to pass unheeded and unpunished. Only last week Helmford School refused to play one of their footer fixtures with us, and although we were the visiting team, we were ignominiously hooted from the field. And since then the Helmford fellows have never missed an opportunity of jeering at us.

NO FRATERNISING WITH HELMFORDIANS.

After this unsporting treatment, we cannot again shake hands with Helmfordians until a full apology to us has been made. I hope that none of our fellows, the Fourth in particular, will fraternise with any of the Helmford chaps, for they are virtually at war with us, and fraternising under these conditions will be regarded as playing the traitor. The penalty for being a traitor is severe, and the punishment we shall inflict upon offenders will be, at least, to send them to Coventry.

A VIGILANT COMMITTEE.

Our energetic publicity expert, Buster Boots, has suggested that we should form a Vigilant Committee, composed of a dozen trusted Fourth-Formers, whose duty it will be to act as policemen. They would be empowered to arrest traitors, be ready to protect individuals from attacks by outsiders, and would keep a sharp eye on the

cads of Study A and their confederates. I strongly endorse the scheme, and in my opinion, I think Buster himself would be the best fellow to organise this committee. Once Buster gets going, Fullwood and Co. will have to look out for themselves. Breaking bounds after "lights out," visits to The Grapes Hotel, and smoking and gambling will not be so easy when the Vigilant Committee begins to operate.

A TRACKETT GRIM SERIAL.

Handy didn't like the idea of my reducing his Trackett Grim yarn to three pages. He seems to forget that there are other things to be published in the Mag, besides his contributions. I am afraid I shall have to shorten his story by yet another page. It has occurred to me that a Trackett Grim serial would be much appreciated by way of a change. Handy is quite enthusiastic about it, too. To him, a serial is on a higher plane than the short complete. Lots of serials afterwards appear in book form, and Handy fondly imagines that publishers will be falling over each other to secure the book-rights of a serial by the greatest of detective story writers.

BEGINS NEXT WEEK.

Whatever the merits of Handy's coming serial, it will not be lacking in thrills, and at the end of each instalment—known as the curtain—the reader will be kept wondering for a whole week as to what will happen next. The first instalment of this serial will appear, barring accidents, in our next issue. I cannot tell you the title of it yet. Handy hasn't yet settled upon one. He argues that as the story will be running for some weeks—ahem—a good title is all the more important, and consequently wants careful consideration.

Cheerio, my chums, until next week;

Yours to a cinder,

REGGIE PITT.



OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY. *And WHO'S WHO.*

No. 5.—WALTER CHURCH.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Normal, well-set-up figure, but slightly round-shouldered. Cheerful, good-natured countenance, with small nose, wide mouth. Even chin, with distinctive dimple in centre. Sunny, infectious smile. Eyes, brown. Hair, curly brown. Height, 5 ft. 1 in. Weight, 9 st. 7 lb. Birthday, August 28th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Patient, long-suffering nature. Good-tempered to a degree, but when aroused can be dangerous. Rather lacking in self-confidence. A trusty companion and a staunch friend. Upright and true blue.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Capable footballer and cricketer—always reliable, but never brilliant. Excellent swimmer and runner. Medium boxer. Hobbies: Pulling Handforth's leg, fretwork, and photography.

No. 6.—ARNOLD McCLURE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Square-shouldered and rather lean in appearance, inclined to be angular. Bright, attractive face, with rather wide nose and small mouth. Pointed chin and deep-set eyes. Rather large ears. Eyes, twinkling grey. Hair, sandy. Height, 5 ft. Weight, 9 st. 4 lb. Birthday, May 9th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Amiable disposition. Shrewd, quick-thinking, but not forceful. Hard to arouse, but usually easy-going. Inclined to be sulky after a quarrel. A true chum who makes few enemies. Tolerant, but not as patient as Church.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Quite good at all sports, but a champion in none. Hobbies: Cycling, drawing, bookbinding, and the difficult pastime of rubbing Handforth the right way.



