

HOW CAPTAIN BOOM ATTEMPTS TO QUELL THE REVOLT!

THE NELSON LEE 2^D

LIBRARY



In less than twenty seconds the Triangle was a solid mass of yelling humanity. Exactly how Captain Boom escaped, he hardly knew.

THE IRON COMMANDER!

A lively story of the Boys of St. Frank's, introducing an amusing new personality in Captain Boom, a breezy sea-salt of the Merchant Service, who comes to St. Frank's as the Deputy Head.



"Buck up, you chaps!" yelled Handforth from one of the windows. "Why don't you show a bit of spirit, and join us? Don't take any notice of that rotter——"

"Silence!" roared Captain Boom.

THE IRON COMMANDER!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

St. Frank's has lost its Head, both in a literal and a figurative sense. Following the dismissal of Mr. Beverley Stokes as Housemaster of West House, which had revolted through the persecutions of Guy Sinclair, the prefect in charge, Dr. Stafford has had a seizure during an enquiry of the school governors, and has had to go away on a holiday. The revolt of the West House continues, and there is danger of the rest of the school joining the rebels, since it is now beginning to be known that Mr. Stokes, who was very popular with the boys, was not to blame for Sinclair's conduct, and that Sinclair had a hold over the Housemaster, which prevented the latter from explaining the true facts. In order to restore discipline at the school, the governors have decided to appoint Commander Sampson Rudd as deputy head. The arrival of Captain Boom, a breezy sea-salt, late of the Merchant Service, as the Iron Commander, introduces a lively new character, whose humorous attempts to quell the disturbances at St. Frank's provides many laughable incidents in this week's splendid narrative.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT IN THE REBELS' STRONGHOLD.

RAP-RAP-RAP!

R Johnny Onions, of the Remove, gave a sudden start and halted. "Did you hear that, Bertie?" he whispered tensely.

"Yes," breathed his brother. "Somebody rapping!"

They stood there, at the end of the lower rear passage of the West House, keen and alert. It was fairly late, and St. Frank's was dark and quiet. Under ordinary circumstances the entire school would have been asleep, but in the West House, at least, there was a general air of alertness.

For the West House was in a state of rebellion. In fact, the West House was

holding a barring-out of its own, quite independent from the rest of the school. All the other Houses were normal, but the boys of Stokes' felt themselves justified in defying the school authority.

At least half the rebels were asleep, but the others were stationed in various sections of the building, guarding the barricaded doors and windows. There were sentries at every danger spot; there were fellows on the watch at the upper windows, and even on the roof.

This was a totally novel kind of insurrection, for the seniors had supported the juniors in their defiance. Reggie Pitt was recognised as leader in the Remove and Third, but Arthur Morrow, of the Sixth, represented the seniors. And all were equally

determined to hold on until they won the day.

Rap-rap-rap!

"By Jove, there it is again!" muttered Johnny Onions. "Bertie, you'd better dash round and fetch Reggie! This might be something—"

"It's all right, you fellows—only me!" came a voice from the end window. "I haven't got the password, but I'm a friend!"

"Sounds like Nipper!" exclaimed Johnny, with relief. "Is that you, Hamilton?"

"Of course it's me, you ass!" came the voice. "What's the idea of all this mystery? There's no fear of an attack to-night. The Head's ill, and the Governors are as harmless as a bunch of kittens!"

The Onions brothers removed the barricades—a number of forms and tables—and cautiously opened the casement window. Dick Hamilton, the popular junior captain of St. Frank's, squeezed in. He belonged to the Ancient House, but he was evidently interested in the doings of the rebels.

"It's just as well to be cautious, of course," he grinned, after greeting the pair. "But you can take my word for it that everything's quiet. I just came across to have a word with Reggie. Everything going all right? You don't look particularly cheerful, Bertie."

"You can't take any notice of Bertie," said Johnny Onions. "I believe he was born on a cold night, and he's had that melancholy expression frozen on his face ever since. You gave us a turn, you ass! We thought you were the first signs of an attack!"

Nipper chuckled.

"You wouldn't expect an attacking party to tap on the window, would you?" he asked dryly. "I thought I'd slip in quietly, so I dodged the eagle eyes of the upper sentries. My hat! Are they supposed to be on the watch?"

