

NEW SERIES OF EXTRA LONG STORIES TO-DAY!

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Fooling the School

INTRODUCING
NAPOLEON BROWNE
or, The Greatest Jape on Record!



The royal pair alighted, leaving William Napoleon Browne in sole possession of the compartment. They did not even bid him good morning.



FOOLING the SCHOOL!

or, THE BIGGEST JAPE ON RECORD.

A Magnificent First of April Story, introducing A GREAT NEW CHARACTER. THE FIRST OF THE SUPER-LENGTH SERIES OF ST. FRANK'S STORIES.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

ON THE JOB EARLY!

WILLY HANDFORTH stirred uneasily in his sleep.

The Third Form dormitory in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was silent, except for the steady breathing of the slumbering fags. The grey light of day was filtering through the windows, for it was exactly five o'clock, a good half hour before sunrise.

Willy seemed uncomfortable. As a matter of fact, he was dreaming. He had just invented a marvellous new wireless set—in his dream, of course—and he was now sitting before a great instrument board, fingering dozens of dials. He had the headphones on, but something seemed to be wrong. His head was filled with a tremendous throbbing.

Agonised, he pulled the headphones off and flung them away. Then he woke up. He found himself sitting in bed, his head still throbbing. And a faint, muffled buzzing was coming from beneath his pillow, and he quickly dived his hand under, and a moment later the sound ceased. Willy drew forth a battered old alarm clock, minus a bell.

"Good!" he murmured. "Thought it would do the trick! But I'm blessed if I expected to dream about wireless!"

A glance at the dial told Handforth minor that the time was two minutes after five. Nobody else in the dormitory was awake, which was just what he desired. His pillow had been rather uncomfortable overnight, but he had soon fallen asleep, in spite of the hard lump. The clock had gone off to

schedule, and the vibration, while awakening Willy, had disturbed nobody else.

He hopped out of bed, well pleased with his own inventive device. And without delay he seized the junior in the next bed, and shook him by the shoulder. Chubby Heath gurgled, turned round, and sat up.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Who's that? What the—"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Willy, horrified. "What's up with you?"

"Up with me?" stammered Chubby.

"Yes, your face!"

"Face?"

"I'd better dash for the matron!" panted Willy. "Oh, my goodness! Poor old Chubby! Poor old chap!"

Chubby Heath shook himself into the wakefulness.

"You're dotty!" he panted. "What's the matter with my face? And what's the idea of waking me up at this unearthly hour?"

Handforth minor shrank away.

"Have you ever had measles?" he asked tensely.

"Measles!"

"Or small-pox?"

"Sus-small-pox," stuttered Chubby faintly. "I say, what the—"

"Look at your face!" exclaimed Willy, with deep concern. "What disease is it when you come out all in red spots?"

"Red spots!" repeated Chubby, now thoroughly alarmed. "Oh, corks! I—I didn't know I was ill! I feel all right—"

"For goodness' sake, look at your face!" gasped Willy.

Chubby Heath dived out of bed in a kind of panic, and dashed to the nearest mirror. The early morning light was not strong, but

it seemed to him that his reflection was perfectly normal.

"I haven't got any red spots!" he exclaimed, with relief.

"Red spots?" asked Willy blandly. "Who said you had?"

Chubby turned, and found his study chum grinning at him.

"You funny fathead!" he snorted. "You gave me a turn!"

"April fool!" grinned Willy. "Caught you lovely!"

Chubby Heath started.

"April fool?" he repeated. "You don't mean—"

"To-day, my cheerful ass, is the first of April," explained Willy. "Not so bad, eh? I put the wind up you beautifully!"

"Well, of all the mad lunatics!" snorted Chubby. "Getting up at six o'clock in the morning to play a trick like this!"

"You're wrong—it's only five!"

"Well, five, then!" snapped Chubby. "What's the difference? It's a pity you can't leave your fat-headed jokes until after the rising-bell! I was going to fool you this morning, too," he added ruefully. "I had it all planned out."

"Sorry, old son, but it's the early bird who catches the worm," said Willy. "See what I mean? And now to business! Into your clobber, and quick about it!"

Chubby stared.

"I'm not going to get dressed now," he said indignantly.

"Just one of your little childish mistakes," said Willy. "You are going to get dressed. And so am I. Work calls us. All Fools' Day only comes once a year, and we can't afford to lose the opportunity."

"What opportunity?"

"Get dressed, and don't ask so many questions," said Willy briskly. "Eh? What's that? Do you want me to biff you? I need an assistant. You're only an imitation, but I shall have to make you do."

When Handforth minor made up his mind, there was nothing else for his chums to do but accept the inevitable. Chubby Heath

hated the idea of getting dressed at five a.m., but it had to be done.

Of course, he could have refused, but as this would have entailed a thick ear, and probably a black eye, he submitted. Rising early in the morning was one of Chubby's pet aversions. To get out of bed before the rising bell clanged out was something like torture to him.

"Well?" he demanded, when he was dressed. "What's the silly game?"

"Nothing much," replied Willy. "We're only going to fool the whole school!"

CHAPTER II.

DIRTY WORK IN THE SMALL HOURS.

CHUBBY HEATH looked sceptical.

"Don't be dotty!" he said gruffly. "It might have been easy to fool me—I was half asleep, anyhow, and it wasn't a fair test—but you can't fool the whole school! You're off your rocker!"

Willy smiled patiently.

"Determination can do anything," he replied. "I'll admit it seems a tall order, but all these tall orders are like a chap having a cold bath. There's nothing to be scared of. Once we start on it, my son, it'll be done in no time."

"What'll be done?"

"Nothing, if we stand here jawing," retorted Willy. "Look here, it's only ten past five—and nobody's awake before half-past. We've got twenty minutes to

do the preliminaries."

"What preliminaries?" asked Chubby, more mystified than ever.

"In a week or a fortnight's time—it doesn't matter about the date, anyhow—the official Summer Time begins," explained Willy calmly. "In other words, all the giddy clocks of the kingdom have to be shoved on an hour. Well, St. Frank's is going to start Summer Time this morning!"

Chubby gave a gulp.

"But—but we can't do that!" he gasped breathlessly.

"Can't we? Just watch us, and see!"

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series—Third Form.



No. 13.—Dicky Jones.

One of the most mischievous fags in the Third, and always ready to support Willy Handforth in any of the latter's escapades. A cheeky, happy-go-lucky youngster, with untidy hair.

"But I don't understand—"

"I don't expect you to—you need a brain for that!" interrupted Willy tartly. "My dear ass, won't it be a gorgeous First of April rag? Imagine it! Everybody getting up an hour too soon! Breakfast an hour too soon! Prayers an hour too soon! Lessons an hour too soon!"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Chubby, overcome by this exhibition of genius.

"It'll beat anything that's ever been done," grinned Willy. "And nobody will ever discover who performed the foul deed! Nobody will ever know who did the dirty work! It'll be the joke of the year!"

"Wait a minute," said Chubby. "The idea is to put all the clocks on? At nine o'clock we shall go in to lessons—but it'll really only be eight?"

"You do have lucid moments, then?" asked Willy.

"Don't be funny!" snorted Chubby Heath. "It seems to me there's a snag in this joke! A fat lot of fun going into lessons an hour too soon, isn't there?"

"My poor, pitiful blitherer, that's just where the fun really begins!" replied Willy. "But I can't stop to explain everything now—time's precious. Go round the dormitory, and shove every watch on an hour! There aren't many watches to do—only about nine," he added. "But don't miss any."

"Where are you going?" asked Chubby, as Willy moved away.

"To see about the important matters," replied Willy. "As soon as you've done here, sneak into the Fourth dormitory, and get busy on their watches. Going at full speed, this job's going to take us till half-past six. But it'll be worth it!"

Willy vanished, and lost no time in making his way to the domestic quarters of the house. He was alive to the fact that the servants would be the first awake. Therefore they had to be dealt with in advance of anybody else.

There was very little that escaped the leader of the Third. He knew, for example, that Mrs. Poulter, the House matron, arose each morning at six-thirty to the sound of an alarm clock. It was then her custom to don her dressing-gown, and awaken various domestics—since these could not be trusted to turn out punctually on their own. Having completed her round, Mrs. Poulter would return to her bed-room to dress.

Willy arrived outside her door at a quarter-past five. He rapped on it urgently.

"Who is there?" came the lady's voice, after a moment.

"Please, Mrs. Poulter, it's me!" moaned Willy.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the matron. "Come in—come in!"

Willy entered, nearly doubled up. He uttered several pitiful moans, and reeled over towards the dressing-table. Mrs.

Poulter was sitting up in bed, a comical figure in her ruffled nightcap.

"Whatever is the matter with the boy?" she asked. "Is that you, Master Willy?"

"I—I want some of your special liniment!" groaned Willy. "Sorry to trouble you like this, Mrs. Poulter—here it is, on the dressing-table! Can I take it?"

He fumbled about on the dressing-table, his back to Mrs. Poulter, and it only took him a moment to put the hands of the clock on until they pointed to six-fifteen. Then he grabbed the bottle of liniment and turned.

"What's the matter with you, Master Willy?" asked Mrs. Poulter concernedly.

"Have you had an accident, or—"

"It's all right—I'll rub it on!" interrupted Willy. "That game of football yesterday—bruises, you know—"

He escaped from the room, leaving Mrs. Poulter mystified, but in no way suspicious. She didn't even trouble to look at the clock, but turned over in bed, and settled herself for sleep again. She instinctively felt that it was extremely early. And she consoled herself with the thought that Willy Handforth's pain was probably more imaginary than real. She was nearer the mark than she believed.

And Willy went away to continue the good work.

He knew that the ordinary domestics had no watches—they relied upon Mrs. Poulter. But there was always the problem of the big school clock in the central tower.

Mrs. Poulter would certainly consult this when the clock went off, for the absence of full daylight would give her a clue. So Willy gave all his attention to the big clock.

He had paved the way for this overnight by sneaking up to the tower for a preliminary inspection. He went there now, although it was strictly against all school rules. In the winding-room just beneath the great clock, he found the various appliances for regulating the works.

He had always taken a great interest in these works, for he was of a mechanical turn of mind. He knew exactly how to operate them. By pulling a lever down he put the chimes and the gong out of action. Then he turned a heavy wheel, keeping his eye on an indicator. He set the clock on exactly an hour, and then adjusted the striking apparatus, and set it ready for action.

"And that," he chuckled, "is that!"

CHAPTER III.

RIISING EARLY IN THE MORNING.



B URRRH!

Mrs. Poulter's clock went off with its usual energy, and she started up in a fluster. It seemed to her that she had only just dozed off after

Willy had gone, and she peered at the clock closely.

"Bless my life!" she murmured. "Half-past six already!"

She looked at the window, and the gray light seemed all wrong. At this hour the sun ought to have been shining. She got out of bed, went to the window, and examined the sky.

"I do believe that clock's wrong," she told herself. "It can't be half-past six yet."

Fortunately, the sky was clouded, and it was impossible to judge the exact nature of the daylight. If Mrs. Poulter hadn't glanced at the school clock, she might have remembered Willy's visit, and then she would probably have put two and two together.

But the school tower was visible from her window, and the light was quite strong enough for her to read the big dial. The hands pointed to six-thirty. And it was impossible, of course, to doubt the authenticity of the school clock.

"Well, I never did!" said Mrs. Poulter, yawning.

Not a doubt came to her. She vaguely wondered why the daylight was so faint, but this was all. She certainly never dreamed that the time was only five-thirty, and that the clocks were an hour fast.

The appearance of old Josh Cuttle, the school porter, only tended to make the thing more certain. The porter generally turned out at about half-past six, and Mrs. Poulter often saw him from a window. Willy had thoughtfully attended to Mr. Cuttle's clock the previous night, in order to make assurance doubly sure. He had sneaked into the lodge while Mr. Cuttle had been dozing over the fire. The porter, waking up soon afterwards, had gone to bed without troubling to verify the time.

Everything was going well.

Willy and his confederates had already tampered with the watches in the Third and Fourth dormitories. They were now busy as bees. Chubby was going from watch to watch in the Fifth Form dormitory, and Willy was downstairs attending to every clock he could find. He even penetrated into the headmaster's own sanctum.

It was a formidable task, but the fags worked with amazing speed. And, having finished operations in the Ancient House, they sped across to the Modern House and went through the whole process over again. Willy believed in being thorough.

By seven-fifteen, according to the new time, practically every watch and clock had been altered, and nobody was the wiser. The fags had been unable to penetrate several Sixth Form bed-rooms, but they didn't mind much.

There were bound to be a few clocks and

a number of watches unaltered. But the owners would conclude that something had gone wrong during the night, and would put their tickers on without a thought.

Many of the servants were late in the Modern House, but they flew about their work under the impression that they had overslept themselves. The master stroke was the setting on of the school clock. Everybody consulted the great dial when in doubt, and never questioned its veracity.

At seven-twenty-five the two conspirators stole into the Third Form dormitory, rapidly undressed and slipped into bed. They were only just in time. For a minute or two later the rising-bell clanged out.

"Good egg!" breathed Willy. "We've just done it!"

"And everybody's up and about—all the giddy servants," grinned Chubby. "I say, what a lark! It's the best stunt——"

"Shush!" interrupted Willy warningly.

The very fact that the rising-bell was clanging proved that the domestics were all deceived. Preparations for breakfast were in full swing, and the early morning work of the school was going ahead an hour before time without anybody being aware of the fact.

The headmaster happened to meet Mr. Beverley Stokes in one of the corridors just before the usual hour for breakfast.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stokes—good-morning!" said the Head. "Extraordinary thing—I seem to feel that everything is early this morning. Even my watch is apparently an hour slow."

Mr. Stokes smiled.

"I feel the same, but my own watch is quite correct," he replied. "I have just compared it to the clock in my study, and to the school clock itself. There is no discrepancy. The time is nearly eight."

"Then we must blame the weather for this unaccountable sense of earliness," said Dr. Stafford. "A dull morning, Mr. Stokes. We shall have rain, I am afraid. I am sorry, to-day being a half-holiday."

"We can never tell—our weather is full of vagaries," said the Housemaster. "I shouldn't be surprised if the afternoon turns out bright and sunny."

They parted, thinking no more of the matter. When the Head entered his study, and found his marble clock on the point of striking eight, he gave no attention to it. Similar to everybody else in the school, he was taking the time for granted.

And by the time breakfast was over the queer early feeling in the air had been dismissed by all and sundry. A few watches had been put right—at least, their owners thought they were putting them right—and the success of Willy Handforth's April 1st joke was assured.

But the cream of it was still to come.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GUESTS OF HONOUR.



"W HAT-HO! What-ho! Greetings, and so forth!"

Archie Glen-

thorne, of the Fourth, came to a graceful halt in the Ancient House lobby, and

gazed benevolently upon Nipper and Tommy Watson. The latter pair were arm-in-arm, having just entered from the Triangle.

"Like old times, what?" went on Archie. "I mean to say, here you are, trickling about the jolly old place as in the days of yore! Dashed good, Dick, old chestnut!"

"Meaning me?" asked Nipper, with a chuckle.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "The fact is, I consider it's frightfully undignified for a chappie of your standing to stagger about the place under the name of Nipper. I mean to say, so frightfully plebeian, what? Dick Hamilton is a somewhat juicy improvement. And, dash it, it's your bally name, so why not?"

Tommy Watson grinned.

"Nipper's all right," he replied. "What's in a name, anyhow? It's the chap that counts—and if Mr. Nelson Lee is agreeable, Nipper will be back with us for good next term."

"We're just waiting for the postman," explained Nipper cheerfully. "He seems to be late this morning, for some reason. Of course, it's as good as fixed up, but I want the final word from the guv'nor. I believe he'll be back with us next term, too."

"Bally good!" said Archie, nodding. "In fact, the scheme is absolutely choice. It appears that certain rumours are scurrying about to the effect that you will again become Form skipper?"

"Yes, Pitt threatens to resign after the holidays and let me take his place," said Nipper. "But I'm not having any of it—"

"You'd better think again, my son," interrupted Reginald Pitt, joining the little group. "There can only be one captain if you're here, Nipper—and that's you! Why, hang it all, I only took the job on as your deputy! But if you wish to raise these objections, there's always a simple solution."

"A Form election, eh?" asked Watson.

"Exactly," said Reggie. "But why go to the trouble? Ninety per cent. of the Form will vote for you, Nipper, so an election would be a mere waste of time."

"Rats!" snorted Edward Oswald Handforth.

He had appeared down the stairs, accompanied by Church and McClure, and he was looking more than usually aggressive.

"Rats!" he repeated. "I demand an election!"

"Caesar has spoken!" murmured Pitt.

"I demand an election!" roared Handforth. "With a proper campaign, there's every chance that I shall get the majority of votes—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy, you can't help these delusions!" sighed Pitt. "Still, if you want an election, there's no reason why we shouldn't hold one. It'll be a bit of a rag, anyhow, and it'll help to liven up the first week of term."

"Why talk of these matters now?" asked Tommy Watson bluntly. "We shall be going away for the Easter vacation soon, and all sorts of things might happen before the new term."

Watson was feeling very happy and light-hearted. He and Nipper were not really in the Fourth just now. They had been the guests of the Head for two or three days, and were at liberty to stay on until the beginning of the holidays, if they chose.

Watson's recent experience at Moat Hollow was something like a dream to him now—a kind of nightmare that was becoming dulled by the passage of time. And he gloated over the thought that he would be back again in Study C when the new term commenced. It wasn't much good his entering the Fourth for the few days that remained of the present term. Easter was near at hand.

"Can't understand about the postman," said Nipper, frowning. "It's nearly nine o'clock—time for call-over. I always thought the postman came at about eight."

"Generally between eight and a quarter-past," said Church.

"Then what's the matter with him this morning?"

"Goodness knows!" growled Handforth. "He's always late when we particularly want him. I'm expecting some cash from my pater. Look here, Willy, you buzz off!" he added darkly. "My only hat! I've only got to mention money, and you appear like some giddy goblin!"

Handforth minor grinned.

"A mere coincidence, funnysides!" he explained. "Still, now that you talk about money, I could do with five bob—"

"Oh, could you?" interrupted his major. "Well, I'm broke! The postman hasn't come yet—"

"Of course he hasn't!" said Willy. "He isn't due!"

"Fathead! He's over half an hour late!"

"Just another of your little hallucinations, old man," said Willy sadly. "You can't help these mental lapses—Hallo! There goes the giddy bell! Now for the fun!" he added, under his breath.

CHAPTER V.

WILLY REFUSES.



MR. SUNCLIFFE gazed round the Third Form-room keenly.

"Hurry up—hurry up!" he exclaimed, in an irritable voice. "Good gracious! Is

it really necessary for you to shuffle your feet in that manner, Conroy minimus? Set your tie straight, Hobbs! Cease that grimacing at once, Heath!"

The Third was settling itself down. Mr. Suncliff was obviously in one of his touchy moods, and it behoved the Third to be careful. They were always careful on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Mr. Suncliff had a sinister habit of detaining wrongdoers during the afternoon. He was a dutiful man, and would even abandon his own leisure in order to personally supervise the extra work.