W. CHURCH



A. McCLURE

THE FOURTH At ST. FRANK'S.



No. 7.—BOB CHRISTINE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Broad, sturdy, finely proportioned. Short neck, balancing a well-shaped head. By no means handsome, but possessing very likeable features. Round, dimpled face, with plump cheeks and short chin. Nose slightly upturned. Eyes, hazel. Hair, very dark. Height, 5 ft. 2½ ins. Weight, 10 st. Birthday, February 4th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Easy-going generally, but forceful and aggressive when aroused. Plenty of initiative and confidence. A good general, but a better second-in-command. A sunny, genial youngster.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Second best to Boots in Modern Fourth athletics—a tower of strength in football and cricket. A champion swimmer, and prize-winning sprinter. Fond of every kind of sport, disdaining most indoor hobbies. Prominent member of Fourth Form Amateur Dramatic Society.



B. CHRISTINE.

No. 8.—JIMMY (FATTY) LITTLE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Short, but what he lacks in height he makes up for in breadth. An enormously plump boy, somewhat resembling a barrel. Is amazingly active and agile, considering his great bulk. Large, round, smooth, pink face. Jolly expression. Eyes, deep blue, with a merry twinkle. Hair, fair. Height, 4 ft. 11 ins. Weight, 15 st. 8 lb. Birthday, June 20th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

The soul of good nature. Modest, retiring, and the owner of a sunny temper. Very difficult to offend. Can be chaffed with impunity, and is the proud possessor of the record appetite at St. Frank's.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Too bulky to be prominent in sports. His favourite hobby is eating, and he indulges this to the utmost extent of his pocket-money. Is the champion cook of the Form, and the preparation and eating of food form his sole recreations.

NOTE.—The ages of Fourth Form boys vary between 14 and 16, but, for obvious reasons, no more definite information on this point can be given.

NEXT WEEK.—Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Charlie Talmadge, Roddy Yorke.



J. LITTLE.

FACTS LET LOOSE

∴ Our Allsorts Page ∴

By EUGENE ELLMORE

A STORY OF BAMBURGH CASTLE.

Lord Dorrimore's "Trifle" last week about Bamburgh Castle reminds me of a smaller trifle on the same subject. Robert Mowbray, third Norman Earl of Northumberland, in 1095, was summoned by William Rufus to appear at his court to answer a charge of piracy. Mowbray refused, and Rufus decided to conquer his Castle of Bamburgh. Mowbray escaped in order to raise an army in Newcastle, but he was captured. His countess, however, defied Rufus, and held the castle. But her courage gave way when the king brought Mowbray as a captive to Bamburgh, and exhibited him to the countess below the keep of the castle. The king brutally put to her the dilemma of either keeping Bamburgh, and letting her husband's eyes be gouged out—or she could surrender Bamburgh, and receive her husband safe and sound. So Bamburgh on this occasion fell, but only by the foulest means.

HIGHLAND GAMES AND GATHERINGS.

Though merry and peaceful enough, the Highland gatherings originated in fierce passions and war-like expeditions. The big fashionable gatherings are held in August and September. But these are not the real thing at all. To see that, in primitive style and with all the old-time virility, you must go to one of the remote islands. South Uist is a fine example. There is no admission fee, and no fashionable attendance, but there are real old-fashioned Highland sports, and big prizes are given. Piping is much in evidence at all these gatherings, though few people nowadays care for the bagpipes, and the pipes usually play to small audiences. The Piobaireach, or Great Music, commonly called pibroch, has gone out of fashion. Most of the famous pibrochs were composed three or four hundred years ago, and scarcely any new ones have been added for a century past.

CURIOSITIES OF POSTAGE STAMPS.