"That was the general idea," said Johnny. "But, of course, they are not on the lookout for experts of your sort. When it comes to tracking and shadowing, you can make yourself as invisible as a giddy ghost!"

"Don't you believe it!" said Reggie Pitt, bustling up. "We saw the beggar from the roof, and I've just buzzed down to find out. So it's good old Nipper!" he went on, grabbing the visitor's hand. "Come to my arms, fair one! Gladness is mine."

"Don't be an ass!" grinned Nipper. "So you spotted me, eh?"

"Well, we spotted something," said Pitt. "Of course, we're not expecting an attack, but it's always best to be on the safe side. What are you doing out of your little cot at this wicked hour? You'll excuse us for neglecting to bring out the brass band, won't you?"

"We've been having a confab. in the Ancient House," explained Nipper. "Browne and Handforth and De Valerie and Fullwood and the rest of us, you know. We thought you might be running short of grub, so

we're prepared to do a little grub running. Only say the word!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Pitt, with gratitude. "It's jolly decent of you fellows to rally round like this. We shan't forget the way you came to the rescue during that attack. We should have been pitched out if you Ancient House men hadn't lent a hand."

"That's all right," said Nipper. "No need to thank us, old son. We enjoyed it to the full. Handforth's so jolly keen, in fact, that he's thinking of coming over here to join the rebellion. He'll probably arrive at any minute."

"Has he still got that bee in his bonnet?" asked Pitt, with a sigh. "Handy's a good chap, but he needs such a lot of looking after! But about that grub! Thanks all the same, but we've explored the store-rooms and larders, and we find there's enough to last three or four days. But we're short of water. They turned it off at the main, you know."

"Looks like being serious," put in Johnny Onions, nodding.

"We'll turn it on again," promised Nipper. "In fact, it'll be turned on in the natural order of things, because the whole school was cut off. They can't cut you off without stopping the supply to all the other Houses. So you're bound to be O.K. by the morning."

Each House, of course, had its own stop-cock, but this was situated within the building. During the recent attack, therefore, the rebels' hosepipes—which they had used as a means of defence—had been dried up by the turning of the main control outside.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Pitt, nodding. "There's not much time to think of anything, in fact. We've been on the go for hours. Thank goodness we've got a respite now. How are things going with the beaks?"

"Well, just between ourselves, you've tied 'em into knots," said Nipper confidentially. "They're in the most hopeless mess."

"Words of cheer indeed!" murmured Pitt.

"The Head's had a seizure, as you know," went on Nipper. "We're very sorry for the poor old boy. He's confined to his bed now, and he's really ill. They're sending him away to-morrow."

"But who's in charge?"

"Nobody," replied Nipper. "At least, only Sir James Henson. He's one of the Governors, you know. And he's been left here until they can bring a temporary headmaster down. The other governors, including the chairman, went home this evening. Nobody knows what the next move's going to be. But you had a quiet day yesterday, and you'll probably have another quiet day to-morrow."

Reggie Pitt frowned.

"I shall have to speak to Morrow about this," he said. "There's something fishy about this lull. Of course, we've got our defences in good order, and we know that

we can rely on you fellows in an emergency. But this inactivity doesn't look healthy. They're not giving in, or we should have had some peace negotiations before this. I can see trouble looming."

"Plenty of it," agreed Nipper. "But the school's in a pretty rummy condition. Everybody in our House is infuriated at Barry Stokes' dismissal, and they're indignant on the other side of the Triangle, too. Unless the governors are careful, they'll precipitate a general revolt."

"This is all very interesting, but why stand here in the cold?" put in Johnny Onions. "Take Nipper along to the dining hall, and offer him some refreshments. It's the least we can do for a guest."

"I was thinking the same thing," said Bertie, with a gloomy nod. "Take Nipper into the dining hall and do the honours. Sew him into a sheet, and make him thoroughly comfortable."

Nipper stared.

"Sew me into a sheet?" he repeated. "Thanks all the same, but that's not my idea of real comfort. What do you take me for? Mutton?"

Johnny grinned.

"That's only Bert's way of putting it," he chuckled. "He got it mixed up. He meant to say, show you into a seat."

"Show me into a seat—sew me into a sheet," repeated Nipper. "My only hat! These things are a bit tricky! I thought your minor had got rid of that habit months ago, Johnny."