Morning school at St. Frank's always began at nine o'clock. After call-over in the Form-rooms, the boys were marched to Big Hall for prayers, marched back again, and then lessons would begin in earnest. It was no uncommon thing for a junior to dash into his class-room at the last second in time to answer his name.

Mr. Suncliff called over the names in a testy voice.

When he came to the H's there was a pause.

"Handforth minor!" he repeated sharply.

There was still silence, and Mr. Suncliff adjusted his glasses, and looked up sharply. Willy Handforth's place was empty.

"So Handforth minor is adding lateness to his other misdemeanours!" snapped the Form-master. "This is a new departure for the young man! I will deal with him severely. Heath, do you hear me, sir? Heath!"

Mr. Suncliff went on with the call-over, and had just got to the R's when the door opened, and Willy Handforth strolled in.

"I've been looking everywhere—Hallo! What the dickens—" He broke off, and looked round with mild surprise. "What's the idea?" he went on innocently. "What's the new game?"

Mr. Suncliff turned.

"Ah! So you have condescended to grace us with your presence, Handforth minor!" he said sarcastically. "We are honoured, indeed! Go to your place—and take fifty lines for being late!"

"Fifty lines for being late!" repeated Willy blankly. "You're dotty! I—I mean—Sorry, sir!" he added hastily.

"I do not wish to argue, young man—"

"You're just like me, sir," interrupted Willy. "But this is a case where something's got to be said. Haven't you made a mistake, sir?"

"A mistake?"

"About the time, I mean—"

"No, Handforth minor, I have not made a mistake," snapped Mr. Suncliff. "The time is four minutes after nine, and you have no excuse. You failed to answer to your name."

"Wait a minute, sir—I've got nearly an hour yet," said Willy calmly. "I hate contradicting you, sir, but the exact time is only just four minutes past eight."

Willy was just beginning to thoroughly enjoy himself, and Chubby Heath hugged himself in his own seat. The rest of the Third looked on with astonishment. This sort of thing, in their opinion, was not merely asking for trouble, but simply yelling for it.

But Handforth minor had the supreme satisfaction of knowing that he was in the right, and that the matter could be proved. Whatever happened in the interim, he would ultimately justify himself. And any punishments that might be inflicted would naturally be cancelled. It was the choicest situation Willy had ever engineered.

"Are you deliberately impertinent, Handforth minor?" demanded Mr. Suncliff.

"Impertinent, sir?" protested Willy. "Oh, sir! How could you? Have you ever known me to be cheeky, sir? But when I see you making such a big mistake as this—"

"There is no mistake!" thundered the Form-master. "Go to your place!"

Willy remained stationary.

"Do you hear me?" roared Mr. Suncliff.

"Yes, sir."

"Then—then why don't you go?"

"Because it's only just five past eight, sir," said Willy calmly. "There's nothing in the school regulations that we've got to start school at five past eight! There's practically an hour yet."

Mr. Suncliff fumed.

"This is nothing more nor less than studied impudence!" he snapped. "You know as well as I do that the school clock struck nine over five minutes ago—"

"Ah! That's just where the school clock was wrong!" interrupted Willy sweetly. "The giddy thing's an hour fast! My hat! The Form-room clock's an hour fast, too!" he added, glancing up. "Who's been messing about with the time?"

Chubby Heath nearly exploded, and Mr. Suncliff actually did.

"Handforth minor, you'll be detained for the whole afternoon!" he shouted furiously. "Another word, boy, and I will take you to the Headmaster to be flogged!"

"I can't help that, sir—he wouldn't flog me!" retorted Willy. "I don't see why I should turn up for call-over at eight o'clock instead of nine—"

"Will you abandon this ridiculous pretence?" hooted Mr. Suncliff. "You are an impertinent, wilful, young rascal. Go to your place at once, Handforth minor! I have already warned you!"

Willy stuck his hands in his pockets, and strolled to the door.

"Sorry I can't agree with you, sir," he said calmly. "But as it's only just seven minutes past eight, I'll go and put Marmaduke through his tricks!"

"Marmaduke!" repeated Mr. Suncliffe, goggling.

"My monkey, sir," explained Willy. "I haven't exhibited him in public yet. I believe in keeping him locked up until he can do his tricks perfectly. He's nearly ready——"

"Come here, sir!" roared Mr. Suncliffe.

But Willy calmly walked out and closed the door. Chubby Heath swallowed hard. This was going too far—there could be no justification for such deliberate cheek. The rest of the Form felt dazed.

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Suncliffe.

He gave one dash to the door, flung it open, and sped down the passage in pursuit of Willy like a hound on the trail.

CHAPTER VI.

PROOF POSITIVE.



OUTSIDE, Willy was inspecting the sky with a critical gaze. The clouds were breaking, and the blue sky peeped through in many places.

"Going to be fine," decided Willy contentedly.

He noticed a stately figure crossing from the Head's house to the Modern House. It was Dr. Stafford himself—impressive and dignified in his flowing gown and mortar-board.

"What are you doing out here, Handforth minor?" asked the Head, pausing.

"Just taking the air, sir," replied Willy.

"Taking the air!" repeated the Head.

"Do you know that it is past time for call-over? Prayers will be held in a few minutes——"

"Really, sir?" asked Willy. "An hour before time?"

"I don't understand——"

The Head broke off, for at this moment a wild figure came tearing out of the Ancient House. It was the enraged Mr. Suncliffe, and he came dashing up with all thoughts of dignity flung to the winds.

"Mr. Suncliffe!" said the Head, shocked.

The Form-master came to a halt, breathless. He seized Willy by the shoulder, and held on like a leech.

"This—this boy!" he panted. "I appeal to you, sir! He has been deliberately insolent. He refuses to take his place in class, and insists that the hour is only seven minutes past eight!"

"Ten past eight, sir," corrected Willy smoothly.



Willy drew forth a battered old alarm clock, minus a bell.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Suncliffe. "Do you hear, sir? I urge you to deal with this young rascal at once! I have never experienced such a deliberate act of insubordination!"

The head looked pained.

"Really, Handforth minor!" he protested. "Really! This sort of thing—— What have you got to say?"

"Only that it's ten past eight, sir," replied Willy sweetly.

"There you are—there you are!" shouted Mr. Suncliffe. "You hear, sir? Even in your presence, he maintains this—this——"

"Perhaps the boy's unwell!" interrupted the Head, with concern. "He cannot really think that the hour is so early."

"All right, sir—ask the postman," said Willy. "Here he comes—at his usual time, too. He nearly always drops in while we're at breakfast. There's been a mistake this morning, sir. Everything's an hour too early."

Mr. Suncliffe fumed, and the Head's brow grew black. He regarded this as a pure evasion, and he was rapidly coming to the conclusion that Handforth minor was deliberately cheeky. As for asking the postman the time, the Head would not lower his dignity by any such proceeding.

Fortunately, the postman acted on his own account.

"Morning, sir—morning, sir!" he said,

touching his cap respectfully to the Head and Mr. Sutcliffe.

"Good-morning, Mudford!" said the Head gruffly.

"Summat wrong with the old clock this morning, sir," said the postman, pausing and glancing up at the tower. "I see it when I was down the road," he added conversationally. "'Tain't often as the old clock's wrong. Must be three years since I've seen it more'n a minute or two out, one way or t'other."

Willy smiled, and gave an expressive shrug.

"There you are!" he said calmly. "What did I say?"

Both the Head and Mr. Suncliffe stared at the postman blankly.

"What—what did you say, Mudford?" asked the Head, at length. "Am I to understand that, in your opinion, the school clock is wrong?"

The postman inspected his enormous watch.

"That be an hour fast, sir—to the minit!" he replied critically.

"An hour fast!" gasped Mr. Suncliffe. "Impossible!"

"Ridiculous!" said Dr. Stafford. "Indeed, preposterous! Every clock in the school is fast, if your statement is true, Mudford! I've never heard of such nonsense!"

Mudford felt somewhat injured.

"There's no call to get riled about it, sir," he growled. "I see the post-office clock this mornin', an' it wasn't ten seconds out by my watch. Not that I was surprised—seein' as I set my watch to Greenwich time last night. This 'ere wireless is mighty useful to us postmen," he added appreciatively. "You can't get no better time than Greenwich."

Mudford made this statement with the air of a man who has clinched all argument, and the Head found a doubt creeping into his mind. With a start, he remembered that he had set his own watch on an hour upon rising. He remembered the queer feeling of earliness which had assailed him.

"Good gracious me!" he ejaculated.

Was it possible that the whole school was starting its schedule an hour before time? If so, how had this extraordinary state of affairs come about? The very fact that the postman was here at this hour—an hour later than his usual visit—was significant.

"Wait!" panted the Head abruptly. "I will be back at once!"

He dashed into the house, flew into his study, and grabbed the telephone.

"Number, please!" came the operator's voice.

"Can you tell me the right time?" panted the Head. "The right time, please, to the minute!"

There was a poignant pause.

"The time by the exchange clock is fourteen minutes past eight," said the operator monotonously.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HAND OF GENIUS.



DR. STAFFORD mopped his brow somewhat shakily.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured. "Positively extraordinary! Every clock in the school is wrong! We are an hour before time. I have never experienced anything so remarkable in all my life!"

He hurried outside, convinced beyond all shadow of doubt. There would be no object in the exchange girl telling him the wrong time. And now that he knew the truth, he wondered how in the world he could have been deceived. He had felt all along that something was wrong this morning.

"Well, sir?" asked Willy, as the Head strode up.

Mr. Suncliffe gripped the fag's shoulder hard.

"Well, sir?" he repeated eagerly.

"Er! It appears that there has been some trickery," said the Head awkwardly.

"The boy's quite right, Mr. Suncliffe."

"Quite right?" asked Mr. Suncliffe, almost gibbering.

"The hour is merely a quarter past eight."

"Good gracious me!" gasped the Third-Form master. "But—but—Really, sir, I cannot imagine—"

"Neither can I, Mr. Suncliffe—neither can I!" interrupted the Head. "Well, Mudford, why are you standing here? Do the postal authorities pay you to waste your time in this fashion?"

The postman grinned as he touched his cap.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir; I was wonderin' if you'd got to know about the time," he explained. "I sez it was only just after eight, didn't I? Ah! There's no tellin' wi' these boys!" he added darkly. "Like a lot of monkeys—that's what they are! Trouble enough I 'ad in the village."

"Indeed!" said the Head coldly.

"Tried to fool me, they did," said Mudford. "But I wasn't born yesterday, not me. It may be the Fust of April, but I'm up to their little games. Allus 'ave bin!"

He went off to deliver his letters, and Dr. Stafford and Mr. Suncliffe exchanged startled glances.

"The First of April!" breathed the Head. "Is—is it possible—"

"That's about the size of it, sir," said Willy, nodding. "But, I say! What a

ferrific gag! I wonder who the chap is who thought of it?"

"You may go, Handforth minor!" said the Head firmly.

Willy strolled off, whistling shrilly. Exactly as he had anticipated, he had had some rare sport, and had got off scot-free. Dr. Stafford looked after him suspiciously.

"Is it possible that that boy is responsible?" he murmured. "I can hardly believe it, Mr. Suncliffe. In any case, there is no possibility of obtaining the necessary evidence."

The Head suddenly chuckled, and his lined old face broke into smiles.

"Upon my soul! I can't help appreciating the humour of the situation!" he exclaimed heartily. "The whole school has been fooled, Mr. Suncliffe. The most remarkable First of April joke I have ever encountered. Ahem! Not that I approve of such foolishness!" he added hastily.

"I should imagine not, sir," said Mr. Suncliffe, aggrieved.

"We will let the boys go in for prayers, and then they will be dismissed," said the Head briskly. "And then I must see about having the clocks altered. Dear me! Most of the school is already congregated for prayers!"

Five minutes later the Third was marched into Big Hall, under the wing of Mr. Suncliffe, who completely failed to appreciate the joke. Nobody in that great gathering guessed what was coming.

"It appears that some humorist has been playing fast and loose with all the school clocks," said the headmaster, going straight to the point. "In fact, we have all been made the victims of an April First joke."

The school buzzed.

"Instead of the time being nine-twenty-three, as the clocks indicate, the time is really eight-twenty-three," went on the Head. "Therefore, you may dismiss and re-assemble in your class-rooms at the usual hour of nine."

Nobody moved. The Head had brought out his announcement so pointedly that the school hardly realised what he meant. But the order for dismissal had been given, and after the first rank was broken, the rest of the boys followed.

"He's mad!" declared Edward Oswald Handforth. "It's nearly half-past nine—look at my watch! He's the one who's been fooled!"

"Why should we worry—we've got over half an hour before lessons?" grinned Church. "I say, this is tophole! What a lark!"

And that was the general conclusion. The school could talk of nothing else, and it was fully ten minutes before everybody realised that some genius had been at work with the clocks and watches.

His identity remained a mystery. There

were all sorts of conjectures, and hundreds of wild guesses, but nobody associated Willy Handforth with the stirring deed.

"Why shouldn't we tell 'em?" asked Chubby Heath, as he and Willy sunned themselves in the Triangle. "Don't we want the glory?"

"I don't mind a little glory, but I should get it in a sack!" retorted Willy. "My dear chap, if the Head finds out who messed about with all the clocks, he'll give 'em the order of the boot in two ticks. If we're bowled out, it'll mean expulsion, my lad. In other words, the sack. Or, to be more exact, the push!"

Chubby Heath turned slightly pale.

"On the whole, I think we'd better keep mum!" he decided shakily.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LETTER.



"As the poets say, silence is golden," observed Willy. "Of course, it all depends upon the circumstances. Even poets can't always be right. For

example, I can spot Ted with a letter on the Ancient House steps, and I'm going to dun him for five bob. Silence wouldn't be golden in a case of that sort. Speech is the order of the day."

Willy detached himself from the stonework of the fountain, and approached his major. Edward Oswald saw him coming and glared.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded.

"Did you click?" asked Willy.

"The pater's sent me a couple of quid, if that's what you mean," retorted Handforth.

"In that case, I can't possibly let you off with five bob," said Willy firmly. "Nothing less than ten, old son. I don't mind how I get it—in silver or a note. But be good enough to fork out!"

Handforth snorted.

"It's a pity you can't wait!" he said tartly. "As a matter of fact, I was going to give you ten bob, anyhow. Here you are—take it! And mind you don't make yourself ill!"

Willy took the note and grinned.

"Thanks awfully," he said calmly. "Your generosity is only exceeded by your exquisite beauty of form and feature. By the way, is this a present from you, or a tip from the pater?"

"He mentioned something about giving you ten bob," said Handforth gruffly.

"I suspected it," said Willy. "Good! I can come on you for five bob later on,

so mind you keep some loose change handy."

"Cheeky young bounder!" said Handforth, glaring.

The lobby was full of fellows, many of them reading letters. For by this time the morning's post had been sorted out and distributed. And everybody was revelling in the unexpected period of liberty. Many were the blessings that were poured down upon Willy's unconscious head.

Stevens, of the Fifth, was standing by the cloak-room door, reading a letter of his own. Chambers & Co., of Study 10, invited him to accompany them to the school shop, but he absently shook his head.

"Thanks all the same," he said. "Too busy just now."

"You look it!" exclaimed Chambers. "All right, my son, if you don't want a treat, you can stay away!"

Stevens nodded, and returned to his letter. It wasn't particularly long, and it appeared to be worrying him somewhat. It ran as follows:

"Innesford House,
"Belgrave Square,
"London, W.
"March 31st.

"My Dear Old Bazooka,
"Prepare yourself for two pieces of vital and all-important news. Brace yourself firmly, put your shoulders back, and get ready for the double-barrelled shock.

"Firstly, I am no longer at Uxton, and that celebrated seat of learning is consequently thrown into disorder and dismay. Imagine it! Uxton without its Napoleon! I picture to myself masters striding to and fro, wringing their hands in despair. I can see strong seniors weeping silently and shaking with inward emotion. But the truth must be told. I am no longer at Uxton.

"Secondly, it is my intention to give yourself and the whole of St. Frank's College a rare treat. It is not too much to say that St. Frank's will ring with the affair for generations. Briefly, I shall be with you to-morrow morning.

"I have chartered a special train, and with my host of attendants I shall embark upon the journey in the grey, early hours—roughly, between eight and nine. If we are to believe the time schedules of the Southern Railway—and I must confess I have grave misgivings—I shall descend upon Bellton in all my glory at precisely ten-thirty-seven.

"So be ready, brother. Spread the news far and wide. Prepare the school for this great honour. And even though it necessitates tearing yourself away from work, be sure to meet me at the train.

"And so until we meet,

Your fraternal brother

"WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE."

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series—Third Form.



No. 14.—Bobby Dexter.

Bobby is not very prominent in Third Form japing. He is generally known as "The Cherub," owing to his angelic, child-like features. As a matter of fact, he is as fond of mischief as any of the others.

"Of all the silly chumps!" muttered Stevens, as he re-read the astonishing effusion. "How the dickens can I get away from lessons this morning? But if I don't meet him he'll be upset, and give me one of his straight looks. I've simply got to do it!"

Stevens put the letter in his pocket. He had no intention of spreading the news, as the writer of that letter so clearly desired. Stevens' opinion of William Napoleon Browne was evidently different from William Browne's opinion of himself.

"Just the same as ever," muttered Stevens. "It's a wonder he didn't tell me to have a brass band waiting for him! He's a good old stick, though—we had some ripping times together at Uxton."

Browne was an old friend of Stevens'. They had been fags together at Uxton College, a great Public school which was probably the most famous in all England. The two former friends had met occasionally in the holidays, but there had never been a renewal of the old intimacy. Stevens hadn't even seen his friend of Uxton days for over two years.

But he grinned as he recalled the lanky, untidy junior he had once known. Browne had always been original, he remembered, and he had been a perfect demon for

practical jokes. Stevens suddenly felt a keen desire to see what Browne looked like in these days.

He made his way to Mr. Pagett's study, and to his great delight he found the Fifth Form master in an excellent humour. Mr. Pagett was poring over a sheet of paper on which there were many squares, but he hastily covered this up upon Stevens' entry.

"Well, Stevens?" asked Mr. Pagett genially. "I must confess I feel no animosity against the unknown joker who set all the clocks on. The extra time has enabled me to complete a most important piece of work."

"So I see, sir," smiled Stevens. "These cross word puzzles are a bit of a bother, but there's a fine satisfaction when you've figured 'em all out!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT.



MR. PAGETT coughed. "Quite so, Stevens—quite so!" he said hastily. "But in

this instance I have not been merely elucidating a cross word puzzle, but manufacturing one. And I rather think I am within measurable distance of gaining a first prize. These puzzles require brain, Stevens—brain!"

"I can quite believe it, sir," said Stevens. "By the way, I was wondering if I could be excused lessons until the interval?"

"Until eleven o'clock, Stevens?" said Mr. Pagett, frowning. "I am afraid—What reason have you for making this request? A good one, I trust? I dislike my boys being absent—Well?"