Much information about animals may be gathered from the stamps of the various

nations. A lion appears on the British Exhibition stamp. In the Federated Malay States tigers and elephants divide the honours, tigers on the cheap stamps and elephants on the expensive. Elephants are also favoured in the Belgian Congo, Liberia, and Sirmoor. Abyssinian stamps show giraffes, stags, the ostrich and the rhinoceros. In French Somaliland, Iraq, the Soudan, Obock and Nyassaland, camels and dromedaries appear on the stamps. Peru has the llama, Mexico the eagle, and Australia the kangaroo, French Guiana the anteater, and New South Wales the emu and lyre bird. Guatemala has what are called "parrot stamps," the prominent figure being the quetzal.

There are three complete series of zoological stamps. Newfoundland stamps show pictures of dogs, seals, codfish, ptarmigan, and caribou. Those of North Borneo and Labuan exhibit parrots, cassowary, peacock, argus pheasant, wild bull, rhinoceros, crocodile, and elephant. Liberia has a whole picture-gallery—snakes, agama, lizard, great egret, fishing vultures, palm civit, bommifish, chimpanzee, plaintain-eater, hippopotamus, and lyre-horned antelope.

Very appropriately, Japan issued a Peace stamp in 1919, showing a representation of the dove. Western Australia has the swan, Tasmania the platypus, the Orange River Colony has the springbok and gnu, and the Cape of Good Hope the ram. The stamps of the United States portray buffaloes, mules, and horses. The lion appeared on the New Zealand Peace stamps of 1920. Persia and Paraguay also depict lions on their stamps. The first King George stamps of Great Britain bore the lion.

It will thus be seen that the humble postage-stamp may impart a good deal of information and be a valuable means of education. A boy who would set himself to collect zoological stamps only might strike out a new line, and in due time find himself the possessor of a unique and attractive collection, which would be worth a good deal of money.

The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



THE PROBLEM OF THE PUNCTURED PENNY

Being the Further Amazing Adventures of Trackett Grim and his Clever Assistant, Splinter.

By

E. O. HANDFORTH

ALTHOUGH Trackett Grim looked half asleep, he wasn't.

As he strode along the strand his eyes were dreamy, and he seemed to be taking no notice of the traffic which rolled ceaselessly along. To tell the truth, the notorious incriminator was deep in the throes of a mathematical problem. And yet, at the same time, he saw everything that went on about him.

He even saw a taxi-cab which sped out from behind a 'bus, and tried to bite him. But Trackett Grim deftly leapt across the road, and had no difficulty in dodging two motor-buses, a telegraph-boy on a bicycle, and an express delivery van. All were going so slowly that Grim was in no danger.

As he came opposite Lyons' Corner House he halted abruptly. A savoury odour hit him amidships, and he sadly jingled the coppers in his trousers pocket. Then he shook his head, and continued his search for clues. He was on the track of a Harris' Sausage Shop.

At this moment Trackett Grim caught sight of a sinister figure. He knew that the figure was sinister at the first glance—for Trackett Grim had eyes like magnifying glasses, and they could see about twice as far as a cat's. Even in the pitch darkness this marvellous detective could see things.

And yet none of the other people in the Strand saw anything rummy about the sinister figure. He was a man with a horrible-looking face, and he was dressed in a great black cloak and a wide-brimmed, black hat—just like one of those Anarchists. But only Trackett Grim could see that he was sinister.

His face was swarthy and wicked, with piercing eyes and teeth that were like a wolf's. He was strolling along in a stealthy kind of way, as though on some villainous mission.

Trackett Grim halted, all his instincts on fire. Smoke even came out of his chest, but this was because he had put his pipe into his breast-pocket. Even when Trackett Grim's instincts were all alive, he didn't actually burn.

The man with the piercing eyes came to a halt as he was in the act of passing a gutter merchant. This latter was a ragged old chap, with a handful of matchboxes. They were the kind of matches that only beggars sell—the sort that won't strike. In the gutter merchant's other hand was a little tin can, and now and again he rattled it to let people know that he was still there.