"He's worse than ever," said Johnny. "I've tried to cure him, but it's no good. He's always putting things the wrong way about. Mind you, he doesn't know it; they're all unconscious."

"The next time he does it we'll make him thoroughly unconscious!" said Nipper severely.

"Awfully sorry," said Bertie. "It's my tongue, you know. I try to control it, but it's beyond me. Why not find that nosey cook and make yourself comfortable?"

"Nosey cook!" gasped Nipper.

"Sorry! I mean to say cosy nook."

"You—you tongue-twisting ass!" snorted Nipper. "You ought to be boiled!"

"In that case, he'd be oiled bunions," chuckled Pitt. "Eh?" He started violently. "Great Scott! I'm catching it myself! I meant to say 'boiled onions,' and I find myself talking about feet!"

"Let's escape!" suggested Nipper, with a wary glance at Bertie.

He and Pitt hurried up the corridor, and soon arrived at the dining hall, which, being a central apartment, was used by the rebels as a sort of general meeting-place. It was, in fact, the rebel headquarters.

Arthur Morrow, of the Sixth, was talking with two or three other seniors when the Removite entered. He greeted Nipper warmly.

For once the seniors had forsaken their dignity. In the West House, at least, they were equals, fighting in a common cause.

And a sportsman of Morrow's type would never have lent himself to this enterprise unless he had every justification. Morrow was a quiet fellow as a rule, a thoroughly decent, level-headed senior, who had made an ideal head prefect. Under his regime, and with Mr. Beverley Stokes above him, the West House had experienced no internal troubles.

But since the beginning of this present term there had been a series of sensational changes. On the very first day Morrow had been deposed, and Guy Sinclair had been appointed in his place.

Sinclair was really an East House senior, and one of the worst fellows in the school. He wasn't actually a bully, although he had revealed bullying tendencies in a very marked degree. The sudden acquisition of power had got into his head, and he had misused it so atrociously that practically all sense of proportion had deserted him.

At first the juniors had kept their indignation to themselves, but gradually matters had gone from bad to worse. A rebellion, a barring out, is not a thing that can be entered upon at a moment's notice. It is the most serious step that any body of schoolboys can take, and before a barring out becomes a reality, the boys need to be worked up to a high pitch of indignation and anger. In the West House the fellows had stood Sinclair's tyranny until human endurance could no longer stand the strain.

Sinclair had not been alone, for he had brought Kenmore and Parkin and several others with him, apparently flaunting the House-master. From the very first he had made himself a dictator, and it had pleased his vanity to be called the boss of the West House. It wasn't merely a pretence, but an actual fact. Mr. Beverley Stokes had been a mere nonentity since the arrival of Guy Sinclair.

The interlopers—for the West House regarded Sinclair and his set as intruders—had ruled the roost in every possible way. They had started a night club of their own, they had organised an inquisition over the juniors, and had generally upset the House. Sinclair even introduced a brainy scheme of confining his victims to the House, and then bailing them out, thus extracting large sums of money from rich juniors, such as the Hon. Douglas Singleton and Lord Pippinton, for Sinclair had always contrived to retain the bail money.

To cap everything, the West House fags had been treated like slaves. They had been bullied and victimised until the Remove had stepped in. Then the seniors had aroused themselves, and finally Sinclair and his bunch had been kicked out. Mr. Stokes had refused to recognise this drastic expulsion, and before he could realise it, the West House had revolted.

From the smallest fag to the most dignified senior, the entire House was prepared to go to the extreme limit before admitting itself beaten. They were not out to defy the school, but they were determined that

Guy Sinclair should never return. They were thoroughly justified, too.

The issue was a simple one. The West House only needed a guarantee that Sinclair should be deposed, and they would instantly surrender. Unfortunately, Mr. Stokes had been unable to give a satisfactory explanation to the headmaster, whereas Sinclair had succeeded in whitewashing himself.

In his extremity, Dr. Stafford had appealed to the governors, and they, too, had been fooled by the head prefect's glib tongue. They had not only reproved Mr. Stokes for his slackness, but they had placed the entire responsibility upon his shoulders, and had demanded his resignation.

And then, during the course of a heated altercation with the governors, Dr. Stafford had suffered a sudden seizure, and could take no further active part in the quarrel.

In fact, affairs at St. Frank's were in a rather queer state.

CHAPTER II.

JUST LIKE HANDFORTH!