"There's a friend coming down to see me, sir," explained Stevens. "He'll be here on the ten thirty-seven train, and he has asked me to meet him. He's an Uxton chap, sir, and he wouldn't like it if I——"

"An Uxton boy, eh?" interrupted Mr. Pagett. "Well, well, under the circumstances—Yes, Stevens, you can go and meet your friend, as he desires. Uxton is the only school in the kingdom that can be placed in the same class as St. Frank's, so we must be courteous."

"St. Frank's is better than Uxton, sir," said Stevens stoutly.

"Oh, undoubtedly," agreed Mr. Pagett. "Undoubtedly! At the same time, Uxton—Well, there is only one Uxton, just the same as there is only one St. Frank's. You understand me, Stevens?"

"Yes, sir—and thanks awfully," said Stevens.

"Don't mention it, my boy," smiled the Fifth Form master. "Oh, and Stevens, before you go! If a word occurs to you beginning with G, consisting of ten letters, and ending with Z, I shall be obliged if you will bear it in mind, and let me know at the first opportunity."

"A bit of a hard nut, isn't it, sir?"

"It is, Stevens—it certainly is!" agreed Mr. Pagett, frowning. "In order to complete my puzzle satisfactorily, I have had to substitute three words which I really do not desire. However, no matter——"

"Hold on, sir," said Stevens, thinking hard. "Ten letters, beginning with G, and ending with Z?"

"Yes, I have racked my brain——"

"How about Georgsputz, sir?"

Mr. Pagett jumped clean out of his chair.

"Georgsputz! Georgsputz!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Good heavens, it's the very word, Stevens! But wait! Wait! Is there such a word?"

"It's the name of a little town in South West Africa, sir," said Stevens, grinning. "I remember it from our last geography lesson. It's just on the borders of Bechuanaland."

"Splendid, Stevens! I am delighted," panted Mr. Pagett, dashing for his atlas. "My puzzle will now be perfect—quite perfect! Stevens, you may take the whole morning off! You may spend all the time you wish with your Uxton friend."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Stevens, overjoyed.

"Of course, I must give a fairly strong clue," murmured Mr. Pagett, poring over the atlas as Stevens went out of the study. "A town in Africa—No, that is rather too broad—too informative——"

Stevens chuckled loudly as he went down the passage. Throughout the term the cross word craze had flooded St. Frank's, but it was only recently that the masters had succumbed to the lure.

The Fifth-Former was very happy. He had never expected to get the morning off like this. Mr. Pagett was usually severe and arbitrary. Stevens silently blessed the unknown inventor of cross word puzzles.

It was practically time for lessons, and a few minutes later he went in for call-over with the rest of the Fifth—the second call-over that morning. It was, indeed, the first time in history that there had been two call-overs, and this day would probably go down to posterity with a very special mark against it.

Prayers over in Big Hall, the Head had a short announcement to make. He didn't refer to the previous fiasco. For Dr. Stafford had decided to let the whole thing drop. It had been quite a good April First joke, and the Head had no desire to find the culprit.

"To-day we shall have a distinguished visitor," said Dr. Stafford. "Some of you may have heard of Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania. He is the Crown Prince of that Italian-speaking State, and his distinguished father, the King of Zeko-Vania, was one of our ardent allies during the late war."

"Sounds like an ointment!" murmured Reggie Pitt, grinning.

"The prince has recently left Oxford, after

a distinguished career both there and at Harrow," went on the Head. "He has been visiting several of our Public schools, and it is his intention to honour us with his presence to-day. A purely informal visit, of course, and there will be no special celebrations. Prince Augustine is quite a modest young man."

The school didn't seem very impressed.

"I am merely mentioning this, as I wish you to be quite prepared," smiled the headmaster. "I know I can trust you to be on your best behaviour, and I shall expect the junior boys to see that their collars are clean, and similar details duly attended to."

So the school was dismissed, and not even the fags went mad with excitement about the expected visit of Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania.

CHAPTER X.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE.



VICTORIA STATION was fairly crowded that morning when a taxicab pulled up against the main entrance. Streams of people were pouring out, and distributing themselves into the Underground, on to the buses, and elsewhere.

A tall young gentleman emerged from the taxi.

There was nothing particularly striking about him except, perhaps, the extreme gravity of his countenance. He was well-dressed, but not dandified. His morning-suit fitted him as though he had been moulded into it, and his top hat gleamed without blemish.

"Porter, sir?"

The young gentleman regarded the porter thoughtfully for a moment, and then relinquished a small travelling-bag.

"A somewhat unnecessary luxury, but no matter," he observed. "We cannot allow such trifles to worry our powerful brain. Away, lackey, and see if you can track down the eight-fifteen train to its lair. We are about to grace the Southern Railway with our distinguished person."

The porter stared rather hard.

"The eight-fifteen, sir?" he repeated.

"Your brain is apparently in full working order," said the tall young man. "We would hie ourselves down into the wilds of Sussex, and, unless we are mistaken, there will be very little hieing done unless we shake a somewhat vigorous leg. If the station clock is correct—which we strongly suspect, in spite of rumours—but two minutes remain."

"You mean the eight-fifteen to Helmford, Bannington, and Caistowe?" suggested the porter. "Right you are, sir! You'll find me waiting at the gate."

"A touching scene," said the new arrival. "Peter the Porter waiting at the gate for his little piece of silver! If we can locate

the ticket emporium in good time, all will yet be well."

He paused to place five shillings into the cabby's hand, and then he dashed off with long strides to the main line booking-office. Having obtained a first-class ticket, he went to one of the platform gates, where a board announced that the train would depart at 8.15. The porter was waiting, as per schedule.

"Just in time, sir," he announced cheerfully.

"Our heart is greatly gladdened by these tidings," said the tall young gentleman. "Take this shilling, Brother Peter, and stow it carefully away for a rainy day—which will probably be to-morrow. And when you bask in the smiles of the family circle to-night, remember to tell the little children that you have been permitted to serve William Napoleon Browne. In fact, Brother Peter, we can safely say that this is the turning-point of your life."

"Just closing the gate, sir," remarked the collector, staring hard.

"And rightly, too," agreed William Napoleon Browne. "Gates are made to be closed. But should you close this one before I steal softly through, another of the world's great tragedies will have taken place. For St. Frank's College, that great seat of learning, will be deprived of my presence for several hours."

He waved his hand gravely, and strode up the train, glancing keenly into the various compartments. At last he arrived at one which appeared to satisfy him. It was a first-class compartment, and already contained two passengers. Browne opened the door and strode in.

"Wait! You cannot enter here!" exclaimed a small, excitable man, with a tiny, pointed beard. "This compartment is reserved—"

"A detail which fails to worry us," interrupted Browne calmly. "Have no fear, brother. We do not object to your presence. So far as we are concerned, you and your offspring may ride in this compartment unchallenged."

He tossed his bag into the rack, lounged down into a corner seat, and removed his hat. The excitable man stood over him, red in the face, and exceedingly angry.

"I tell you this compartment is reserved!" he shouted. "You are intruding!"

"These outbursts are greatly to be deplored," said Browne sadly. "Your physician, I am convinced, would drop the veto on them with no uncertain exhibition of force. Always remember, Brother— But I am lost! Unaccountably enough, I failed to catch your name."

"My name is Count Oscar," fumed the other. "You do not seem to realise that you have intruded upon the presence of royalty! You are in the company of his Royal Highness, Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania," he added, with a ceremonious

wave towards the young man at the other end of the compartment.

Browne rose gracefully, and bowed.

"Enough! Say no more!" he exclaimed. "Once again my unerring instinct has guided me. Kindred spirits, Brother Oscar! I have not the slightest doubt that we shall be able to hob-nob to some good purpose."

"You will leave this compartment—"

"Too late! Alas, the old, old cry—too late!" sighed Browne. "The train is already moving. The engine, apparently, has got tired of champing at the bit, and is now dashing off into the wilds. We must learn to bear these great trials in patience, Brother Oscar."

He sank back into his seat, and gazed with a kindly eye upon his Royal Highness, Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania. He was not entirely overwhelmed. His Royal Highness was a narrow-shouldered young gentleman with a haughty expression, and an unpleasant scowl.

Except for Count Oscar's fuming, a broody silence descended over the compartment.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PERFECT SNOB.



WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE gazed with interest out of the window as the train sped through the outer suburbs towards East Croydon.

"A somewhat scaly vista, but we must fortify ourselves, and contemplate the charms of the open country beyond," he observed. "I regret, Comrade Oscar, to notice that you are still decidedly ruffled. You are like a man who has been caught in the machinery."

Count Oscar glared, but said nothing.

"Come, come!" said Browne. "Is this strained silence necessary? Can we not be as brothers? Here we are, flung together by the winds of chance, and the entire onus of conversation is apparently pressed upon my shoulders! A lamentable situation, since modesty is my besetting sin. My chief delight is to listen while great men give voice to momentous thoughts."

Prince Augustine stirred himself irritably.

"I shall complain to the Company about this!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Not content with intruding, you must insult us with your flippant talk! At the first stop I will have you turned out!"

"I am grieved," said Browne, with deep melancholy. "My heart bleeds. I set out upon a mission of gladness and joy, and what do I find? Instead of harmony—discord. Instead of peace—warfare. Instead of genial companionship—scowls and re-creminations. It is a sad world!"

"Will you be silent?" shouted Prince Augustine.

"Nothing," said Browne, "would delight me more. But, alack, it would be better to ask the nightingale to cease his warblings in the midst of his favourite selection. I go to St. Frank's to spread joy among the denizens of that—"

"St. Frank's?" repeated the Royal pair, in one voice.

"What have I said?" asked Browne, with concern. "What tragic thing is this, which causes you to start in your seats like frightened mustangs of the prairie?"

"You go to St. Frank's?" asked Count Oscar abruptly.

"By this time the bells are ringing in preparation for my arrival," replied William Napoleon Browne. "No doubt a whole holiday has been proclaimed, and the school, in one solid mass, is preparing to march down to the station to greet me. Only once in a lifetime will such a momentous event occur."

Prince Augustine lost sight of his reserve. He spoke rapidly to Count Oscar in Italian, and Browne regarded them benevolently.

"Pray allow the flow to continue unchecked," he said, when there was a slight pause. "Nothing delights me more than to listen to these exhibitions of Hindustani. Since childhood, I have lamented the fact that the language is still unknown to me."

"Since you are travelling to St. Frank's, the situation is altered," said the prince stiffly. "We, too, are bound for St. Frank's College. It is my intention to go over the entire school."

"And does the school know of this?" asked Browne, with interest.

"The Headmaster has been informed," replied the prince. "I am conferring the honour upon several schools."

Having broken the ice, Prince Augustine became quite loquacious. But his manner never altered. After another five minutes had elapsed, Browne came to the conclusion that Zeko-Vania was a decidedly blighted country to have such a prince as this. In every word, and in every sentence, he revealed himself to be an insufferable snob.

He spoke unendingly of the great honour he was conferring upon St. Frank's; he expressed a veiled contempt for British Public schools in general, and even went so far as to make unfavourable comments concerning Oxford.

Browne listened attentively, and his manner gradually changed. He seemed to become imbued with an awe for this petty prince.

"Naturally, I shall not mix with the boys themselves," went on Prince Augustine. "Under no circumstances can I mix with commoners. The Headmaster will conduct me round, and I shall hold myself rigidly aloof. It is necessary to make these distinctions."

"Unquestionably, Brother Augustine," said Browne gravely. "I can well imagine

how embarrassing it will be for the lowly scum of St. Frank's to bask in your glittering presence. But are you not sadly misinformed as to the nature of this establishment?"

"Misinformed?" repeated the prince haughtily.

"I speak," said Browne, laying back in his seat, "from hearsay alone. But I have caught sundry rumours to the effect that a certain section of the school is renowned for its fire-eating character. Indeed, it is even whispered that one takes one's life in one's hands when venturing in the vicinity of this battle zone."

"I do not understand you," said the prince stiffly.

"Sad, sad words," sighed Browne. "Alas, 'twere ever thus! The melancholy cry—misunderstood! But we Brownes are triers—we never cease to strive. Let us enlarge. St. Frank's, as I have heard on best authority, is populated by various assorted firebrands of ferocious type. The Fourth, I understand, is, literally speaking, a seething mass of human lava. This mass is ever ready to overflow, and envelop strangers at the slightest provocation."

"St. Frank's is a famous Public school," said the Count.

"Ah, Brother Oscar, you may be right," agreed Browne. "But what if you are? Are Public schools all alike? The answer is decidedly and emphatically in the negative! These lava-esque Fourth Formers are scarred battle warriors who have fought in many a grim action. Did they not rise in their might against a certain millionaire? Did they not seize this millionaire by the short bristles and hurl him forth into obscurity? To such as these, the sight of a real noble prince would surely arouse their warlike passions to at least one hundred degrees above the safety zone."

Count Oscar looked at Prince Augustine, and Prince Augustine looked at Count Oscar. And William Napoleon Browne languidly closed his eyes, and his solemn face was full of repose.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO TELEGRAMS.



PRINCE AUGUSTINE had become very uneasy.

"But are you sure of this?" he demanded, tapping Browne on the knee, and arousing him from his blissful peace. "Are you sure that St. Frank's is as you say?"

Browne wore a meditative look.

"Who am I to cast slurs upon a celebrated seat of learning?" he asked. "I merely give voice to rumours. At the same time, I have a conviction that if you venture into St. Frank's you will dive feet foremost into the very centre of the consommé."

"I do not gather your meaning," said the prince stiffly.

"In bold, rugged language, you will find yourself in the soup," explained Browne gracefully. "Only recently these hot-heads of the Fourth Form took active part in grim battle scenes. As I understand it, there was trouble at a neighbouring school, and what did the St. Frank's Fourth do? It would be better to ask—what didn't they do? Not content with invading the unhappy place, they actually laid hands upon the schoolmaster himself. And, though it will doubtless make you shudder, they actually dropped the gentleman head foremost into his own ditch. A playful little habit of these Fourth Formers," he added lightly. "I realise full well that I am visiting the place at my own peril. You apparently do not realise that strangers enter St. Frank's with fear in their hearts. Alas, it is a mournful fact that these boys absolutely lurk in the undergrowth, waiting for new victims."

"I am astounded," said Count Oscar agitatedly.

"Others have also been astounded," agreed Browne. "Particularly so, after finding themselves swishing about like a dead goldfish in the fountain pool. That is merely one of the chances one has to take. I am told that the fountain pool at St. Frank's is never actually free from human debris. Astonishingly enough, the more distinguished the visitor, the more violent the upheaval."

"This is serious news, your Highness," said the count.

"A plague on me if I have alarmed you," exclaimed Browne, with deep concern. "I merely chat about the things I have heard. Possibly I am wrong. Possibly the school is inhabited by beves of angels. But I fear not. In the matter of schools, rumour seldom lies. And St. Frank's, without question, holds the record for fighting and revolution. Were I to advise you, I should unhesitatingly suggest an immediate right-about turn— But, no! Who am I to give advice to Royal blood? This blood, being of the purest blue, is probably immune from such perils as I have sketchily outlined. Enough! Let us forget!"

But William Napoleon Browne had said more than sufficient.

He had sown the seeds of doubt in the minds of the Zeko-Vania Crown Prince and his equerry. It must be recorded, moreover, that Count Oscar had been rather opposed to this St. Frank's visit from the very first. Prince Augustine's vanity, however, had overruled him.

ANSWERS
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Now, in fluent Italian, the count urged his sire to abandon the trip altogether. He pointed out that Browne's story was probably a gross exaggeration, but, at the same time, it would never do to take any risks. Better to leave St. Frank's alone. Under no circumstances could his Royal Highness lay himself open to indignity.

And his Royal Highness, who had the wind up practically vertical, needed very little persuading. At one other public school he had been ragged by a group of juniors, and the memory of that affair lingered. He shuddered slightly as he thought of it.

no notice of my prattlings. St. Frank's, after all, is to be honoured by a regal visit——"

"His Royal Highness has decided that it would be unwise to keep the proposed appointment," interrupted Count Oscar stiffly. "Under no circumstances can his Royal Highness risk the danger of vulgar brawling."

Browne attempted a hollow groan.

"Alack! What have I done?" he asked tragically. "What disaster has my unruly tongue precipitated? A few innocent observations, and darkness has descended.



Willy entered, nearly doubled up. Mrs. Poulter was sitting up in bed, a comical figure in a ruffled nightcap.

If these St. Frank's Fourth Formers were as warlike as Browne indicated, a visit to such an establishment was not even to be considered. Thus a decision was quickly arrived at.

Browne, watching from his corner seat, was serenely content. He regarded his fellow passengers in very much the same way as a benevolent old gentleman regards the playful antics of children. And when the prince's brow cleared, and the flow of Italian grew intermittent. Browne roused himself and beamed across the compartment.

"And so," he said, "all is settled. I am gratified that you have decided to take

To-day, and for many days to come, the boys of St. Frank's will weep salt tears of unhappiness and disappointment."

The royal pair took no notice. Count Oscar wrote down some words on a scrap of paper, and handed it to the prince.

"That will do," he said in English. "Dispatch it from the next stop."

"A telegram?" asked Browne politely. "Think, brothers! Consider! Pause before taking this terrible step! Picture the wave of grief which will flood the school upon the receipt of that telegram! The news of your non-arrival will be whispered from mouth to mouth throughout the school,

and strong men will wilt and wither and go all goosey!"

However, at this moment the brakes of the train were applied, and the express pulled up against the platform of a big station. The royal pair alighted, leaving William Napoleon Browne in sole possession of the compartment. They did not even bid him good-morning.

"A pair of singularly blistered specimens," Browne told himself complacently. "Ah me! This central European royalty! Something, however, has got to be done. Much as I regret the step which must now be taken, I take it without flinching!"

He tore a page from his pocket-book and wrote the following:

"Headmaster, St. Frank's College, Bell-ton. Have changed my mind. Will arrive as originally planned, and desire to be introduced to all and sundry simply as 'Browne.'"

The old Uxtonian regarded the words with calm contentment, put his pencil away, and dreamily closed his eyes.

"That, I think," he said softly, "will set the works going without a misfire. At the very next stop we will dispatch the masterly effusion."

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURPRISE FOR STEVENS.



STEVENS, of the Fifth, paced up and down the little platform of Bellton Station, and meditated upon the tranquillity of the April morning. Without doubt, spring had

come.

The sky was blue, the sun was shining gloriously, and the hedgerows were full of traces of green. Stevens was a quiet sort of fellow in his way, and he had an eye for natural beauty. He told himself that he would soon be able to set off upon one of his specimen hunts. Stevens was a naturalist, and he frequently spent half-holidays prowling about the countryside, digging up rare plants. Other Fifth-Formers contemptuously called them weeds, but Stevens didn't care.

A puff of smoke appeared in the distance, and a minute later the ten-thirty-seven rolled gracefully into the station at exactly ten-forty-nine. Stevens gazed keenly up and down as the train stopped.

The door of a first-class carriage opened near by, and a tall young gentleman emerged, faultlessly attired in morning-clothes, his topper shining in the sunlight.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Stevens.

He hadn't seen William Napoleon Browne for two years, but he recognised his old

Uxton school friend at once. There could be no mistaking this celebrated character. But Browne was amazingly changed.