The man in the black cloak carelessly tossed a penny into the can, but didn't trouble to take any matches. And Trackett Grim noted this fact with rapidly growing suspicions. For it proved to him that the villain was engaged upon some deep and dastardly game.

The penny hit upon the side of the can, but didn't go in. It bounced off, rolled along the pavement, and lost itself among the feet of the passing crowds. Trackett Grim walked on, frowning deeply.

He was puzzled. This problem worried him. He forgot all about the mathematical exercise which had previously bothered him. No longer did he wonder how he could obtain a four-course meal for ninepence-halfpenny. Work had come—and food was forgotten. When Trackett Grim was on a case, he never touched a morsel of grub. Sometimes he went for weeks without feeding, the speed of the chase keeping him alive.

To the famous detective's surprise, the sinister individual had not stopped. Grim had been expecting the villain to whisper something to the street merchant. But no. He had walked straight on, and it began to appear that there wasn't any plot being hatched, after all.

And just then Trackett Grim noticed something funny about his walking-stick. By this time he had reached Old Kent Road, and he paused abruptly. Stuck on the end of his walking-stick was a penny!

Trackett Grim pulled it off in surprise. And then he performed one of those amazing, lightning-like deductions for which he was infamous. This was the penny that the sinister man in the cloak had tossed into the beggar's tin can! Trackett Grim had seen it roll, and must have stuck his stick through it by accident. He was such a marvellous detective that he even did these things without knowing it.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered, as he turned the penny over and over in his hand. "It's a dud! It's counterfeit! I'm on the track of a coiners' den!"

His heart started beating like the dickens. If only he could expose these daring coiners, who were making bad pennies, he might be able to get his watch out. It was very awkward going about without the time.

But then, suddenly, he changed his ideas. The penny wasn't an ordinary counterfeit coin. It was punctured where the stick had gone through it, but it was hollow. In fact, it was only a kind of shell, with a scrap of paper showing inside.

In a trice Trackett Grim tore the thing up—his fingers were as strong as a pair of pliers—and he took out a little scrap of tissue paper. He unfolded it, and gazed at the words that were written on it:

"TO-NIGHT AT 11.45. REPORT FOR DUTY AT BACK DOOR OF CITY AND SUBURBAN BANK, EDGWARE ROAD. BIG JOE. MILLION QUID IN BULLION.—THE CHIEF."

In a flash of dazzling brilliance Trackett

understood. The chief! A gang was at work, and the chief was the man in the black cloak! He had been going round to the members of his gang—who were all disguised as match-sellers. And to-night there would be dirty work in Edgware Road!

"Ha, ha!" laughed Trackett Grim mockingly. "You didn't know that I was on the track, did you? This is going to be my greatest triumph! If I can only save that million quid in bullion, I shall probably get a reward of thirty bob! But I shall have to be quick, because it's ten o'clock already!"

Trackett Grim turned round, and retraced his steps to the Strand. In two or three minutes he was there. And his eyesight was so extraordinary that he saw at once that the match-seller was no longer in the gutter. The man had thrown off his disguise, and had gone to join the gang! It was the final proof!

Trackett Grim hailed a passing taxi, leapt in, and drove like the wind to Baker's Inn Road. He left the taxi outside, knowing that he would be able to sneak out by the back door. A million pound in bullion was at stake, and a mere taxi fare was a matter of no importance.

Grim discovered Splinter in the consulting-room, deeply immersed in the pages of "Offensive Oscar, The Outlaw; or, How Ranger Rufus Rounded Up The Ranch Rascals." With one well-directed kick, Trackett Grim hurled the book out of Splinter's grasp.

"Get up, you lazy rotter!" roared Grim. "What's the idea of messing about here, when there's work to be done? We've got to whizz round to Edgware Road and capture a gang of bank robbers!"

"Good!" gasped Splinter. "But what about your supper, sir? I left it in the cupboard, all wrapped up, and I put the salt and vinegar on ready."