MORROW walked back with Nipper when the latter was preparing to leave.

"Jolly good of you to come over, Hamilton," he was saying. "It puts a lot of heart into the fellows to know that they've got outside support. What about Stockdale's and Goole's?"

"They're a bit lukewarm at present," replied Nipper. "Of course, that's because they're on the other side of the Triangle—rather out of it, you know. There's been no disturbance in either the Modern House or the East House. But there's no telling."

"Is there anything behind that last remark?"

"Only that Sinclair and his crowd are in the East House," replied Nipper. "Some of the fellows are talking about kicking them out. Armstrong was quite excited about it, and tried to get up an agitation; but he's a pretty rotten leader, and nobody takes any notice of him. But you needn't worry, Morrow. You'll get all the help you need from us."

"What about the seniors?" asked Morrow, with a touch of anxiety. "Fenton and Browne and the rest?"

"Well, Fenton has got to think pretty carefully before he commits himself," replied Nipper. "Being captain of the school, he is cautious; but his sympathies are with you fellows. And old Browne is naturally as keen as mustard. He'd like to be in the rebellion himself."

The news was very satisfactory to the rebels, for the more outside support they had, the more certain they could be of ultimate victory.

Nipper lost no time in taking his departure. It was nearly ten-thirty, and he was breaking bounds. Indeed, he was commit-

ting an even more serious offence, for the order had gone forth that no boys should fraternise with the rebels under any circumstances.

"It's all very encouraging, but I wish I knew something of the governors' plans," said Morrow after Nipper had gone. "That's where we're up against it, Pitt. We don't know what's on the way."

"We're prepared for the worst, anyhow," said Reggie.

Morrow frowned.

"I can't help thinking they've got something big up their sleeves," he went on thoughtfully. "They didn't touch us during the night, and they've left us severely alone all day. As far as I can see, there's not one chance in a thousand of trouble to-night. What's the idea? Why are they leaving us to stew in our own juice?"

"Not because they've got some marvellous scheme," retorted Pitt. "My dear chap, they're at their wits' end. That's the secret. The Head tried to pitch us out, and failed. The governors *daren't* try another attack. They're afraid of the Ancient House joining the revolt."

"Something in that," admitted Morrow, nodding. "The Head's going away, and Stokes is virtually dismissed. What are they going to do to settle the matter? By all that we can hear, Sinclair has fooled the governors properly. Why on earth can't they hold a proper inquiry, instead of fooling about like this? It wouldn't take us long to state a convincing case."

"These governors have got a bee in their bonnet," said Pitt. "That's the trouble with them. No dealings with rebels! As long as they maintain that attitude, this deadlock will continue. Instead of doing the sensible thing, and threshing out the truth, they've taken the view that the rebellion must be quelled before there's any inquiry."

"H'm!" grunted Morrow. "That's what a lot of short-sighted employers do when there's a labour strike. Far better to hold an inquiry first, and see where they stand. Let's hope the new Head proves to be a man of sense! They're bound to appoint a deputy—unless they ask Mr. Lee to step in!"

"That would be the thing!" exclaimed Reggie. "By jingo, Mr. Lee wouldn't make much song about it! He'd soon call an armistice, and hold an investigation. That's the idiocy of the whole thing! Sinclair wouldn't have a leg to stand on after some of our men had given their evidence. The Head and the governors have only heard one side."

Rap-rap-rap!

They were still standing near the end window of the lower passage, and they glanced at one another as the sounds of soft rapping hit their ears. Johnny Onions grinned.

"Nipper must have forgotten something," he said. "Shall we let him in?"

"Of course!" said Morrow.

Once more the barricades were removed, and the casement window was unfastened. A dim figure looked in. The rebels saw a flushed face and gleaming eyes.

"Good!" said a well-known voice. "Glad you've had enough sense to let me in without any silly delay! I've come here to take charge of things!"

"My only hat!" groaned Reggie Pitt. "Handy!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, the volcanic leader of Study D in the Ancient House, climbed through the window, and looked at the West House fellows. He was fully dressed, and he carried a suitcase in his hand.

"You can get to bed, Morrow, as soon as you like," he said briskly. "I suppose you're in charge? All right! Leave everything to me now!"

Arthur Morrow grinned.

"Sorry, old man, but I don't think it matters," he replied, with a chuckle. "Why didn't Nipper hold you back? He might have had some consideration for us!"