To Stevens, it seemed that his fag-chum had sprung up like a mushroom, his baggy clothing had vanished, his general appearance of untidiness had gone for good, and he now stood revealed as a mirror of form and fashion.

"I say, Browne!" he exclaimed rather awkwardly.

"Ah, Brother Steve!" ejaculated Browne, moving gracefully forward. "This is surely the merriest day of all the glad new year? Come to my arms, brother, and lay your sobbing head upon my manly breast!"

They shook hands warmly.

"I hardly knew you!" exclaimed Stevens, grinning. "The same old flow of talk, though. Great Scott! You've changed tremendously, old man."

"Time," said Browne, "has left its mark. You, too, Brother Steve, reveal the ineradicable traces. I observe the lines of care on that piece of anatomy known as your face, but which, at Uxton, was commonly referred to as your dial. My dear old Brother Bazooka, old age is creeping upon us with fleet wings."

"What the dickens are you doing down here?" asked Stevens, as he seized Browne's handbag. "That's all right, old man—I'll carry this."

"As you wish," said Browne gracefully. "As you wish. Far be it from me to deny you this simple pleasure. In answer to your esteemed inquiry, we beg to state that we have no alternative but to plead curiosity. We are here, Brother Steve, for the purpose of satisfying our craving for knowledge."

"Bluntly, what exactly does that mean?" asked Stevens.

"A plain inquiry—as one would expect from a plain, rugged man such as yourself," said Browne. "Who are we to deny you a simple answer? Rumour has it, brother, that we are to descend upon St. Frank's in all our courtly glory at the commencement of next term."

"We?" said Stevens, staring.

"We," repeated Browne. "I, myself."

"You're coming to St. Frank's?"

"Hush! Someone may hear!" whispered Browne. "We must not let the glad tidings break upon the school in a thunderclap. Would you have the entire assembly go raving mad with joy? Such things as this must be broken gently."

"But, I say, look here," said Stevens. "You're rotting, aren't you?"

"The Brownes," said the old Uxtonian, "never rot. They may sometimes indulge in a little playful banter, but under no circumstances do they rot."

"You haven't left Uxton, have you?"

"I am here," said Browne simply.

"I can see that, you long-winded chump——"

"What strange words are these?" asked Browne, shocked. "Am I to be taught such language if I grace St. Frank's with my presence? Brother—brother! I am speechless with horror!"

They passed out of the station, and wandered down the road.

"Joking aside, though have you left Uxton for good?" asked Stevens. "You're only in the Fifth. I thought you'd stay at Uxton until you went up to Oxford."

"Alas, the chief of our clan is of another opinion," said Browne sadly. "In other words, Brother Steve, our pater has thrown a spanner into the gear-box, and the works are now somewhat disjointed. To be brief, I have been torn away from Uxton, and what is Uxton's loss will be St. Frank's gain. Commencing with next term, I shall be amongst you."

CHAPTER XIV.

BROWNE'S LITTLE SCHEME.



THIS piece of news was received by Stevens with slightly mixed feelings. Browne was a fairly good sort, and he belonged to one of the best families in the country, but

Stevens doubted the cordiality of his reception in the Fifth.

Cuthbert Chambers, of Study No. 10, was the present leader of the Fifth Form. He didn't deserve to be, but he was. Cuthbert was inclined to brag a lot, and it was this very self-advertisement which placed him in his elevated position. The Fifth didn't really need a leader, and if Chambers cared to call himself one, nobody else minded.

But with the advent of Browne, trouble would undoubtedly follow. Stevens could see it coming. For William Napoleon, with his irresistible flow of talk, his extraordinary knack of forcing people to do things they objected to, his serene coolness, would certainly cause a minor revolution in the Fifth.

"You are silent, Brother Steve," said Browne, after a lengthy pause. "Doubtless a few well-assorted great thoughts are now taking shape in your massive mind. What have we done that we should be excluded from these mental masterpieces?"

"You do talk, old man!" exclaimed Stevens. "I think you're even worse than you used to be—and goodness knows you were bad enough in the old days."

"Ah, me!" said Browne, grief-stricken. "Such terms of reproach."

"Be serious for a minute, and tell me all the facts," went on Stevens. "Why, exactly, have you left Uxton, and why——"

"One question at a time, Brother Horace," interrupted Browne. "I think I am right

in addressing you as Horace? Yes? Sad—sad! Of all the blistered names, Horace is surely the most blistered."

"Look here——"

"Not," said Browne, "that I am blaming you. Far from it. In their skittish exuberance, parents frequently nail such abominations to their offspring. In my own case, as you know, William was allotted to me. A bold, honest name, but scarcely adequate. There is nothing in the name of Bill to suggest power and forcefulness. Thus, the addition of Napoleon. I may add that Napoleon is my middle name, and it will further interest you to learn that I inserted this name of my own volition."

"Like your nerve," grinned Stevens.

"We will now pass lightly on to more interesting topics," proceeded Browne. "You were asking pertinent questions concerning my sad departure from Uxton? A tragedy, Brother Horace—a calamity which the school will feel for generations. However, to get down to brass tacks. To descend to iron nails. Tragic as it will sound, I have left Uxton owing to the misguided enthusiasm of the headmaster for that abomination which is known to the proletariat as work."

"In other words, you were sacked?"

"Alack-a-day! How is it that such base thoughts creep into your cerebellum?" asked Browne with a sigh. "No, Brother Horace, I was not sacked. The headmaster of Uxton, in one of his lucid moments, thought it necessary to put me through the hoop. In consequence, a report was forthwith dispatched to the president of the Browne organisation."

"In other words, to your pater?"

"As of old, your grasping capacity is still tentacle-like in its grip," said Browne. "Yes, brother, a report was sent to my pater. It seems that the Head was suffering from the unhappy delusion that it was time I honoured the Sixth Form with my presence. To put it bluntly, the report was nothing more nor less than a foul libel on my name. And our genial managing-director, waxing wrath, informed me that it wouldn't be at all a bad idea if I chartered a special train and returned to the ancestral home."

"You weren't sacked—you were just taken away?"

"Neatly put, but somewhat bald," said Browne, nodding. "Kindly bear in mind that there was no disgrace attached to the removal. Alas! sports and kindred recreations occupied too much of my time. The Uxton first eleven will be desolated this summer. Indeed, the entire cricketing population of Uxton is now walking about in mourning, and faces in general have grown so long that chin-straps are becoming necessary."

"Are you good at cricket?" asked Stevens, interested.

"Good?" repeated Browne, with a start. "Good? Without an unnecessary display of ego, I think I may claim to be mustard. Make no mistake, Brother Horace—St. Frank's will lose no cricket matches this season!"

"My dear ass, you don't expect to get your First Eleven colour in your first term, do you?" grinned Stevens. "Why, it's impossible——"

"There," said Browne, "you make one of those regrettable mistakes which are all too frequent in these barbaric days. Nothing is impossible. And we will see what we shall see. My present descent upon the school is a mere preliminary canter. In other words, I have come down to give St. Frank's the once-over."

"Oh, you have?" asked Stevens, slightly nettled.

"Probably I shall give it the twice-over while I'm about it," said Browne. "We are always thorough—we are always painstaking. That is the great cry of the present age, Brother Steve. Be painstaking! And if, as I trust, St. Frank's pleases me, I shall pass the glad word to the pater that all is well with his junior partner. He has hinted that St. Frank's is to be my future spiritual home, and I thought it a hot scheme to run down and see the sights."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure!"

"Don't mention it," said Browne graciously. "Taste before you buy! That, in brief, is the big idea. Should St. Frank's fall short of my ideals, I shall doubtless wander elsewhere. But wait! Here we are, prattling along, and I have not yet informed you of my latest achievement. Gaze, Brother Horace—gaze well and truly!"

Browne halted, drew himself up, and looked dignified.

"Well?" asked Stevens, amused.

"You may not realise it," said Browne, "but you are now feasting your eyes upon the renowned celebrity, Prince Augustine—Crown Prince of Zeko-Vania!"

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER FALSE COLOURS.



HORACE STEVENS stared.

"The Crown Prince of Zeko-Vania?" he repeated. "What on earth — Look here, Browne, you don't mean to say——"

"Let me briefly explain," interrupted William Napoleon Browne. "Entering the train at Victoria, I found myself in the company of a singularly scorched pair of human organisms. These, upon examination, proved to be Prince Augustine, the pride of Zeko-Vania, and his trusty henchman, Count Oscar."

"You're not serious, are you?" asked Stevens. "By Jove, though! The prince is coming down to-day——"

"Just another of your tragic little errors, Brother Horace," interrupted Browne. "Let me pass lightly on to future details."

At great length Browne explained the situation. By the time he had finished they were approaching the gates of St. Frank's, and Stevens was in a state of considerable perturbation.

"You hopeless ass!" he ejaculated, at last. "You can't do it, Browne! You can't hoax the whole school—including the masters and the Head! It's—it's above a joke, old man!"

"It is the First of April!" said Browne complacently.

Stevens started.

"First of April!" he repeated. "By Jove, so it is! I'd forgotten that for the moment——"

"You should never allow your brain matter to sideslip in this deplorable way," said Browne severely. "But on this occasion we will forgive you! The royal frown no longer sears you with its flame-like intensity. My scheme is simple, which is but natural—seeing that I am a simple, straightforward soul. I'm afraid I gave the Fourth Form a somewhat scarred character, but no matter. In such a great cause the means was justified. And the Fourth Form, being virile, will doubtless survive."

"You'll get yourself into an awful tangle," declared Stevens.

"In that case, brother, it will be your special privilege to disentangle me," said Browne smoothly. "I would not deny you this trivial pleasure. Of course, it will not be my fault if the Headmaster misinterprets my telegram. I told no lies. The Brownes are simpletons in that form of craft, and have never even served an apprenticeship."

"If that wire wasn't a lie, it was a deception."

"A vastly different thing," said Browne. "And what is the first of April but a day of deceptions? I fear the Headmaster will confuse me with the prince——"

"Unless he has met the prince before," said Stevens. "Or unless he has seen the photograph in the illustrated papers."

"A chance," said Browne, "that must be risked. Judging from the average photograph in the illustrated papers, my peril is insignificant. So I consider myself fairly safe."

Stevens was more than startled. Knowing Browne as he did, he was convinced that the old Uxtonian would carry his plan through by sheer audacity. Without question, Dr. Stafford would believe that the second telegram had also come from the prince.

After a while Stevens grinned. He couldn't help it. It was just like Brown's cool cheek to choke the prince off, and to come to St. Frank's in his shoes. And, after all, it was

certainly the first of April. Perhaps the joke would develop well.

"I suppose you just want me to sit tight and say nothing?" asked Stevens.

"You have hit the tack on the cranium with considerable vim," replied Browne calmly. "Briefly, this is the idea. I regard you, Brother Horace, as a friend in need. In the event of exposure I shall fly to your arms for protection—and I shall give you the privilege of explaining all. No, do not thank me—"

"You hopeless duffer, if you get yourself into a mess, you'll do your own explaining," growled Stevens. "Remember, I'm only a spectator. I'm not taking any part in this game."

"Merely another of your little hallucinations, Brother Steve," said Browne. "You are now about to dash through the school, announcing to all and sundry that Prince Augustine has arrived. I leave this matter safely in your hands, knowing that it will be bravely accomplished."

"But look here—"

"Enough! Do not embarrass me with your expressions of gratitude," said Browne, with a kindly wave of his hand. "I can well understand your overwhelming sense of awe. But hurry, brother! Away on your mission! In the meantime, I shall make it my business to steal softly into the Headmaster's presence, and dazzle him with my gracious personality."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FUN BEGINS.



MR. BEVERLEY STOKES, of the Ancient House, found the Head looking rather worried when he entered Dr. Stafford's sanctum on a matter of minor

importance.

"I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Stokes, that Prince Augustine has decided not to come," said the Head. "A telegram arrived just over half an hour ago. An awkward situation."

"Does he give any reason?" asked the Housemaster.

"None. Indeed, the telegram is quite brusque."

"It is rather a pity the school was told of the prince's proposed visit," said Mr. Stokes. "But, of course, you didn't know—"

"I am quite at a loss to understand the prince's attitude," went on the Head, frowning. "He has placed us in a predicament, Mr. Stokes. It will be necessary for me to make another announcement, and there can be no denying that the whole affair is undignified."

"Not that the boys will be very disappointed," smiled Mr. Stokes. "As far as

I can see, the prince's proposed visit has aroused no excitement. These are democratic days, sir, and, after all, Zeko-Vania is but a very insignificant State."

"I am afraid the Zeko-Vania Crown Prince is also insignificant," said the Head gruffly. "No gentleman would have sent me such a telegram— Come in!" he added, glancing at the door.

Tubbs, the pageboy, entered with a buff envelope.

"Telegram, sir!" he said briskly.

The Head took it, and Tubbs retired.

"Dear me!" said Dr. Stafford. "Remarkable! I cannot quite— Please read this, Mr. Stokes, and let me have your opinion."

Mr. Stokes read the message aloud.

"I have changed my mind. Will arrive as originally planned, and desire to be introduced to all and sundry simply as Browne," read Mr. Stokes. "O-ho, I wonder what his little game can be?"

"Of course, this is from the prince himself," said the Head, falling into the little trap which Browne had laid for him. "What on earth does the fellow mean, playing about like this? And how can I introduce him in the name of Browne, when I have already announced his true personality?"

Mr. Stokes chuckled.

"He'll find that it is too late, I'm afraid," he said. "Naturally, he cannot possibly keep his identity a secret after your announcement of this morning. The prince's innate modesty has revealed itself too late. I can't help suspecting that he has sent these two telegrams merely for the sake of effect—to impress us with his great importance."

"Ah, a very feasible explanation," agreed the Head, frowning. "I cannot say that I approve, Mr. Stokes. Frankly, I rather dislike this sort of thing, but it is impossible to offend royalty—even such small fry as this insignificant prince."

Mr. Stokes departed, and neither he nor the Head thought any further on the matter. Prince Augustine had thoughtlessly omitted to mention the time of his arrival, so no steps could be taken in the way of meeting him. But he would probably roll up in a big car, so it didn't matter.

It was just a minute after eleven-thirty when William Napoleon Browne presented himself at the door of the Head's house. He was calm and unruffled. The deception he was practising was no ordeal for him.

His natural exuberance of spirit was so high that he took an adventure of this kind in his stride. And it was peculiarly suited to him, too. It wasn't even necessary for him to act a part.

It was Browne's habitual manner to speak in a courtly fashion, as though he were some regal personage. Stevens of the Fifth had always been amused at his old friend's "gift of the gab." But even Stevens was startled by Browne's remarkable development of the last two years. Although on the right side of seventeen, Browne looked

and spoke like a young man in the early twenties.

Strictly speaking, he ought to have been in the Sixth, but he was notoriously backward in his studies. It was on account of his Headmaster's stern report that Browne senior had taken him away from Uxton. Browne senior was evidently of the opinion that a change of school would lift the backward one out of his rut.

The Head's door was opened by Phipps.

"Good-morning!" said Browne graciously. "No, kindly refrain from any of the usual salammings. I am here, as the poets would remark, quite incognito. From the Latin 'Incognitus,' meaning unknown. I am delighted to meet you, good sir."

He extended his hand and seized Phipps'.

"I am afraid there is a little error, sir," said Phipps, with dignity. "I am Dr. Stafford's butler."

"Do not apologise," said Browne gravely. "Instead, be good enough announce me without pomp. I simply wish to be known as Browne. You quite understand? My name is Browne."

Phipps, who had received earlier instructions, admitted the distinguished visitor. Browne was hardly to be blamed for mistaking Phipps for the Head himself, for Phipps was a learned-looking individual.

"Mr. Brown, sir," announced Phipps, opening the Head's door.

Browne lounged gracefully into the study, and bowed as the Head rose from his chair.

"I must confess you have taken me somewhat—er—unawares," said Dr. Stafford, rather flustered. "I was expecting you to arrive by car—er—"

"Browne is my name," said the visitor.

"Exactly—exactly!" said the Head. "Unfortunately, Prince Augustine, it is too late for your identity to remain hidden. I have already announced to the school—"

"I forgive you freely," interrupted Browne. "But please let me impress upon

you the fact that there is a slight entanglement. My name is not Prince Augustine, but Browne—Browne, plain and rugged."

The Head smiled.

"No, no, Prince Augustine, it is idle to maintain that deception between ourselves," he said. "Indeed, I shall find it necessary to introduce you to the school as the prince. The boys are waiting to welcome you."

Browne shrugged his shoulders.

"Since my protestations are of no avail, I can do nothing further," he said resignedly. "I, Browne, must therefore submit to the ordeal. As you insist, sir,

I have no alternative but to give you your head. So let the bells ring out. Sound the hooters, and let the welkin resound with joyous cheers. Browne is on the spot!"

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series—Third Form.



No. 15.—Ronald Parry (Parry minor).

Parry minor is inclined to associate with Fullerton's "set," and only supports the redoubtable Willy because he is afraid to do anything else. Rather an unpleasant youngster.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEETING THE SCHOOL.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE'S conscience was clear.

He had stoutly denied his identity as Prince Augustine, and the Headmaster had brushed the denial aside. This, of course, was entirely the Head's own fault. Browne had insisted upon his own personality so steadfastly that no blame of any sort could attach itself to him if people now mistook him for a Zeko-Vanian prince.

He was quite at his case, and it never occurred to him that he might be jeopardising his forthcoming place in the school. His first glimpse of St. Frank's had impressed him. He liked

the look of the place. There was a certain dignity about it which pleased him.

But Browne's love of a practical joke was so great, and his confidence in himself so unbounded, that he lightly dismissed any qualms that may have come to him. Difficulties could be dealt with when they arose. For the moment there was nothing to do except bask in the school's united smile.

The cool cheek of the thing was rather staggering.

Browne was merely a Fifth Former who had been taken away from Uxton by his

father because of his deplorable backwardness. There was a suggestion of Browne coming to St. Frank's at the beginning of the new term—so he had undertaken this present trip for the purpose of making an inspection—and if St. Frank's was satisfactory, he would honour it with his presence.

For unadulterated nerve William Napoleon Browne's visit of inspection would have been hard to beat. But somehow Browne carried off these affairs with such complete sang-froid that there seemed nothing whatever audacious about them.

lessons, and it will be a good opportunity to see them——"

"Undoubtedly," interrupted Browne indulgently. "Shall we venture upon this murky mission?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Not at all," said Browne. "Nothing delights us more than to acquaint ourselves with the masses. Could there be a more touching sight than a class-room of boys all sitting rigid with awe as they gaze fascinatedly upon our finely chiselled countenance? So on! Let us to this delectable occupation."



It was a first-class compartment, and already contained two passengers. Browne opened the door, and strode in.

His assumption of Prince Augustine's identity, even though it was only an All-Fool's Day joke, was startlingly daring. And he relied upon the magic date, and his own plausible tongue, to get him out of any hot water that might immerse him later on.

As for the Headmaster, he was pleasantly surprised. The prince was far more English in appearance than he had expected. Not, under the circumstances, that this was surprising.