"Rats to supper!" snorted Trackett Grim, his eyes flashing so fiercely that the electric light looked dim. "When there's a bank to be saved, Splinter, I don't think anything about supper. Quick! Get the rifles! And then disguise yourself as a Chinaman! We've only got two minutes!"

Splinter was ready in a minute and a half, and he looked so much like a Chinaman that there was a moment's confusion. For Trackett Grim



The man in the black coat carelessly tossed a penny into the can.

had disguised himself as a Mongolian, and when they met in the consulting-room they thought they were perfect strangers. It wasn't until Grim started talking in Hindustani that Splinter knew the truth.

"Guv'nor!" he gasped. "It's you!"

"Fathead!" snapped Grim. "Of course it's me. Why didn't you speak before? I thought you were a member of the gang! From this minute onwards you've got to talk Chinese."

They rushed down the stairs, and Trackett Grim gasped when he heard a distant clock striking twenty minutes to twelve. There was only five minutes left! And they had to get to Edgware Road.

There were no taxicabs or 'buses about, for at this hour of the night London was dead. They ran all the way, and covered the five miles in such good time that it was only just eleven-forty-five when they arrived.

They rushed round the back of the bank, and in the nick of time they saw six furtive figures stealing stealthily through a dark doorway. They were led by the man in the black cloak and wide-brimmed hat—who wasn't wearing either of them now. Instead, he was dressed like a policeman, evidently to destroy any suspicion.

As Trackett Grim and Splinter tip-toed up, they heard a shattering explosion. The back door of the bank had been busted in! But it was done so silently that even the cats took no notice. The bank was broken into! And the bullion was at the mercy of this gang!

Trackett Grim grabbed Splinter by the shoulder, and his eyes blazed.

"Rush to Scotland Yard, and bring me a hundred policemen!" he hissed. "Until they come I'll hold the gang at bay! Don't be longer than three hours!"

Splinter scooted off, and Trackett Grim ran into the bank, and joined the gang. Not one of the miscreants suspected him of being a detective, because he looked like a Mongolian. And he was instantly mistaken for one of the gang. They had just broken open the door of the safe—a whacking great thing, all over steel bolts and knobs.

"The bullion!" yelled the chief of the gang.

Trackett Grim rushed into the safe, and pointed upwards.

"Look!" he shouted excitedly. "The great Chinese diamond!"

At the very mention of the word the gang went dotty. Every crook goes dotty at the mention of diamonds. They all rushed into the safe, and started looking for the Chinese diamond.

And Trackett Grim leapt out backwards, and slammed the door. It crashed to with a sickening thud, and from within came the howls and yells of the beaten crooks. The great inculcinator's ruse had succeeded!

And when Splinter arrived, five minutes



They all rushed into the safe, and started looking for the Chinese diamond.

later, with three parts of Scotland Yard at his heels, Trackett Grim stood calmly by while the criminals were hauled out, and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude.

Trackett Grim had saved the bullion, and the bank manager was so pleased that he gave Trackett Grim a bar of gold for himself. Grim would have preferred to keep it as a memento, but he had to live, and so the bar of gold was sold for fifty pounds, and the famous pair went on the razzle for a whole week.

In the meantime, all the crooks of London were having the time of their lives, and so many crimes were committed that Trackett Grim would have heaps and heaps to do when he started work again.

FIRST INSTALMENT
— NEXT WEEK —
of Grand New Thrilling Serial
Story of
TRACKETT GRIM
AND
SPLINTER!

IN REPLY to YOURS



Correspondence Answered by
Edward Oswald Handforth

JOHN BULL (West Hampstead, N.W.6): Certainly not! I won't give Miss Irene that message of yours. It's like your nerve to talk about taking her out in your Rolls-Royce until ten o'clock in the evening! I don't believe you've got a Rolls-Royce, anyhow. More likely a push bike. And why do you get a choking feeling in your throat when you read my Trackett Grim stories? I suppose they are so thrilling that you get worked up with excitement. It's a funny thing you should ask about Reggie Pitt as Form skipper. As you now know, he has stepped into Nipper's shoes. My place, really, but there you are!