"I haven't seen Nipper," retorted Handforth. "Besides, what's he got to do with the subject? I've left the Ancient House. I've come over here to lead the rebellion to victory. In fact, I've got a marvellous scheme for gaining a triumph to-night."

"Good old Handy!" said Pitt. "Let's have it."

"We've got to prepare a storming party," said Handforth keenly. "About twenty of us will do. But it's got to be understood that I'm leader."

"Naturally."

"I'm glad you're making no fuss," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "We'll storm the Head's private residence, seize Sir James Henson—he's the only governor left here—and threaten to make him run the gauntlet unless he sacks Sinclair on the spot! That's the scheme in a nutshell. Simple and straightforward."

Morrow pretended to consider.

"Effective, but hardly the right thing," he objected. "It wouldn't do, Handy. That plan of yours is an example of might over right. That's the last thing we want. All we desire is an inquiry, and a complete exposure of the truth. That'll be good enough to justify this rebellion in the eyes of any competent judges. You've got the wrong policy, old man."

Handforth stared.

"Great pip!" he said, with deliberate scorn. "And you expect to get justice? You expect these grandmotherly old governors to listen to you? You're dotty! The only way is to use force. It's the only way to reason with 'em. You take my tip, and—"

"Sorry, Handy! I'm due to go round to have a look at the various sentry posts," interrupted Morrow calmly. "Pitt, we don't want to be rude to a visitor. See him safely off the premises, won't you?"

"Will it matter if he goes on his neck?" asked Reggie.

"Not a bit!" said Morrow calmly. "In fact, it might be all the better."

He walked off, and Handforth took a deep breath.

"You—you fatheads!" he snorted. "Aren't you going to put that plan of mine into execution?"

"Of course," said Reggie Pitt. "That's all it deserves."

"All it deserves?"

"Executing," explained Reggie calmly. "No, Handy, it's no good coming over here with that yarn. Sorry, but you'll have to skedaddle. You're a good chap, but you're too much of a handful for us."

"Yes, do go, Handy, old man!" said Johnny Onions pleadingly.

"We're supposed to be on guard here," added Bertie. "How can we listen if you make all this noise?"

"Who's making a noise?" roared Handforth.

"He's getting excited now," said Bertie gloomily. "I knew it was coming. That's the worst of Handy—he's such a rusty looser."

"Who are you calling Rusty Laura?" demanded Handforth, glaring. "Laura's a girl's name, anyhow, you ass. And if you say I'm rusty—"

"Keep your hair on!" growled Johnny. "He meant to say you're a lusty roarer—and so you are!"

"Sorry," said Bertie penitently. "I try not to get mixed, but I can't help it. I suppose I'm in one of my money foods."

"Money?" repeated Handforth. "Foods? Who's talking about food or money? Of all the fatheaded asses—"

"He means one of his funny moods," said Johnny patiently.

"If he means funny moods, why doesn't he say funny moods?" demanded Handforth, with an aggressive glare. "I'm fed up with you chaps! You stick in this place all day long and don't do a thing! Where's your spirit? I'm ashamed of you! You're nothing but a lot of silk mops!"

"Silk mops?" repeated Pitt, grinning.

"Yes, silk mops!" roared Handforth. "Eh? Who's talking about silk mops?"

"That's what you said."

"I said milksops!" hooted Handforth. "You're deliberately mixing me up, you rotters! But you can't do it! I've come here to rake the tains, and you can't stop me!"

"You've come here to rake the drains?" grinned Reggie.

"I said take the reins!" howled Handforth wildly. "Go to bed!" he added, glaring at Bertie. "It's your face that's metting me gixed! I don't know whether I'm salking tense, or not."

"You're not," said Pitt, shaking his head. "It's no good getting excited after you've had five minutes of Bertie. Take my advice, old man, and go back quietly to bed. If you're careful, you won't be spotted. It's

dinky ark outside—Great Scott! I've caught it myself now!" he added, with a groan. "Bertie, you're off duty!"

But while Bertie Onions took the tip and departed, Edward Oswald Handforth didn't. He had come to stay, and meant to stay.

CHAPTER III.

SINCLAIR LEARNS SOMETHING.



SIR JAMES HENSON, Bart., knocking the ash from his cigar, glanced across at Guy Sinclair.