"Possibly you would care to be conducted round the school forthwith?" asked Dr. Stafford. "The boys are at their

"By all means—by all means!" said the Head, who felt somehow that the prince's conversation was curiously un-princely.

They passed out of the study, Browne genially amused.

"We may find ourselves bobbing about in the broth before so very long; but no matter," he told himself. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Away with dull care. Let us ride upon the wave of regal glory while it is beneath us!"

They arrived at the Third-Form classroom, and Browne was ushered in amid a tense silence. The Third had no doubts as to the identity of the stranger. After

the Head's announcement that morning there could be no misunderstanding.

"I am sure, Mr. Suncliffe, that you will allow Prince Augustine a few moments of your valuable time," said the Head smoothly. "He is interested in our British Public schools, and has generously consented to inspect St. Frank's."

Mr. Suncliffe bowed somewhat stiffly.

"I am pleased to meet your Highness," he mumbled.

"If I have given you a thrill," said Browne, "I am fully rewarded. For, alack, how many thrills do we get in these wonderful days of Fords and Morris-Cowleys and five-valve sets? Indeed, what thrills are there left?"

He turned his attention to the Form, and gazed over it benevolently.

"I see we are in the presence of extreme youth," he proceeded. "Ah, then I was mistaken about the thrills. For you, Mr. Sunlight—"

"Suncliffe, your Highness," said the Form-master.

"Exactly!" agreed Browne. "Please refrain from any form of apology. For you, Mr. Suncliffe, there must be thrills in platoons. The homely tin-tack as you sit upon your chair, the whistle of a paper pellet as it wings its sticky way past your auricular appendage, the sylvan note of the homely mouth-organ as it is tuned behind the friendly desk-lid. Such thrills as these must be of daily occurrence. Am I right, sir?"

Mr. Suncliffe opened his mouth, but said nothing. Browne's direct question had taken him unawares. Moreover, the entire Form was giggling with delight. Even the Head felt slightly uncomfortable.

"No matter," said Browne graciously. "Do not trouble to get the cerebral organs tuned up to the correct wave-length. We are graciously pleased to address a few well chosen words to the class."

Browne turned to the astonished Third Formers, and felt that everything was going well. He was now fairly into his stride, and he didn't particularly care if it snowed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROWNE IN HIS ELEMENT.



WILLY HANDFORTH mentally decided that Prince Augustine of Zeko-

Vania was a lad. He was unquestionably an innovation.

Any interruption of lessons was naturally to be welcomed, and an interruption like Browne was of the very finest quality.

Willy rose in his seat and threw up an arm.

"Now then, you chaps—three cheers for the prince!" he called.

"Hurrah!" responded the Form nobly.

Browne permitted himself to relax into a beam.

"These healthy young spirits," he observed, turning to the Head. "I like to see it. I like to hear the full-throated cry of the fag on its native heath. Our ears are tickled."

"The boys are—er—somewhat excited," said the Head apologetically.

"And with excellent reason," declared Browne. "How often do they have their lessons relieved by the arrival of blue blood? I have been told that my life fluid is of an even richer tint than Stephens' best. And now to delight our childish audience with a few choice remarks."

He turned to the class, and the class grinned in unison.

"There is but little time at our disposal, so we must be brief," he exclaimed gravely.

"It delights us to observe that the necessary amount of respect is forthcoming. Under the circumstances, we may prevail upon Mr. Suncliffe to leap into the limelight with a slight token of recognition. "How," asked Browne, "would you like the rest of the morning off?"

"Oh!" ejaculated the Third.

"Do I observe the shining eye of hope?" asked Browne. "The sun gleams, the soft breezes blow, and what could be more entrancing than the sight of youth gamboling amid the dandelions?"

"Really, your Highness—" began Mr. Suncliffe.

"My dear Brother Suncliffe, say no more!" interrupted Browne serenely. "I am well aware that the same idea occurred to you; but no matter. You have granted your permission for the Form to dismiss? Splendid! At least one good mark will be written against your illustrious name in the book of Good Deeds. Children, you may patter out into the great and open spaces!"

"But, good gracious!" gasped Mr. Suncliffe.

The Form, however, had taken Browne at his word, and was dismissing itself with alacrity and precision. Willy Handforth led the way. In a matter of this kind promptitude was everything. He who hesitates is lost, thought Willy.

"And now to explore further fields," said Browne smoothly. "Kindly lead us to another collection of exuberant humanity. I am delighted beyond measure by the nerve and sprightliness of these young sparks."

Even the Head could say nothing to countermand Browne's order. The Third had been dismissed, and it was too late to call the boys back. So Browne was speedily conducted into the class-room of the Ancient Fourth.

"Ah, so these are the great celebrities!" he exclaimed, as he gazed interestedly at the juniors. "Here we have the heroes of many a battle. Throughout the world the fame of the Fourth Form has spread itself like an outsize in halos. We are graciously pleased."

The Fourth, on the other hand, was not only startled, but astonished. Nobody had taken any particular interest in the Head's announcement after prayers. All sorts of minor celebrities came down to St. Frank's occasionally, and inspected the school.

But, at the very first sight of Browne, the Fourth sat up. And his opening words convinced them that he was something new in visitors.

"Mr. Crowell, allow me to introduce Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania," said the Head, with dignity.

"I am honoured, sir," said Mr. Crowell, bowing.

"That," said Browne, "is quite natural. I must congratulate you, Brother Crowell, on your robust-looking battalion. Seldom have I seen such rosy-cheeked stalwarts. I have not the slightest doubt that I am now inspecting the flower of the school."

Mr. Crowell beamed.

"I am proud of my Form, sir," he said—"very proud."

And the Fourth visibly swelled at Mr. Crowell's unusual admission.

CHAPTER XIX.

KEEPING IT UP.



BROWNE nodded gravely.

"We are not surprised," he declared.

"For what is the Fourth Form but the truly representative class? A school can

be compared to a community. The fags may be termed the lowly commoners, the seniors represent the aristocracy—but the Fourth fills the unique position of the middle classes. And every great community depends upon the middle classes for its power and strength. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to state that we are now examining the backbone of the school."

"Quite so, your Highness—quite so," said Mr. Crowell.

"Half the backbone, to be exact," murmured Reggie Pitt. "The other half's over in the Modern House."

Browne glanced round.

"Did I hear a slight chirrup from the north-east latitude?" he asked mildly. "A purely natural exhibition of vigour. I can appreciate your joy—the joy, in fact, of seeing me. Have no fear. I do not intend to twist you into knots by asking awkward questions on algebra and geography and the higher forms of mathematics. Good! Various

faces have relaxed, and the tension is now over."

"The Fifth Form," said the Head, "is awaiting our arrival, and I suggest that—"

"Their impatience, of course, is all-consuming," interrupted Browne. "I sometimes wonder how the mere human frame can suffer the agonies of suspense. They are waiting for us—and we keep them on tenter-hooks! Could there be a more refined type of cruelty than that? We will dash to the rescue— But one moment! I have heard that the Fourth Form possesses a certain nimble prowess at the game of football. Are we right, sir? Are we informed correctly, Brother Crowell?"

"The Junior Eleven—" began Mr. Crowell.

"I knew it!" said Browne triumphantly. "The morning is fine, and numerous toes are itching to biff the ball. So what do you say to opening the pen, and releasing the flock?"

"Really, I—"

"You agree?" said Browne. "I was sure that your heart was of bulbous dimensions. Lads, your Form-master has graciously granted you permission to decorate the playing fields with your Grecian forms. Go! Out into the breeze, and belabour the leather!"

The Fourth looked eagerly at Mr. Crowell.

"Er—quite so," stammered Mr. Crowell, confused. "Yes, you may go, boys. Under the circumstances—"

"Thank you, sir!" roared the Fourth.

Browne turned to the Head, and he beamed.

"And now," he said, "for the Fifth."

Dr. Stafford was rather dubious about conducting Browne any further. He seemed to have a mania for dismissing the classes in the middle of lessons. But it was really impossible to offend such a visitor.

So William Napoleon Browne visited the Fifth. And here he gazed round with a purely personal interest. It was practically certain that he would sit in this class-room himself next term. And he forthwith gave the Fifth the "once-over."

"A fairly repellant collection, but no matter," he said indulgently. "In fact, at a casual glance, I should undoubtedly mark off these milky specimens as wash-outs. I can only conclude that they left their backbones behind when taking the upward leap."

The Fifth regarded Browne with plain disapproval, and Mr. Pagett frowned. He was not accustomed to hearing such remarks about his Form. The Head coughed uncomfortably.

"By what I can see," proceeded Browne, "nothing is required but a little ginger. Some mustard, perhaps, and a few grains of pepper would not come amiss. I have a premonition that these ingredients will be forthcoming in the near future. The results, I am convinced, will be staggering."

"Oh you blithering ass!" breathed Stevens inwardly.

"You are proud of your Form, sir?" asked Browne, turning to Mr. Pagett. "No? I thought not! But a little bird has whispered to me that radical changes will come about next term. You will then require certain alterations to your waistcoats and jackets." "I quite fail to understand——" began Mr. Pagett.

"Your chest, sir, will expand to such a degree that the trivial alterations I have outlined will be essential," explained Browne. "But hark! What is that clarion note?"

It was the bell for dismissal, and the Head had never heard such a welcome sound before. He was getting rather nervous of this extraordinary prince. And the dismissal-bell solved the immediate problem. The inspection of the school was over.

"You will take lunch with me?" asked the Head cordially.

Browne accepted the invitation with alacrity—for he was painfully aware of a gnawing hunger. He had breakfasted very early, and his inner man was now waxing impatient.

"We would crave your indulgence, sir," went on Browne. "The luncheon-gong will sound, I understand, at one o'clock. May I, in the meantime, wander off unescorted? Nothing pleases me better than to meditate in solitude—to chew over the greatest thoughts of life."

"By all means—by all means," said the Head, greatly relieved. "You will find the cloisters very soothing. I will conduct you——"

"Nay, let me have the joy of nosing out these spots for myself," interrupted Browne. "I appreciate your desire for my company, but I must deny you this simple pleasure. And so, until lunch-time, fare thee well! If, by any chance, the gong sounds prematurely, I shall make it my business to leap luncheon-wards like a faun on its native downs, for I can assure you, my vitals are crying aloud for sustenance."

Browne bowed, and wandered off. And Dr. Stafford made his way back to his study in a more or less dazed condition.

CHAPTER XX.

HANDFORTH IS SUSPICIOUS.



"GEE WINNERS! Some nifty prince. I'll tell the world!"

Ulysses Spencer

Adams grinned appreciatively as he made that remark. He possessed all the true

American's love for royal blood.

"More like an escaped lunatic!" said Cecil de Valerie.

"Aw, that's the bunk!" said Ulysses. "Say, that bird is sure snappy! I take my hat off to a prince of his sort. He's the

kind of guy we'd sure go crazy about over in the States. A jimdandy kiddo! I'm telling you, he's a regular feller. Oh, boy!"

"Well, he has got us out of class twenty minutes before time, anyhow," grinned Jack Grey. "The way he talks, too! I can't believe he's a prince at all."

"He isn't a prince!" said Handforth firmly.

"Eh?"

"You can't fool me!" declared Edward Oswald. "This is the first of April, don't forget, and that chap is a giddy fraud! What's more, I'm going to unmask him this afternoon! You wait and see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" roared Handforth. "But he who laughs last laughs last. That is——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Draw it mild, Handy!" grinned Church. "Didn't the Head tell us this morning that the Crown Prince of Zeko-Vania was coming? Are you trying to suggest that Dr. Stafford has been spoofed?"

"Yes, I am!" snorted Handforth. "But it's no good trying to convince you fatheads—you're all brushed with the same tar! You haven't got an ounce of sense between the lot of you!"

Handforth was as keen as mustard. And for once in a way he was undoubtedly on the right track. The usual situation was reversed. The leader of Study D was about the only fellow who regarded Browne with suspicion. It didn't matter to Handy that Browne had done the Fourth a good turn. When Handy's detective instincts were aroused, he gave them free rein, and cared nothing for the consequences.

In the meantime, Browne was wandering sedately through the secluded cloisters. But he wasn't allowed much solitude, for after a few minutes Stevens ran him to earth.

"Look here, Browne, this is a bit too thick!" he began breathlessly.

"Ah, Brother Horace, we meet again!" said Browne, coming to a halt, and regarding his friend with a benevolent interest. "But what strange words are these?"

"You've got to cut it out, old man!" insisted Stevens. "You can't go on fooling the Head——"

"Walls," interrupted Browne, "are sometimes credited with having ears, so be good enough to reduce the horse-power. There are sundry windows gaping, and who knows but what spies may lurk around us? Caution, Brother Horace, is distinctly the order of the day."

"You're a fine chap to talk about caution!" exploded Stevens. "This rag of yours is about the—the——"

"The hottest day's work on record?" asked Browne kindly. "Do not trouble to thank me, Brother Steve. I am ever ready to assist the tongue-tied! Yes, I rather pride myself that this particular scheme is well on the way to earning me one hundred marks out of a possible century."

"When are you going away?" asked Stevens bluntly.

"I may be wrong, but I seem to detect a certain anxiety in your tone," replied Browne. "Furthermore, this anxiety is in no way complimentary to myself. Am I right in assuming that you would greatly prefer my space to my charming person?"

"Why the deuce can't you be sensible?" growled Stevens. "I don't mind you being here, Browne—"

"My heart ceases to misfire," sighed Browne.

"I don't mind you being here, but for goodness' sake stop all this rot!" said Stevens. "Go straight to the Head and tell him who you are. It's just possible he'll forgive you—"

"Knowing nothing of the facts, you are naturally floundering," interrupted Browne. "Believe me or believe me not, Brother Horace, I have already done my best to convince the headmaster of my humble origin. I can only conclude that my princely manner has deceived him. If he persists in this delusion, I can do nothing further to enlighten him."

"You mean you're going to keep this ghastly farce up?"

"While admiring your bulldog spirit, I must complain bitterly on the form of your expressions," said Browne solemnly. "Here I am with the welfare of St. Frank's at heart, and my efforts are characterised as being ghastly. My heart is filled with sorrow, brother. It bleeds so much that it has already become wan."

"Well, you can't say I haven't warned you," growled Stevens. "Take my advice, and vanish. The longer you stay, the more trouble you'll pile up for yourself. That's all!"

He stalked off, indignant and helpless.

"Alack-a-day!" sighed William Napoleon Browne. "To think that he was a friend of my youth! I need restoratives to brace me against these base insinuations— But, do I hear the luncheon gong? Not being sure, our only course is to tuck in our two-penny and investigate."

He made tracks for the Head's House with long, purposeful strides.

CHAPTER XXI.

LUNCHEON WITH THE HEAD.



DR. STAFFORD was looking rather worried as he entered the dining-room.

But a little spasm of relief crossed his face when he found that the apartment was only occupied by Nipper and Tommy Watson.

"The prince has not arrived yet, eh?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Nipper.

"Ah, he will doubtless come in within a

minute or two, Hamilton," went on the Head. "A rather remarkable personality, the prince. I must confess that he has upset all my ideas of central European royalty."

"Of course, he's practically English, sir," remarked Nipper. "Not by blood, I mean, but in every other way. He's been all through one of our big public schools, and then Oxford—"

"Yes, yes, but at the same time, I am puzzled," declared Dr. Stafford. "I do not wish to be inhospitable, but— Ahem! Well, well! I understand you boys are leaving me to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir," said Tommy Watson. "Thanks awfully for having us here so long."

"Not at all—not at all!" smiled the Head.

Nipper and Tommy Watson had been Dr. Stafford's guests for some days. For, after the recent events at Moat Hollow, neither boys were actually tied to the school. As the Easter holidays were so near at hand there was no real reason for them to re-join the Fourth. When the new term commenced they would take their places as of yore. For fortune was now smiling upon Watson's father, and there was nothing to bar the junior's return. As for Nipper, he had definitely heard from Nelson Lee that he would be able to take up his school duties again as soon as he liked. Indeed, Nelson Lee himself was seriously considering the idea of making St. Frank's his own permanent home.

"I trust I am not late," came a voice from the doorway.

Browne lounged in, as immaculate and leisurely as ever—as though he had not just raced from the cloisters like an express train.

"No, no—luncheon is not yet served," said the Head.

"Glad tidings!" said Browne. "I was fearing that the hors-d'œuvres had already been swept away. In the depth of my meditations, I fear I lingered too long amid the cloisteral silences."

He beamed upon Tommy Watson and Nipper.

"Two of my younger pupils—Watson and Hamilton," introduced the Head. "They are my guests just now."

"An auspicious meeting, indeed," said Browne gracefully. "Unless something has gone wrong with my marvellous memory, Hamilton is none other than Nipper, the celebrated fire-eater—the leader of every great advance in modern warfare—the Brain of the Fourth."

Nipper grinned.

"The Fourth has got plenty of brain—without mine," he said shortly.

"Unquestionably," agreed Browne. "By what I have seen of the Fourth, it represents the cream of the school."

Luncheon commenced, and Browne was inwardly perturbed by some polite inquiries.

concerning the scenery in Zeko-Vania. But he rose nobly to the occasion, and described the country with great fluency. Happily he had once been with his father and mother to the Italian Tyrol, and his descriptions were extraordinary graphic.

Contrary to Browne's fears, he made his position even more secure, for his very readiness to enlarge upon the wonders of Zeko-Vania was calculated to allay any possible doubts.

"But I fear I am monopolising the entire conversation of the luncheon table," he observed, after he had been talking for about twenty-five minutes. "Pray stop me if I am boring you. But, alas, I am always inclined to run away with myself when describing the glories of that beloved country beyond the Pyrenees."

"The Pyrenees?" repeated Watson, staring.

"That is to say, of course, the Alps," said Browne kindly. "You have no doubt detected the fact that I was merely testing your geographical knowledge. I am delighted beyond measure to find that you are considerably advanced. Touching upon another subject, I was wondering if there would be any rooted objection to a little jollification to-night?"

"To-night?" repeated the Head, starting.

"In honour of my visit," explained Browne.

"Oh, yes, to be sure—"

"And in the morning, perhaps—"

"The morning!" said the Head, with a positive jump.

"I fear I have neglected to express my appreciation of your kindly invitation," said Browne, with concern. "I can assure you it gives me the utmost pleasure to remain at this noble edifice overnight. The royal chamber is, of course, in full readiness?"

"Really I—I—" The Head paused, all his breath taken away.

"I beseech you not to seek for adequate words," urged Browne. "Naturally, the presence of royalty is always more or less

overwhelming. May I ask, as a personal favour, that you should treat me with all the familiarity of a mere commoner? Nothing delights me more than to receive the friendly pat on the back, and nothing cheers me more than to hear an occasional 'old chap,' or 'dear old boy.' So let us be merry, brothers, for the cry goes round that all is well."

The Head went on with his luncheon in a speechless condition. Browne had calmly invited himself to stay the night, and he had done it in such a way that Dr. Stafford could do nothing but accept the situation.

But he was beginning to feel that this astonishing prince was one too many for him. He didn't know it, but Browne had another little scheme up his sleeve—and one that would crown his First of April joke in no uncertain manner.