"MONTIE" (Combe St. Nicholas, Somerset): Thanks, old chap, for writing again—and such a nice letter, too! If you were here you'd jolly well think our masters and prefects were sharp enough! Why, every now and then they make it impossible for us to do anything except behave ourselves!

PIXIE (Constantinople): You can't kid me like that, you know. I knew directly your letter hadn't come all that way. Wisbech is nearer the mark. Anyhow, it was beautifully written. And six pages! But as you ask for "ever such a long answer," I've got to shove it aside till I've got more space. I hope you're a patient girl. If you're not, I can't help it, can I?

"ENA HANDFORTH" (Constantinople): Do you think I don't know my sister's handwriting? Besides, she's at the Moor View School, and not in Constantinople at all. I'll give you another answer when I reply to "Pixie" again. I've only just got room now to thank you both for your ripping letters.

FRANK D. (Atherton, Manchester): Yes, you're quite right. Nipper first came to St. Frank's under the assumed name of Richard Basil Herbert Bennett. You can read all about it in No. 112 of the N.L.L.—July 28th, 1917. I'm glad you like the Old Paper so much, and I've

passed your criticisms of the Mag. on to Reggie Pitt, as he's the Editor now. You rotter! I've just noticed you say I have too much room. Just for that I won't say another word to you! Not likely! Why, if my Trackett Grim yarns stopped I shouldn't get any peace at all!

DLANIGER (Liverpool): So you've read the Old Paper from No. 1! You're a hero! But if you think I've got time to solve your fatheaded name, you're jolly well mistaken. Church and McClure have given it up, and it might take me half-an-hour! But if you let me know what it is, I'll tell you if you're right. And I'll answer your riddles then, old son.

A TOMBOY (Luton): Well, there's a question! Of course I don't believe in girls smoking! Why, I don't smoke myself (yet)—I leave that to rotters like Fullwood. All right—have your hair shingled if you like. But I'll bet it suits you best bobbed. Of course you can write to me again—as often as you like.

VIDA (Wolverhampton), **HEFTY** (Rochdale), **JAMES COOK** (Poplar), **C. H.** (Bristol), **J. HOOPER** (Finsbury Park), **WILLIE** (Rochford, Essex), **GRANPA** (Highgate, N.6), **LEONARD H. R.** (Bristol), **KEEN READER** (Holloway, N.7), **INQUIRER** (Walworth, S.E.17), **L. D. G.** (Bristol), and **A. G. E. DUPIN** (Highgate, N.6): Twelve of you in one go! But your blessed names have taken all the space I had left, so now you can't have that two-line answer I meant to give you to divide among you. Hundreds of you write to me. That's easy. But I've got to reply to you all! It's a bit thick! Anyhow, you ought to be jolly glad if I just say "Thank-you," and mean it. Well, that's got me out of a nasty hole for once, and now I'm off to footer practice. Cheerio!

INQUISITIVE (Irthlingborough): No charge is made for the Mag. at St. Frank's. It ought to be sold at 6d. a copy, but Pitt won't have it. He told me yesterday that if I take up any more space they'll have to give 6d. away with every issue, in order to keep our readers. Just like that fathead's rot! Yes, you are

quite correct about Pitt and De Valerie. They're tip-toppers now, though.

E. O. H. H. (Rochester): I'm glad you realise that my brain is powerful. In fact, after I've written a Trackett Grim story I'm quite dazed. Church and McClure say they're dazed, too—after reading it. This must be because of the intricate development of the plot. I don't believe in a chap knocking his chum about, but you were quite right in blacking the eyes of your pals, and giving them thick ears, etc. Thanks awfully for defending me. But I shouldn't knock their teeth out next time—you're liable to hurt your knuckles.