"Well, my boy, you had better be getting to bed," he suggested. "It is getting quite late, and I mustn't encourage you in staying up."

"Oh, it won't hurt me, sir," said Sinclair easily. "Anyhow, these are exceptional times, aren't they? My only hope is that those confounded rebels will be quelled as soon as possible. It doesn't do the school any good to have these scandals."

"I'm very glad to see, Sinclair, that you have the good name of St. Frank's at heart," said Sir James, with an approving nod. "It will indeed be a pity if the newspapers make a big fuss over this affair. No matter how much we try to hush it up, I'm afraid the papers will make a big story of it. That's the worst of these journalists; they have no consideration for anybody."

Sir James was sitting in the headmaster's study, and everything was quiet. It was getting on for eleven o'clock, and he was thinking of retiring. His attitude towards Guy Sinclair was very friendly—ample proof that Sinclair had hoodwinked him completely.

The other governors had returned to London, and Sir James would follow on the morrow. They had made certain plans—plans which were quite secret, so far. And they were convinced that they had solved the problem. Indeed, Sir James was in quite excellent spirits.

He was merely left in charge until the arrival of a deputy Head, and although clever in some things, he was a mere child in the conduct of a big public school. He had been like putty in Guy Sinclair's hands.

"I'll be going, then," said the Head Prefect, getting to his feet. "I was hoping that you'd give me a hint about the plans, though. I'm very worried about my House, sir—"

"Naturally, Sinclair—naturally," interrupted Sir James. "I'd like to tell you—but I don't know that I should be altogether justified. We have come to a certain decision, but it was to be kept a secret until to-morrow."

"You could trust me, sir," said Sinclair.

"I am quite sure of it, my boy," nodded Sir James kindly. "At all events, you may be quite satisfied that you will be in

control of your House again within twenty-four hours. I venture to predict that St. Frank's will receive a big surprise to-morrow. We are not going to let these boys do just as they please. This rebellion will come to a sudden and dramatic finish—mark my words."

Sinclair was filled with curiosity. He was anxious, too. He badly wanted to know what steps the Governors had planned—for his position was by no means as secure as Sir James indicated. He had escaped so far because there had been no searching inquiry.

But once the West House fellows were allowed to give evidence, there would be an overwhelming string of proof that Sinclair had abused his prefectship. Lies would not serve him in face of the corroborative testimony of a full dozen victims.

Sinclair was very anxious to be prepared—to know what was coming, so that he could safeguard his own skin. And he had a conviction that he would be able to worm the truth out of Sir James before he left.

"It's awfully good to learn that the trouble will soon be over, sir, but I wish you'd take me into your confidence," he said earnestly. "I'm the most interested fellow, you know—and I feel a certain amount of responsibility, too. I'm very uncomfortable about Mr. Stokes—"

"We need not discuss Mr. Stokes," interrupted Sir James coldly. "It is overwhelmingly evident that Mr. Stokes has been too lax in his methods, and it is better for the school that he has resigned his appointment."

Sinclair pretended to approve.

"I've got to admit you're right, sir," he replied. "I found things so loose when I took on the prefectship that the fellows resented my attempts to restore discipline. That's been the cause of all the trouble. But I can't quite see how this miracle is going to be worked. Those rebels have sworn to hold out until I'm deposed—"

"You are not deposed, Sinclair, and the rebels will be brought to their senses in a very short time after the arrival of—"

Sir James paused, and pursed his lips. "H'm! There is really no reason why I should not tell you," he went on thoughtfully. "Yes, Sinclair, I will."

"Thank you, sir."

"I consider that we have achieved a rather wonderful piece of work to-day, Sinclair," went on Sir James with satisfaction. "Perhaps I ought not to say 'we,' however. It was actually Sir John Brent and General Milton who engineered the triumph. In short, a headmaster has been appointed, and will be here to-morrow morning. Naturally, he will only be a deputy—he will have full control until this trouble is settled, and until Dr. Stafford recovers."

"What's he like, sir?" asked Sinclair.

"As a matter of fact, I haven't seen the

gentleman," replied Sir James. "But he is, of course, well known to me by reputation. Our excellent chairman, Sir John, did St. Frank's a very fine service when he persuaded Commander Sampson Rudd to accept this temporary appointment."

Guy Sinclair stared.