CHAPTER XXII.

HANDFORTH MEANS BUSINESS.

"WHAT about practice?" asked McClure briskly.

"Blow practice!"

"But we're playing Helmford on Saturday, and we've all got to buck up," said McClure. "Pitt's given instructions—"

"Bother Pitt, and dash his instructions!" interrupted Handforth grimly. "I'm going to find that copy of the 'Weekly Sketch.' If one of you fatheads have burnt it, I'll jolly well—"

"Keep your hair on," said Church. "We haven't burnt it."

If you'd got a memory, instead of a blank space, you'd know that you lent the thing to your minor."

Handforth started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "So I did!"

"So you might just as well come out and practise," said Church. "By this time that copy of the 'Weekly Sketch' is non-existent. If it hasn't been used for lighting fires, it's probably so tattered and torn that the editor himself wouldn't recognise it."

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series—Third Form.



No. 16.—Arthur Deakin.

A rather sorrowful little figure. A quiet, delicate boy, who loves games and fun, but cannot indulge in either. Spends most of his time with his books.

Handforth & Co. were in Study D, in the Ancient House. Dinner was over, and most of the juniors were eager to get out on to the playing fields. In addition to a junior House match, and an important First Eleven fixture, there were other recreations in the open.

Handforth was not playing for his House this afternoon—a lesser light was being tried. All the same, Reggie Pitt had given the team to understand that practice was essential.

But Handforth was keen on something else.

"I'm going to find Willy, and if he can't produce that 'Weekly Sketch' at a minute's notice, I'll slaughter him!" he declared darkly. "It was like his nerve to take the paper at all!"

"I seem to remember you offering it to him," said Church. "And, anyhow, what does it matter? It's all bunkum about Prince Augustine. You get a bee in your bonnet that he's a fraud, and you can't think of anything else! Do you think the Head would be hoodwinked like this?"

"I don't think anything," retorted Handforth. "I only know that I saw a photograph of Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania—and he isn't a bit like this dotty merchant! The man's a fake!"

Church and McClure gave it up. They were convinced that Handforth would express startled surprise when he dug up the photograph. This, naturally, would turn out to be a striking likeness of the young gentleman who had entertained the school so splendidly that morning.

Church and McClure made the mistake of judging by precedent. Handforth was always wrong—therefore he was bound to be wrong this time. That was the simple maxim that Church and McClure based their judgment upon.

Handforth strode off to the Third Form quarters, and more by luck than anything else he ran Willy to earth just as that young gentleman was about to take his squirrel out for a stroll.

"Oh, there you are!" said Handforth grimly. "What's that bulge under your jacket?"

"This?" said Willy. "Septimus."

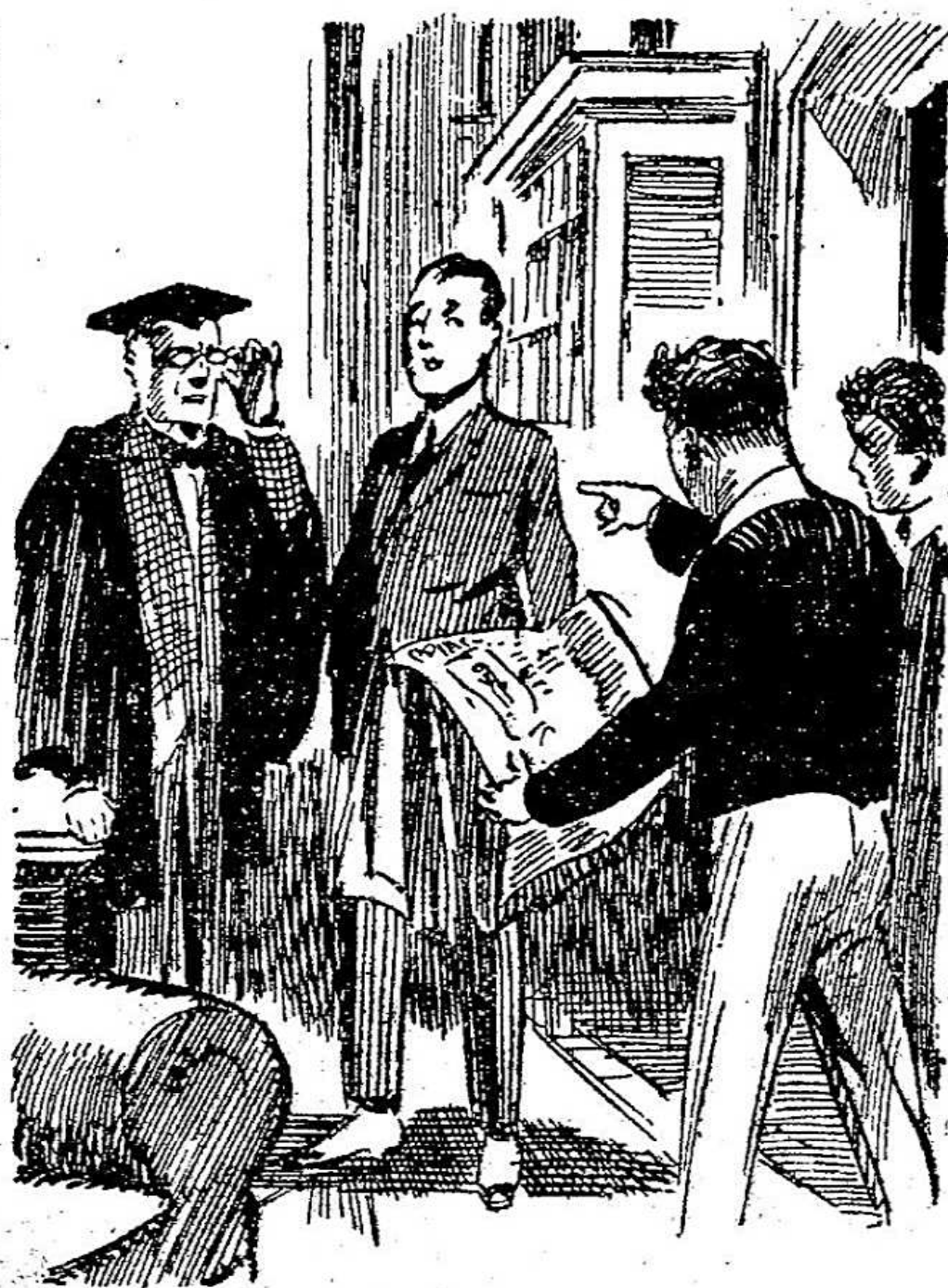
"Septimus!"

"My squirrel," explained Willy. "He's a bit peevish this afternoon—No, don't look at him! He can stand a deal, but I don't want him to peg out altogether! These sudden shocks, you know—"

"None of your blessed cheek!" growled Handforth. "Where's my 'Sketch'?"

"Your sketch?" repeated Willy. "You'll find it in the Magazine, on the top of your 'In reply to yours' column—unless Pitt's had mercy on the readers and taken it away. I haven't seen the rag for weeks. Anyhow, it was a lifelike portrait—"

"You young idiot!" howled Handforth. "I mean the 'Weekly Sketch.' I lent it



"There he is!" roared Handforth pointing.

to you two days ago. I'm not going to tell you what I want it for, but I want it. I've got my suspicions about Prince Augustine."

"Poor old prince!" said Willy. "What do you think he is—a coiner, or a master-forgery? As for that 'Sketch,' you can't have it."

"Can't have it!" roared Handforth. "You young duffer, I want it to prove that this prince chap is a fraud. He's not the real prince at all. There's a photograph of Prince Augustine in that 'Sketch,' and I've got to have it at once."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "I suppose I shall have to give it to you—just to keep you quiet! You're like a baby after its rattle. I shall never get another paper to fit like that one."

Willy went into his little study, followed by Handforth. And Edward Oswald gave a gasp as he saw that his precious 'Weekly Sketch' was firmly tacked over a broken window-pane. With a bellow, he tore it down.

"That's right—destroy the whole place!" said Willy. "There's a draught coming in now, and old Marmaduke's got a cold already."

"Blow Marmaduke!"

"You have to be jolly careful with monkeys," said Willy. "Well, now that you've

got the 'Sketch,' what are you going to do with it?"

"That's none of your business!" retorted his major. "I told you I wouldn't take you into the secret, and I don't mean to! You're too inquisitive— By George! There you are!"

Handforth uttered a yell of triumph. He was staring at a full page portrait of Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania. It was an excellent likeness, perfectly reproduced, and under no circumstances could it claim to be a photograph of the stranger who was within the gates.

"I'm going straight to the Head, and I'm going to unmask the rotter!" snorted Handforth. "I expect he's a crook. He's got in under false pretences, and means to lift the school plate in the dead of night!"

"Rats!" said Willy shrewdly. "I expect it's a jape of some kind. Besides, the chap's a humorist. Look at the way he ragged this morning. And remember how he let us all out in the middle of lessons——"

"Can't help that," interrupted Handforth. "This is a matter of duty—and duty rises above every other consideration. I'm going

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A NARROW SHAVE.



WELL, I'm jig-
g e r e d!" e x-
claimed Willy
with a whistle.

"Didn't I tell you?" asked Handforth triumphantly.

"This is a photograph of the real prince. That funny ass the Head brought in is a giddy counterfeit!"

"Funny how your mind runs on coiners," said Willy. "But you're right—there's a mix-up somewhere. What are you going to do?"

straight to the Head, and I'm going to show him this photograph."

Without Handforth's permission, Willy decided to go with him. He was thoughtful enough, however, to leave Septimus behind. Church and McClure were collected on the way, and they were somewhat staggered to discover that Handforth was right for once.

In the meantime, William Napoleon Browne was deep in conversation with the Head. They were in the latter's study, and Tommy Watson and Nipper had gone out to the playing-fields. Dr. Stafford, hoping to bottle up some of Browne's natural exuberance, had shown him a few

of his most treasured relics. For the Head's life-hobby was archæology.

"Wonderful—wonderful!" exclaimed Browne, as he tenderly examined an ancient scarab. "If I may say so, sir, a perfect specimen. I may be wrong—we are all apt to err—but surely this scarab is from one of the tombs in the vicinity of Luxor?"

"Why, yes," said the Head, delighted. "How did you know?"

"In my small way, I may claim to be something of an archæologist myself," said Browne modestly. "Strange that our hobbies should so coincide. Archæology, my dear brother, practically amounts to a passion with me. My father is literally soaked in the subject to his eyebrows. In all his off-duty moments he does nothing but wallow amid sundry relics."

"This is most interesting—most interesting!" exclaimed the Head.

In less than three minutes he was fairly mounted on his hobby-horse, and he found Browne a keen and intelligent listener. All his irritation vanished. He took Browne to his bosom. It is really wonderful what mutual companionship follows in the wake of such a discovery.

And Browne, for once, was not fooling. His father was, indeed, a renowned archæologist, and from childhood William Napoleon had been brought up on assorted antiquities. He knew quite enough on the subject to enthrall Dr. Stafford—for Browne had a way with him that fascinated any listener. The facility with which he glossed over his weak points was enlightening.

And in the midst of this heart-to-heart chat, Handforth & Co. arrived.

"Come in—come in!" said the Head impatiently. "Good gracious! What on earth—Boys—boys! How dare you burst into my study—"

"There he is!" roared Handforth, pointing.

Browne drew himself up and started slightly. He didn't start because he was pointed at, but because he caught sight of the periodical in Handforth's grip. Staring at him was a full-page photograph of the real prince.

Somehow, Browne had a feeling in his bones that the game was up. He never moved a muscle. His countenance was as calm and unruffled as ever. The tighter the corner, the more glib was Browne's tongue.

"Ah, we welcome this little gathering, but, alas! you are too late," he said benevolently. "It is always the cry—too late! How often have I uttered that mournful sound upon seeing the gates closed in my face at Uxton—However, to pass on to other topics—"

"Boys, what do you want here?" asked the Head angrily.

Handforth & Co. started talking all at once.

"Silence!" commanded Dr. Stafford. "I won't have this brawling—"

"Allow me!" beamed Browne. "In a few choice words I can dismiss this awkward little situation. Lads, if you have come here with the object of making my true identity known to your reverend Head, you are distinctly off the wicket."

"True identity—" began the Head, starting.

"Exactly," said Browne smoothly. "As you know, sir, my name is Browne—plain, simple Browne. Our little April 1st joke is over. The school may now enjoy the fullness of it undeterred."

The Head allowed his pince-nez to drop off his nose.

"So you see, brothers, that nothing can be done," continued Browne, beaming upon the juniors. "The headmaster is fully aware that I am not the prince, and you now have our permission to broadcast the news far and wide. How the Head spoofed the school. Our grandchildren will bubble with silvery laughter when this memorable day's work is recounted."

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Handforth blankly.

"And so—away!" said Browne, waving his hand with regal dignity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL'S WELL.



DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD was looking grim.

Handforth & Co. and Willy had just retired in confusion—and were probably spreading the news already. The calm, cool manner in which Browne had included the Head in the conspiracy had taken Dr. Stafford's breath away.

"And now, sir, regarding your remarks on Neolithic implements of war," exclaimed Browne earnestly. "As far as I can see, this subject is practically new to modern investigation—"

"One moment!" interrupted the Head coldly.

"By all means," beamed Browne. "Two, if you wish. Why not go the whole hog, and have three? I am easy to please—"

"A few minutes ago you were telling those junior boys you are not Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania," said the Head sternly. "Is that true?"

"Happily, yes."

"Happily?"

"The prince," explained Browne, "is a somewhat blistered creature."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Head with agitation. "Then—then you have

dragged me into this deception. You have made me join in a sheer piece of buffoonery. Who are you, sir?"

"My name," said the old Uxtonian, "is Browne. I may be in error, but I fancy I mentioned this little matter on earlier occasions——"

"Browne—Browne?" repeated the Head. "But I thought that was merely your in-cognito?"

"No, it is my real name—a noble, honourable name," said Browne. "For are not the Brownes of the world renowned for their integrity and honour? Your generosity, sir, in overlooking this little deception is appreciated. No doubt the date has influenced you——"

"I have overlooked nothing!" interrupted the Head. "I can see quite plainly that you are here under false pretences. Good gracious! I might have guessed it all along. Who are you, and why did you come here?"

"My father, Mr. Justice Browne——"

"Mr. Justice Browne?" echoed the Head, starting. "Are you the son of the celebrated judge, Sir Mortimer Browne?"

"I have that eminent distinction," beamed Browne.

"But—but——"

"As you are doubtless aware, my father has made preliminary and tentative overtures concerning my residence in this great seat of learning, at the commencement of the summer term," said William Napoleon Browne. "Wandering hither this morning, I chanced upon two singularly blotchy specimens, who turned out to be Prince Augustine and his equerry."

And Browne, thinking that perfect frankness was the order of the day, calmly recounted the full story. And he recounted it so whimsically that the Head found himself smiling by the time it was over.

"Upon my soul!" he exclaimed, pulling his face straight. "I am not at all sure that I can condone this extraordinary——"

"Touching upon the Stone Age," said Browne, "my father has a number of rare relics that he would be only too delighted to show you. You must make a point of visiting us during the holidays, sir."

"That would be splendid!" said the Head eagerly. "Thank you, Browne—I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of your distinguished father."

Within three minutes they were hobnobbing as chummily as ever.

* * *

"Well, great Scott! You've got a nerve!" said Stevens.

He had just met William Napoleon Browne in the Triangle, as he was leisurely making his way towards the playing-fields. It was getting on in the afternoon, and the whole school was chuckling over the joke.

"Nerve, Brother Horace?" repeated Browne mildly. "What strange accusation is this? I have just torn myself away from the headmaster——"

"Haven't you been kicked out yet?"

"Kicked out? Brother—brother!" protested Browne. "Who has put such crude thoughts into your dome-like cranium? It is no exaggeration to say that the headmaster and I are like long-lost brothers. Our view-point is one—our tastes are identical. We are chums for life."

Stevens took a deep breath.

"Well, I can only say that you jolly well take the cake!" he ejaculated.

"Talking of cakes, I perceive the school shop in yonder corner," said Browne genially. "Shall we wend our way thither, Brother Horace?"

He linked his arm into the Fifth-Former's, and they ambled off.

THE END.

Special Easter Holiday Story

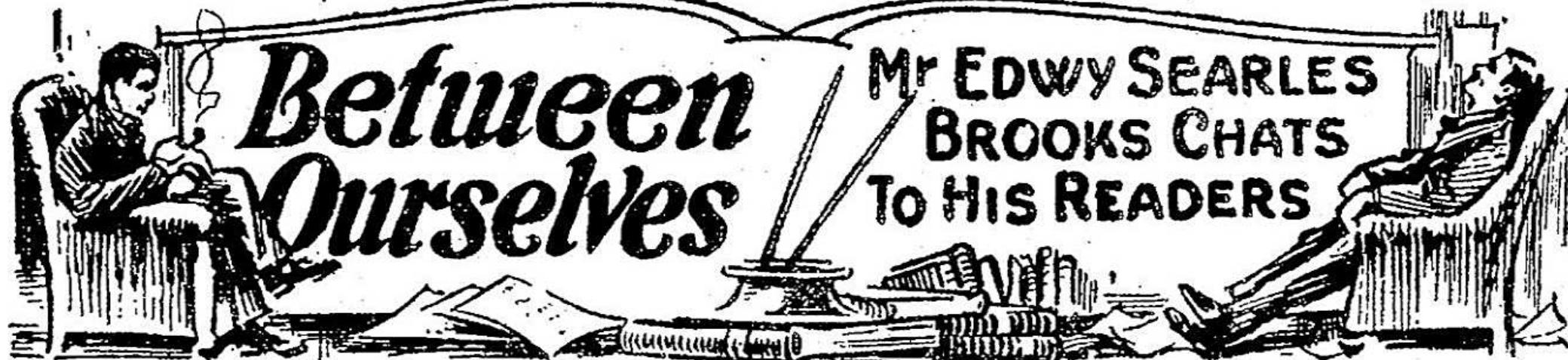
IN THE NEW EXTRA LONG SERIES

ENTITLED:

"ARCHIE'S EASTER PICNIC!"

APPEARS NEXT WEEK.

It is another laughable story of the famous boys of St. Frank's, with Archie Glenthorne in the chief character role, and again introducing that extraordinary new personality, William Napoleon Browne.



Between Ourselves

Mr EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

(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.).