X. Y. Z. (Birmingham): Judging by your letter, I think you must be a girl. No boy would talk of powder-puffs and boxes of chocolates. Your description of me is all wrong. Next week you'll see me as I really am.

HAMMER (Silvertown, E.16): Of course I'm not offended. Why should I be? You say that nobody can tell my face from a boot. If ever I catch hold of you, my lad, I'll show you that my punches don't miss their mark.

MARJORIE TAYLOR (Bridlington): I don't remember who lived in The Mount before it became the Moor View School. If I do remember, I'll give you another reply. Anyhow, it's bound to be mentioned again some time or other in the stories.

SILVIA COOKE (Maidstone): How can you be my nephew when you're a girl? If you've got a brother like Willy, you have my sympathy.

LESLIE R. HILL (Highbury, N.5): Here we are again! And this time you've given me a regular dose. By George! If I tried to answer all those questions properly, I should want half the Mag. You'll have to give me time. The replies to you will take a lot of thinking out, and Church and McClure say they're overworked as it is. Besides, the questions aren't about our school at all, and the answers might set a lot of other fat-heads off on the same tack. Thanks for your promise about your biography book of film artists. Now I know where to come for reliable information. Your Fifth Avenue drawing is quite decent, but you've got the buildings all in the wrong places, you chump!

CHARLES HALL (Shepherd's Bush, W.12): If I told you my favourite boxer you'd only say I was boasting, and the richest chap in the Fourth is the one with the best health.

B. COOPER (Reading): Well, I like that! This isn't a free advertisement paper, nor a personal letter exchange. You can't bribe me, my lad. Blow new readers at such a cost as you suggest! Are you dotty, or what?

OLWEN HUGHES (Streatham Hill, London): You shouldn't wait till dad's asleep to read my Trackett Grim stories. They'd keep him awake if you read them to him

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—they're so thrilling. There's something wrong with you, or you wouldn't laugh over them. Archie isn't a "scream"—he's a lazy bounder. Willy's about 13, and the Head's name is Dr. Stafford. As you're a new reader, I'll forgive your questions. Write again, please, Olwen, when you know us a little better.

WILLIE GOSLING (Tipton St. John, Devon): So you're going on reading the Old Paper as long as you live! That's the talk! You're the sort of Willy I like. I hope you'll live to be 100. Of course, my Trackett Grim stories are "simply glorious"—these detective heroes are always swamped in glory, aren't they? I'd like to change you for my Willy! Write again soon, sonny. Bright lad!

TRACKETT GRIM ADMIRER (London, W.C.2): Stow it, J. T. U.! My hat, don't you think this is grind enough for me without undertaking to answer you asses through the giddy post? Why, I'd go off my blessed rocker in no time if I did that. Besides, Church and McClure would never stand the extra fag. They're nearly worn to shadows as it is, although I haven't the time to keep them at it properly. Live and let live, old chap! Just come here and have a go at it yourself! It's driving me pottier than even Willy's everlasting cheek!

TED.

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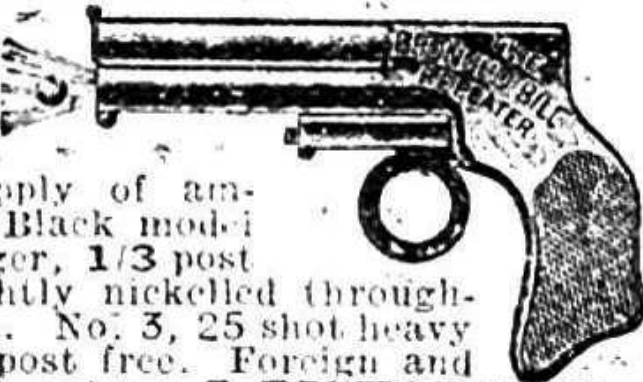
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