Letters received: Graham Young (Brisbane), G. Dejardin (Les Collines, Gabon, French Equatorial Africa), B. Martin (St. Kilda, Victoria, Australia), Allan Black (Hornsby, N.S.W., Australia), Israel Herr (Johannesburg, S. Africa), J. Hans (Cape-town, S. Africa), Andrew van Niekerk (Learston, Cape Colony, S. Africa), Pringle J. Cook (Knights, Transvaal, S. Africa), R. Rushworth (Gateshead), Guiseppe (Dublin), "An Enthusiastic Reader" (Oldham), S. T. Bacon (Nuneaton), "An Admirer of Your Stories" (The Black Country), Arthur Mercer jnr. (Conway), "Nelsonian" (Paisley), "A Staunch and Enthusiastic Admirer" (Blackpool), Bruce Jackson (Mirfield, Yorks), Harold Davies (Everton), P. J. Gibson (Bray, Ireland), Lionel Moxom (Rochdale), G. E. Porteous jnr. (Cardiff), "A Delighted Reader of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" (Basingstoke), Sidney Harris (Nottingham), "A Lad" (Kingswinford), "A Northern Admirer" (Blackpool), Karl Tschulkoiski Ivanoff (Broadstairs), William Slade (Custom House, E.16.), "A NELSON LEE Fan" (Halesowen), G. W. Young (Henley), William Sullins (Stratford), Hilary M. Clerke (Leytonstone), Edwin F. Ebborn (Mount Leyshon, Queensland, Australia), "Colonial" (Johannesburg, S.A.), William J. Scholes (Toronto, Canada), Smith Thompson (Bradford), Gilbert (Montmartre, Paris), Harold Doughty (Chesterfield), William Page (Bournbrook), A. Price (Ebbw Vale, Mon.), George Tindall (North Kensington), H. Clark, (Edmonton, N.18.), W. B. (Winchester), Charles R. Colwell (Birmingham).

Well, I must admit that I never suspected that the Old Paper penetrated into French Equatorial Africa! Yet there's a reader there who's been a staunch subscriber since number one! It makes me feel rather

good to know that our readers are to be found in every part of the world, and even in tropical zones where the English language is not usually spoken.

Thanks for your chatty little letter, G. Dejardin. By the time you read this, I expect you will have received the books you asked for. I hope they have arrived quite safely, at all events. Perhaps you would be good enough to drop me a line and let me know.

Your requirements are not very modest, I'm afraid, Andrew van Niekerk. All the same, I'll do what I can for you—and for other readers who are in similar want. Will everybody please read the next paragraph carefully?

Andrew van Niekerk is very anxious to obtain numbers 1 to 186. If anybody has got these early issues, and is prepared to sell them, please let me know as soon as possible. There are many other readers who want these numbers, too, so the more offers I receive, the better I shall be pleased.

You ask me, Guiseppe, to advise you as to whether you should join the Royal Navy or not. Now, this isn't a matter of general interest, is it? I'm only giving you this space so that other readers who may be contemplating similar personal questions may be warned in time. I must really leave you to judge entirely for yourself, Guiseppe—since it is a matter for you alone.

Thank you, P. J. Gibson, for distributing a few dozen back numbers amongst some of your friends. I hope they will become regular readers, as you anticipate. This kind of help, while costing you nothing except some trouble, is one of the best signs of genuine enthusiasm.

As you will now have seen, "Delighted Reader of the THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," the stories are no longer "told" by Nipper. Even though he is back again, I am not reverting to the original style of telling the stories. I think the present method is really the best—as formerly it was difficult to give Nipper any appreciation without it appearing that he was boasting. Furthermore, it was always something of a paradox for

Nipper to describe scenes at which he couldn't be present.

Can you obtain the Old Paper in Palestine, eh, Sidney Harris? Of course you can! You could obtain it in the middle of the Indian jungle if you wanted to. If you're really going to Palestine in August, and you really want the Old Paper there, I should take no chances if I were you. Pay your subscription, and have it sent through the post. You can't go wrong by doing that.

You've bowled me out, "Northern Admirer." Yes, I admit it—Arthur Kemp was not included in the list of Fourth-Formers, although he figured in the Portrait Gallery. Perhaps other readers, in addition to yourself, will be interested to know that Arthur Kemp belongs to the Ancient House, and shares Study J with Timothy Armstrong and Louis Griffith.

I don't want to call you a spoofer, Karl Tschulkoiski Ivanoff, but that letter of yours is so thoroughly English that I suspect you are using a pen-name. You tell me that you haven't mastered our language yet, but there wasn't a single mistake in your letter. You criticise me for having brought Nipper to St. Frank's while he was still appearing in "The Invisible Grip," on quite another case. But, really, this is scarcely a serious criticism, is it? You quite forget that the "Invisible Grip" was a serial. Although it took nearly three months to run its course, the action of the story was infinitely less than this. So if you had paused to think, you would have realised that the period of "The Invisible Grip" was quite different to the period of the Creepe series. Naturally, Nipper couldn't be in two places at once—and I never intended that it should appear so. And I didn't think it necessary to explain such an obvious point. But it evidently is necessary, because you are not the only reader who has accused me of blundering here.

If you really want to know who the musicians of the Fourth are, "NELSON LEE Fan," you've only got to refer back to the "Who's Who." You'll find the information you want there. I am terribly sorry you are so cut up about the Fourth not being referred to as the Remove any more. But what does it really matter? The boys are the same, and the Form is the same.

One reader (I won't give his name, in case he feels self-conscious) includes the following paragraph in his letter: "My mother used to regard the 'N.L.L.' as a Penny Dreadful until one day she read a paragraph of 'Between Ourselves,' where you said the English climate was the best in the world, and England the best country,

and she said 'Hear, hear!'" He implies that his mother now has formed quite a different opinion. It seems a shame, doesn't it, that people should still have such a false impression about the Old Paper? Let's all do something to knock these ideas out. And if any of you have parents who regard the Old Paper with disdain, please show them the above. I've said this before, but you'll notice that I keep pegging away. I'm not trying to boost up my own work, but I DO want people to know that it isn't harmful reading matter. And the only way they can really find out is to read some of it for themselves. I always try to make my yarns perfectly wholesome.

That's rather a good idea of yours, "Colonial." You suggest that readers should send me their votes regarding their favourite character in the St. Frank's stories. Your favourite, I understand, is Willy Handforth. I wonder if he would get the most votes? In fact, it would be a help and a guidance to me if readers would tell me which characters they desired to be featured more than others.

What a busy chap you are, Smith Thompson! You must have taken an awful lot of trouble over that copied partrait gallery. I think your sketch of Billy Nation is the pick of the bunch. You tell me that I've got the wrong idea about your suggestion that you should figure in my stories. Not at all, Smithy. You're the one who's got the wrong idea. If I included you as a new character, it would be only fair to include lots of others. I couldn't possibly use your name only, as you request. Quite apart from this, how could a new boy come to St. Frank's and assume your name—just to please you? When a new boy comes along he'll naturally use his own name. I can't pinch my readers' names, and mess about with them just as I like. Do you want me to get locked up?

Hallo! I've been bowled out again! And this time it's even more serious, by what I can see. You've got a good memory, George Tindall—I'm not sure that it isn't a bit too good. You want to know why John Willard wasn't included in the Portrait Gallery? As a matter of fact, I forgot all about him. Now, that's a frank confession, isn't it? But I'm sure you won't be too hard on me—considering how many names I've got to juggle with. Some time in the future, John Willard will be included in the Portrait Gallery, but you mustn't expect to see him for quite a long while.

How do you like the longer school story? You've got the first one in this issue, and I hope you'll find that it doesn't "come to an end as soon as you've begun it," as one of my readers once told me.



or, THE SECRET OF THE GHAUTS.

A Wonderful Romance of the Adventures of Two British Boys in India.

By WILLIAM MURRAY

CHAPTER I.

TAP OF DRUMS.

"Ho, get away, you bullock-man, you've heard the bugle blowed. There's a regiment a-coming down the Grand Trunk Road."

IN ringing tones Myles Chesney shouted out the stirring couplet from his favourite "Barrack-room Ballads." Then he made an imaginary slash at little Paltu, who dodged nimbly aside.

"Me no bullock-man, Chesney, sahib!" he grunted.

"Don't you wish you were?" cried Myles, laughing. "That's better than a syce any day. But come on, or we'll miss the show."

Side by side, the two oddly contrasting companions ran across the lawn of the British Residency. They passed through the gates, indifferent to the helmeted soldier standing guard, and halted on the edge of the street.

The distant bugle blast had not deceived Myles Chesney's keen ears. The regiment, surrounded by a motley throng of natives, was coming—not down the Grand Trunk road, but along one of the principal thoroughfares of Mysore, the capital city of the native state of that name in south-western India.

Nearer and nearer marched the gallant fellows, keeping step to the roll of drums and the fanfare of bugles. First the band, then the mounted colonel and his officers, then columns of bronzed faces, and dusty uniforms, and flashing rifles.

Myles drew himself up to the full stature of his sixteen years, and his face glowed.

"They're marching from the Madras railway-station to the barracks, Paltu," he exclaimed. "It's the Bedfordshire regiment that was ordered here from Burmah."

The soldiers bore plain evidence of recent campaigning with the cruel dacoits. Here and there were scarred faces, faces stamped with the mark of the illness and exhausting wounds. The muster-roll, too, could have told a sad story.

From out the passing ranks more than one pair of eyes glanced with interest at the two boys before the residency gates—the handsome English lad with his ruddy cheeks and curly brown hair; the thin dusky-faced little Hindu in white waistcoat and jacket.

Half of the regiment had marched by when three horsemen cantered out of the residency grounds and brought up within a few feet of the moving columns. They were Colonel Teversham, the British Resident, Captain Chesney, his private secretary, and the father of Myles, and an orderly. They were waiting until the street was clear to start on their evening ride.

The soldiers, recognising them, tendered salutes and cheers.

Colonel Teversham lifted his hand to his forehead in friendly acknowledgment. He was an aristocratic-looking old soldier, with keen eyes and the carriage of a rigid martinet. His cheeks were florid, and black hairs were as plentiful as grey in his close-

cropped moustache. But there were wrinkles on his brow and under his eyes—the indelible stamp of the tragedy in his life.

The story was well known, but none ever referred to it. In the early years of his military service abroad, Colonel Teversham had been stationed in the wild Black Mountain district north of Assam, and during his absence his bungalow had been set on fire by a raiding-party of Naga tribesmen, and his wife and six-year-old boy and his native servant had perished in the flames.

Thirty-six years ago that was, yet the colonel had not forgotten, and never would. He had merely learned to hide the grief that still gnawed keenly at his heart.

The service-worn troops filed on towards the cantonments. Outside the ranks of the fifth company, and proudly holding step with it, marched a lad of seventeen, with black hair and sun-bronzed cheeks. In spite of his semi-military dress he was evidently not attached to the regiment. He seemed to be on friendly terms with the private at his side, a tall, well-built fellow of twenty-five or thereabouts, with sandy hair and moustache, a freckled face, and big grey eyes that twinkled with jolly good humour.

When opposite the residency gates the young stranger and Myles Chesney exchanged glances of mutual attraction. Each saw in the other a possible future acquaintance.

Suddenly Colonel Teversham spied the lad. His face paled, and he uttered an unguarded exclamation. For a moment his hands trembled. Then his self-control came back, and only the hungry look in his eyes as they turned to follow the ranks of the fifth company betrayed his secret agitation.

Myles intercepted part of the glance, and he instinctively divined its meaning. The sad story had often been told him by his father.

"That chap must remind the colonel of his own son," he thought. "I've seen him look the same way at other boys more than once."

The dusty columns marched on, bringing closer the rear-guard of baggage carts and ambulance wagons.

Suddenly there was a commotion in front—hoarse cries, the clatter of hoofs, and a shrill sound like the blast of a trumpet. The hubbub came from a cross thoroughfare that led to the rajah's palace, and skirted one side of the residency grounds.

In a trice Myles and Paltu were racing toward the corner of the two streets, surrounded by a motley throng of natives who seemed to have sprung out of the very earth.

The lads reached the spot just in time to behold a thrilling sight. Down the cross street came a huge runaway elephant, most gorgeously caparisoned. The mahout,

perched on the beast's neck, was vainly shouting and prodding with his steel-tipped goad.

To the sides of the magnificent howdah, which glittered with gold and tinsel, clung his Royal Highness, Cham Bahadur, the Rajah of Mysore. He looked far from regal now, for terror was stamped on his youthful, olive-tinted features, and his jewel-studded turban was sadly awry.

At the heels of the elephant clattered a mounted troop of the rajah's native retainer's, enlisted from various quarters of Asia. Here were Afghans, Persians, Sikhs, Rohillas, a perfect arsenal of jewelled weapons bristling in their multi-coloured kummerbunds.

The rajah's evening ride bade fair to have a sorry ending, and so it proved. The middle of the regiment chanced to be crossing the side street just then, and at sight of the lumbering quadruped, trumpeting with rage, the soldiers, who had unflinchingly faced the perils of Burmese jungles, broke ranks in confusion, and fled right and left.

Either from fright at the jingle and clash of the men's equipments, or out of sheer perversity, the elephant swerved suddenly to one side and fell on its knees.

The shock broke one of the straps of the howdah, which instantly lurched forward with a jerk. Out flew its royal occupant, turning a complete somersault that landed him on his back in the street.

A great cry of horror burst from the spectators. The rajah lay right in the path of the wild horsemen, whose fiery steeds were but ten feet distant. Escape seemed impossible. A moment more and he would be tramped to a bleeding mass.

But that brief instant proved a hero's right to the name. The private whom Myles had seen marching beside the lad made a dash to the spot. None doubted that he was going to his death.

He stooped like a flash, and as quickly he was erect again, with the slim form of the rajah clasped under his left arm. Up shot his right hand, just in time to snatch the bridle of the steed that was about to strike him down—a powerful black animal straddled by a bearded Afghan.

The brave fellow hung on like a Hercules, now gaining a foothold, now dangling in air. How he escaped the flying hoofs was miraculous.

He was dragged full a dozen feet, and then he actually brought the plunging steed to a standstill just as the rest of the troop, who had managed to swerve a little to right and left, passed clear of him.

The air rang with cheers, and there was a rush forward from all sides. By then the elephant had risen to his feet, and stood sullenly swinging his trunk. He was under the full control of his mahout, who had escaped sharing the rajah's peril by sticking to the overturned howdah.

The horsemen were reining up their steeds

one by one, and wheeling around. The Resident and his escort spurred impatiently through the crowd, in the thick of which were Myles and Paltu. The broken ranks of the now stationary regiment looked on, wavering between duty and desire. Their officers were riding back from the front.

Beyond a few bruises and a sadly disordered dress, the rajah was uninjured. He imperiously waved aside his retainers, and thus cleared a small space, to the centre of which he drew his brave rescuer.

What passed between them was inaudible, but the soldier's face showed embarrassment and confusion, while the rajah's sparkling eyes expressed warm gratitude.

The Resident found himself beside a mounted officer who was an old acquaintance. They shook hands, and exchanged a few hasty words of greeting.

"I'm proud of that fellow, Colonel Teversham," said the officer. "It was a most heroic deed. He did some fine work with the dacoits, too. But he's a sort of black sheep—always breaking the regulations, you know. It's kept him in the ranks."

"Sorry to hear it," replied the Resident briefly. "He ought to have the Victoria Cross. But tell me, Captain Dundas, who is that lad I saw marching with you? I—I like his face."

"A sort of protégé of mine," answered the captain. "There's the making of a fine soldier in him. The poor boy is an orphan. He came out from England a year ago to join his father, who was Captain Wynyard of ours."

"I've heard of him," interrupted Colonel Teversham. "He was killed by dacoits up in Burmah."

"Yes, only a week before the boy arrived. It was very sad."

"What's his name?"

"Jack," replied Captain Dundas, "same as his father."

The Resident gave a little start.

"Excuse me," he said hastily. "I must congratulate his Highness."

He touched up his horse, and trotted forward through the yielding throng.

About this time Myles and Paltu chanced to rub elbows with the object of the Resident's inquiries, and they promptly scraped acquaintance on the spot.

"Wasn't that a brave thing to do?" said Myles, in a tone of great enthusiasm.

"Well, I should say it was," replied the young stranger. "It's like Pink Triscott. He's an awfully good fellow. He ought to be a lieutenant."

"Or a capain," said Myles, going him one better. "I'll bet the rajah will load him with presents."

"Pink won't take them," was the slightly scornful reply. "He hates to be made much of. What's your name? Mine is Jack Wynyard."

"And mine is Myles Chesney. That is my father there. He is the Resident's secretary."

A wistful look came into the lad's eyes.

"My father is dead," he said softly. "He was a soldier, and the dacoits killed him. I haven't anybody now but Pink Triscott and Captain Dundas—Hullo, there goes the bugle! I'll see you again."

He hurried off to his post beside Triscott, who had already returned to the ranks, and an instant later the dusty columns were in motion.

The Resident's party cantered towards the suburbs of the city, and the Rajah Chaim Bahadur rode to the palace on a steed borrowed from one of his retainers. The spectators scattered in different directions, all unconscious that the seeds of what might blossom into a great tragedy had just been sown.

The native Indian State of Mysore, the reader must know, was only nominally governed by its Hindu prince. The Resident's duties were hardly in accord with his smooth-sounding name. He was there to watch the rajah's court, to report everything to the Viceroy at Calcutta, and to order out the British troops at the least sign of revolt. It was one of his duties, also, to collect the annual tribute of two hundred and fifty thousand rupees.

In no other native state, perhaps, was less danger of friction and trouble apprehended. The rajah, now over thirty years of age, had been reared under English tutors. His present Prime Minister, a Hindu named Pershad Jung, was well-known to be on the side of British institutions and customs, and was an intimate friend of the Resident. Moreover, Mysore had held loyal during the bloody times of the Great Mutiny.

So Colonel Teversham is little to be blamed if he regarded his post as somewhat of a sinecure. There was an air of bachelor's hall about the Residency, in spite of its luxurious fittings and large staff of servants. Colonel Teversham had never married a second time, and Captain Chesney's wife had been dead twelve years. Myles remembered his mother but dimly, and equally vague were his recollections of his English home. His studies under a tutor had ended a few weeks ago, and he was shortly to enter the military school at Nainee Tal, up in the Himalayas.

Paltu lived at the residency in the capacity of syce, or stable-lad. His mother was one of the house servants, and his father, Matee Mal, belonged to the rajah's native body-guard. The little Hindu was devotedly attached to Myles.

During the week following the arrival of the Bedfordshire Regiment at Mysore, several things occurred that must needs be chronicled. In the first place, Myles and Jack Wynyard sought each other out, and speedily became close chums. They played cricket, and took horseback rides in the cool of the evening, and indulged in other Anglo-Indian sports.

About the middle of the week Captain Chesney was threatened with an attack of fever, and the doctor ordered a change of air. So with some officers from the canton-

ment, he went to the Neilgherry Hills on a two week's shooting expedition, leaving Myles behind as a sort of a substitute.

Three days later Colonel Teversham was summoned by telegram to Madras to confer with the Viceroy, who happened to be there on an official tour. The colonel had to go, and as there was no getting at Captain Chesney he did what had been done before under similar circumstances; he left the affairs of his office in charge of Pershad Jung, the rajah's prime minister.

A few hours after Colonel Teversham's departure, and shortly before midnight, Pink Triscott disappeared from one of the

ing Pink Triscott's desertion, Myles and Paltu were strolling about in the garden among the shrubs and fire-flies.

The residency and gardens occupied a whole block, and were enclosed by a ten-foot wall of masonry. The principal entrance was constantly guarded, and at intervals during the night a sentry paced around the square.

The house fronted the main street, and on the right side was the avenue that led to the palace. On the left ran a less pretentious street, in close proximity to the native bazaars. Here the wall was pierced by a pair of heavy gates, which



Down the street came a huge runaway elephant, most gorgeously caparisoned. The mahout, perched on the beast's neck, was vainly shouting and prodding with his steel-tipped goad.

side approaches to the cantonments, where he had been stationed on guard duty.

Rigid investigations shed no light on the mystery. The neighbouring sentries, posted fifty yards away, had heard nothing and seen no one. The indications pointed to a premeditated flight, and Pink Triscott was straightaway branded a deserter.

City and suburbs were searched in vain, placards were posted in public places, and a description of the fugitive was telegraphed to Madras and other seaports, for his objective was believed to be England.

An hour after sunset, on the day follow-

were always locked, and were used mainly by the servants and the stable employees. Just inside these gates were the stables—two long, low buildings with a passage between.

In the rear the grounds abutted on a narrow thoroughfare, across which was the English church, standing among trees and shrubbery, and enclosed by a low stone parapet.

A tiny gate of carved brass, built in the high wall, opened toward the churchyard. It was possibly intended for the secret use of the Resident. At all events, the key

was kept hidden in the house, and that hiding-place Myles happened to know.

On the aforementioned evening, the two lads, being in the rear of the grounds, heard a low whistle, and then Myles' name was called.

They hurried to the small gate, and by the dim light they saw Jack Wynyard peering through the bars from the outer side.

"I thought it was you talking," he said. "The guard at the main gate wouldn't let me in. He said it was too late. I knew the Resident was away, but I wanted to see your father."

"He's away, too," interrupted Myles. "Go to the Neilgherry Hills."

"By Jove, that's bad!" said Jack, in a tone of keen disappointment. "And Captain Dundas is with the party, too. I don't know what to do now."

"Wait a moment," exclaimed Myles. "It won't do for you to stay here. The sentry may drop along, you know."

He vanished in the direction of the house, and was back in less than five minutes with a key in his hand. He unlocked the gate and opened it far enough to admit Jack. Then he closed it softly.

"Now we can talk," he said. "Pershad Jung is in charge of affairs while father and Colonel Teversham are away, and if you want to see him—"

"No, not the colonel," quickly spoke Jack; "anybody but him! See here, Myles, it's just this. I'm awfully worried about Pink Triscott. You know what happened last night, of course?"

"Yes," replied Myles. "I could hardly believe it."

"And you would believe it still less if you knew Pink as well as I do. Why, he's the very soul of honour. He never deserted, Myles, never! I'll tell you one thing, though. He hasn't been like himself since the rajah sent for him four or five days ago. He seemed worried over something, and he wouldn't say a word about his visit. There's been foul play, Myles, and that's as sure as you and I stand here!"

"Foul play!" exclaimed Myles, incredulously. "You don't mean to say—"

"I mean that the rajah has got a finger in Pink's disappearance," exploded Jack, lowering his voice to a whisper. "There, it's out now! That's what I wanted to see Colonel Teversham about. When I spoke to some of the officers, they only laughed at me. You see, Pink and I were awfully good friends, and I can't bear to think that—that—"

A sound that was suspiciously like a sob ended the sentence, and Jack turned his head away.

Myles gave a long, low whistle, and tapped his friend on the shoulder.

"Say, old fellow—" he began.

Then he stopped, for a bell near by had

suddenly started to clang in deep, dismal tones. Another joined in, and then another, until all the bells in the city seemed to have gone mad.

Bang, went the alarm-gun at the fortress, and its echoes woke a pandemonium of shouts and yells, and scurrying feet, and clatter of horses and wheels.

"Fire, sahibs!" yelled Paltu, pointing to a red glare through the gate in the direction of the English church.

"It's the palace!" cried Myles, jerking open the gate. "Come on!"

Pink Triscott was forgotten; and a moment later the gate was locked, and the key was in Myles' pocket, and the three lads were outside the grounds, racing at breakneck speed toward the rajah's palace.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE RAJAH'S DUNGEONS.

THE fortress was simply a walled quadrangle, with massive gates of teak-wood, and gun-mounted bastions at each angle. It was under the direct control of the rajah, and was garrisoned by a regiment of irregular native troops, mostly recruited from Mysore. Half the quadrangle was taken up by the rajah's palace—an ancient edifice of hard woods, stone, and enamelled plaster, with two wings that formed a three-sided court. The other half was a beautiful garden, containing fountains, shrubbery, and a deep tank of water.

On reaching the avenue, Myles and his companions saw that the fire was really at the palace. They hurried on with the crowd, and managed to slip through the main gate of the fortress behind an English fire-engine. They were just in time, for the fierce-looking guards at once blocked the way to all newcomers.

As it was, the quadrangle contained a score of natives, civilians, and British officers, who had entered during the first panic and excitement.

One wing of the palace was blazing fiercely from the ground floor upward. The general alarm had not been given until the chemical grenades and small hand engines were found powerless to arrest the flames.

No one paid any attention to the boys, except to jostle them to and fro, or tramp on their feet. The turmoil was deafening, and the lurid flames made the scene as light as day.

"Not much chance of saving the palace," said Myles. "Look, they're carrying furniture and stuff into the court!"

"Can't we help?" asked Jack. "I'd like to see the inside."

"They would throw us out right away," Myles replied. "We're lucky to be this near. Hallo, what's coming?"

"The men that shoot water, sahibs!" cried Paltu, jumping to one side.

With hoarse shouts a group of firemen dashed by, dragging a long hose. A second steamer had meanwhile arrived, and the throbbing and puffing of the engines as they sucked water out of the tank rose loudly above the din. Two streams soon began to play on the burning building, but their only noticeable effect was to send up volumes of smoke and hissing steam.

The boys wandered about, seeking the best and safest place from which to view the fire. Suddenly a piece of hose burst somewhere in front of them, flinging jets of water in all directions. The crowd scattered and fled, and Myles and Jack ran blindly with the rest. They checked themselves with difficulty on the edge of the tank.

"We pretty near took a bath!" cried Jack. "Hallo, where's Paltu?"

"We've lost him!" exclaimed Myles. "He can't be far away."

Just then a shrill scream was heard, and the boys saw Paltu struggling in the water, a dozen feet farther up the tank. He had probably been pushed in by the rush of the crowd.

Plenty of men were standing by, but they seemed incapable of action. They called for ropes, and shouted absurd directions.

The little Hindu was in great danger. He could not swim, and he was four or five feet from the sloping side of the tank. His frantic splashing brought him no nearer, and, even had he succeeded, there was no hold for him on the slimy granite slabs.

Myles and Jack were thunderstruck when they saw that no one was trying to rescue the lad. They first endeavoured to reach the spot, but the crowd was wedged too tightly.

"Cowards!" cried Myles indignantly.

He turned aside and cleared the sloping stones by a flying leap that landed him in deep water. He went under, shot to the surface, and swam forward with long strokes. He clutched Paltu's dripping hair just as the lad was going down, and struggled with him toward the bank.

The spectators were active enough now.

A dozen men linked hands and formed a chain that reached to the water's edge. In brief time Paltu and his rescuer were hauled safely up.

A fierce-looking, bearded Hindu in the picturesque dress of the rajah's bodyguard had just reached the scene. He immediately pounced on Myles, and in broken English poured out a flood of gratitude. Then, with a few stern words to Paltu, he hastened away.

"Who was that excitable old fellow?" asked Jack.

"Matee Mal, Paltu's father," Myles replied. "He needn't have made so much fuss over a little thing like that. What did he tell you, Paltu? To go home, I'll bet."

Paltu nodded.

"Me stay watch fire," he said. "You save my life, Sahib Chesney. Me nearly go under."

"It was a close shave," admitted Myles. "Those cowards would have let you drown. Well, we're none the worse for it except a wetting, and that can't hurt us if we move about. We'll stay and see the fun through."

So the three lads squeezed once more to the front of the crowd. The situation now bordered on a panic. The wing of the palace was wrapped in flames from top to bottom, and the whole building seemed doomed. A stream of servants poured incessantly out, bearing costly furniture. More fire-engines arrived, and got to work amid great excitement. The town bell kept up a harsh jangling.

"There comes the rajah's golden throne!" cried Myles, as that priceless article was deposited in the court by a dozen servants.

"I say, don't it shine?" gasped Jack. "I wish I had its value in money."

At that instant two Hindu soldiers ran toward the crowd, waving their swords warningly and shouting in loud tones. What they said was unintelligible, owing to the tumult.

"They are going to attack us!" cried Jack.

"No; it is something about powder and danger," replied Myles. "Look, everybody's running. Come on—quick!"

But before the boys could seek safety in flight they were surrounded by a madly struggling mob. Then came a fearful explosion that seemed to rend the very earth apart. Myles and Paltu were dashed violently against Jack, and all three went down together.

For a few seconds they lay there while a rain of stones, cement, and charred timbers descended on all sides. Then they staggered to their feet, stunned and dizzy. They were sorely bruised, too, for not a few of the mob had ruthlessly trampled over them.

At first all they saw was a curtain of pungent smoke. This slowly lifted, revealing where the burning wing of the palace had been, a blackened excavation filled with debris.

Groans and cries rose on the air, adding to the terror of the lads. They hurried a few yards to one side, and then curiosity impelled them to stop.

"Whew! That was a close call," said

Jack. "The explosion must have been under the wing."

"It was," replied Myles. "There are dungeons beneath the whole palace. The fire seems to be out, anyway."

"Many people hurt, sahibs," exclaimed Paltu, pointing to several groups of men who were bearing ghastly burdens away from the scene. Among the victims was one of the Hindu soldiers who had given the alarm.

"They were likely hit by falling stones," said Myles. "We had a lucky escape, I tell you."

A few feet behind the lads were two English officers, half-concealed by the curling smoke.

"They say the rajah blew up the wing on purpose to save the rest of the building," remarked one. "It was clever of him if he did."

"I have my doubts," answered his companion. "It looks as though he had powder or other explosives stored in the dungeons. The matter ought to be investigated."

Here the officers moved off, and after briefly commenting on what they had just heard, the boys ventured near the scene of the explosion.

They had taken but a few steps when the mass of debris blazed up in a dozen places. The lurid flames showed how complete was the destruction. The end of the palace gaped open, and through the shattered and tottery walls the interior of many apartments on the second and third floors could be seen.

Far back in the excavation, and below the level of the ground, a section of one of the dungeon walls was visible. The burning timbers were stacked around it, but not high enough to conceal a part of a massive, brazen door. In this was set a square wicket, and behind it Myles suddenly espied a ghastly, white face and a pair of hands clutching the bars.

"Look!" he cried shrilly. "Who's that?"

"Good gracious! It's Pink Triscott!" yelled Jack, and the startling words had barely left his lips when the brazen door was deeply buried under an avalanche of beams and masonry that thundered down from overhead.

For a moment the lads were dazed and horrified. Had they seen aright, or was it only an illusion? Before they could fully realise the discovery, they were swept aside by the noisy rush of the firemen and the crowd, and an instant later streams of water were playing on the hissing flames and sending up clouds of steam.

Jack found himself under the shadow of the fortress wall, with his companion at his side.

"Let me go!" he cried savagely, as Myles held him. "Pink is dead or dying down in that awful place. I must give the alarm. There are English officers here, and they will help me save him. Let me go, I say!"

But Myles only clung the tighter.

"Don't be a fool, Jack," he pleaded. "If you give an alarm Pink is lost. We've got to outwit the rajah, and I think I can do it. I was in the palace once with my father, and I know a secret way to the dungeons!"

"Quick, then!" cried Jack. "I'll trust you. Oh, the rajah shall pay dear for this outrage."

"I rather think he will," muttered Myles. "Whew! It seems like a fairy tale. I can hardly believe it."

"Don't stop to talk," Jack protested. "How about Paltu?"

"It's safer to take him with us," said Myles. "He's all right, anyhow. Eh, Paltu?"

"Me help save poor sahib," stoutly replied the little Hindoo.

"Good for you," whispered Myles. "Come on now, while no one is looking."

He quickly led his companions into the gloomy space between the side of the palace and the fortress. They were too excited to give a thought to the perils of the mad and foolhardy enterprise on which they were embarking. Under cover of the shrubbery they rounded the angle of the building, and found one of the rear entrances open and unguarded.

Myles had counted on this, feeling satisfied that everyone would be in front. With fast-beating hearts they entered the palace, and passed hurriedly through a hall and two vast rooms—all dense with smoke, and stripped of most of their furniture.

"Do you know where you're going?" asked Jack anxiously.

"Yes, I'm on the right path," whispered Myles. "Ah, here we are!"

He opened a door, revealing a narrow corridor hung with costly paintings and curtains. A silver lamp burned dimly on a bronze table.

He jerked one of the curtains aside, and ran his fingers over the beautifully enamelled wall. Suddenly an invisible panel slid back, and a yawning, black hole was seen. A draft of cool air blew into the corridor.

"Jove! How did you do it?" exclaimed Jack.

"The rajah touched the spring accidentally when he was showing father and me the decorated walls," Myles answered. "Lucky, wasn't it? Come on, we're all right now."

He snatched the lamp and led the way into the secret passage. Jack came last, and drew the panel shut. A winding stair-

case confronted the lads, and they quickly descended between massive walls of granite. The tumult outside could no longer be heard. The silence was intense and oppressive.

At the bottom of the stairs was a long gallery, with diverging corridors on both sides. The boys halted in perplexity. They had lost their bearings completely, and knew not which way to turn. The air was full of a pungent powder smoke that made breathing difficult and painful.

Suddenly they heard a dull, pounding noise.

"That's Pink!" cried Jack. "Thank God he's alive!"

"This way," said Myles. "We'll find him."

They dashed off at full speed in the direction of the sound. It led them to the end of the main corridor, and then sharply to the left between blank walls of masonry. At the bottom of this passage they were checked by a pyramid of loose stone and mortar. The explosion had caved in the roof and sides.

"No use," exclaimed Myles in despair. "We might have remembered that the dungeon could only have one door, and you know we saw that choked up by the fall of stone. I'm afraid——"

"Hark, sahibs! The noise again!" interrupted Paltu.

Just then a head and a pair of shoulders appeared at a narrow slit in the mass of debris which the boys had failed to notice before.

"Is that you, Pink?" cried Jack.

"Ay, my lad," was the husky reply. "Lend a 'and, till I get out of this beastly 'ole."

Myles put down the lamp, and the three lads tore with might and main at the rubbish. In less than five minutes the hole was sufficiently enlarged for the prisoner to crawl through.

Jack threw his arms around him.

"I thought I would never see you again, Pink," he cried. "Are you hurt?"

"Not a scratch, my boy," replied Triscott. "That fire was a lucky thing, for these 'eathen dogs were going to behead me in the morning. Who are your friends, and 'ow did you get in 'ere?"

Jack hastily explained, and gave a brief account of the events of the evening.

"Wonderful!" muttered Pink, as he warmly shook hands with Myles and Paltu. "So I'm branded as a deserter, am I? Well, I'll 'ave to stay branded for a time yet. I've got a secret mission to perform. But this ain't the place to talk. We must get away from 'ere at once. When we're in safe quarters, I'll tell you a tale that'll make your 'air stand on end. My 'ead swims

to think of it. Do you know 'ow to get out?"

"Come on!" replied Myles, picking up the lamp and leading the way forward.

They hurried towards the main corridor, turned the angle, and came face to face with one of the palace guards, a stalwart, wicked-looking Hindoo.

The fellow was armed, but before he could use his weapons or make an outcry Pink had him by the throat. There was a brief scuffle, and down they went. The Hindoo's head struck the stone floor with terrific force.

"That settles 'im," muttered Pink. "'E's 'elpless. Tear 'is kummerbund off, Jack."

Though badly frightened, the boys were able to lend assistance, and in a minute or two the captive was securely bound and gagged with his own sash. He was then dragged into one of the side passages.

Myles again took the lead, and the little party hurried on.

"Stop! You're going past the stairs," whispered Jack.

"I know it," Myles answered. "The panel may not open from this side. There must be a safer exit, anyhow."

"There is," declared Pink. "That's 'ow I was brought in 'ere the first time. It opens on the main 'all, close to the court."

"Then we've got to find it," said Myles, as he pushed on more rapidly. "It won't be hard."

This assertion sounded very cheering; but, unfortunately, it was not realised. After wandering through a mass of corridors for nearly ten minutes, the fugitives began to despair. The underground floor of the palace was evidently a labyrinth to which none but an experienced guide could find the clue.

"We must keep on," exclaimed Myles; "it's the only chance."

"And a deuced slim one, lad," added Pink. "If we're found down 'ere, our 'eads will go off on the spot."

The boys exchanged frightened glances. For ten minutes longer they followed Pink, who now took the lead. Then, to their fear and amazement, they found themselves back at the scene of the struggle with the guard. The latter's tulwar and spear lay on the floor, marking the spot.

"We've been travelling in a circle," exclaimed Pink. "Now we must begin over again. These may come 'andy."

He picked up the weapons, keeping the spear for himself, and giving the tulwar, which was a curved sword, to Jack.

"Let's try the stairway," suggested Myles. "It's the last chance."

They hurried in that direction, but before the distance was half covered they heard an

uproar straight ahead—voices, and shuffling steps, and the clatter of arms.

"It's the guards coming to look for me," Pink muttered hoarsely.

"Then we're lost!" gasped Jack. "What shall we do?"

At this critical moment Myles observed an iron door in the side of the corridor. He threw himself against it, and, to his relief, it darted inward.

"The guards don't see us yet," he whispered. "Let's hide here until they get past. Then we will tackle the stairs."

An instant later the fugitives were in the friendly shelter of a cell, little dreaming that they had exchanged one peril for another. Just as Pink extinguished the lamp and Myles closed the door, a low, blood-curdling snarl rang out of the darkness.

(To be continued.)

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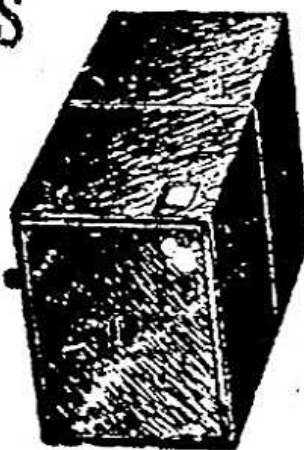
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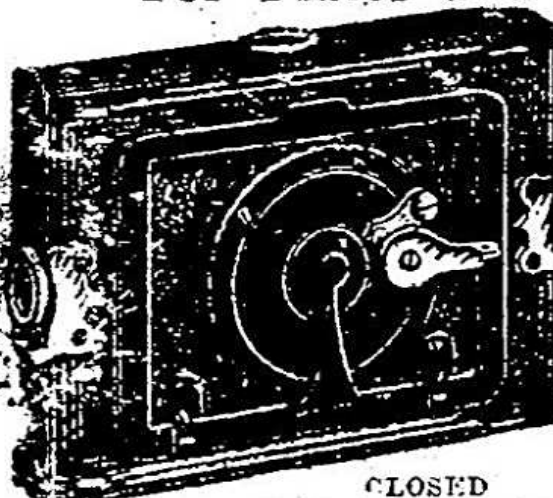
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