"Commander Sampson Rudd, sir!" he repeated.

"I have surprised you, eh?" smiled Sir James. "Remember, Sinclair, this is in strict confidence. Nobody else must know until to-morrow morning, when the whole school will be informed in Big Hall. It is my intention to introduce Commander Rudd to the boys at a special muster in mid-morning. And from that minute, Commander Rudd will be in full command. You can take my word for it that he'll quell this mutiny in a masterly fashion."

Sinclair revealed his astonishment.

"But—but he sounds like a naval man, sir," he protested.

"And for a very excellent reason, Sinclair—he IS a naval man," chuckled Sir James, pleased at the effect he had produced.

"I say, isn't that a bit extraordinary, sir?"

"It is by no means as extraordinary as you might think, Sinclair," replied Sir James. "Commander Sampson Rudd has dealt with boys for many years. He has had control of more than one training ship. Commander Rudd is an officer and a gentleman. He has trained the élite of the country's youth. During the war he turned out hundreds of youngsters who became distinguished officers."

"I can quite believe that, sir, but is he just the type of man to control a big public school like St. Frank's?" asked Sinclair dubiously. "It seems such a queer thing to have a naval man—"

"The conditions at this school are unusual—and the Governing Board has decided that an unusual controller must be appointed," interrupted Sir James grimly. "We need strength, Sinclair. There are many distinguished scholars who could take up the reins with success over a normal St. Frank's. But it requires a Commander Rudd to deal with the present revolt. He will make short work of this insurrection."

"You mean he'll use force, sir?"

"I have no idea of Commander Rudd's methods—but there is little doubt that he will use a strong hand," said Sir James. "He is not the kind of gentleman to bother with long-winded inquiries. A swift stroke, Sinclair—a crushing blow. That will be Commander Rudd's policy, I have no doubt. And once he has quelled those hot-headed youngsters, he will retain an iron grip on the school. You may safely take it that you will be in control of your House again by to-morrow evening."

"That's jolly good news, sir," said Sinclair, with relief.



Edward Oswald Handforth took his departure from the West House with far more speed than grace.

"I am relying upon you, of course, to keep this matter strictly confidential," warned Sir James fussily. "I shouldn't like anybody else to know. This appointment will come as a complete surprise to the school to-morrow morning—when I introduce Commander Rudd in Big Hall."

"That's all right, sir—you can trust me," said the head prefect, nodding. "I shan't breathe a word to a soul. You can take my word for it."

But exactly five minutes later, when Guy Sinclair had reached his bed-room in the East House, he proceeded to tell Simon Kenmore all about it.

CHAPTER IV.

KENMORE ISN'T OPTIMISTIC.



"COMMANDER SAMPSON RUDD!" said Kenmore.

He sat on the end of his bed, and gave a long, low whistle. The very expression of his face caused Sinclair to stare at him with an uneasy feeling at his heart.

"What's the idea of that infernal whistle?" he demanded.

"Commander Sampson Rudd!" repeated Kenmore. "Ye gods!"

Sinclair felt more uneasy than ever. That ejaculation of Kenmore's was by no means cheering. The seniors were sharing Kenmore's old bed-room in the East House—a temporary arrangement until the revolt was over. Previous to this term, Kenmore had been Mr. Goole's head prefect, but he had found life much easier in the West House as second prefect under Sinclair.

"Confound you!" snapped Sinclair, glaring. "What on earth's the matter? I tell you this man is coming to St. Frank's to-morrow—he's been appointed as temporary head. And this is confidential, too. Don't breathe a word of it to a soul. Have you heard of the beggar?"

"Heard of him!" echoed Kenmore. "He's famous."

"Well, I've never seen his name before—"

"He's known as the Iron Commander."

"Very likely he is—but only in shipping circles," growled Sinclair. "The man's the wrong type to take control over St. Frank's—"

"I'm not so sure about that," interrupted Kenmore slowly. "After all, a training ship is very much like a school. And Commander Rudd made his name when he settled a mutiny in one of those ships. Of course, he's a distinguished officer—with heaps of medals and things. It'll be no disgrace to have him at St. Frank's, if that's what you're thinking about."

"I'm thinking about myself!" growled Sinclair.

"You need to!" nodded Kenmore sympathetically.

"What?"

"This fellow's going to twist you inside out!"

"You think he'll make things warm?"

"I don't think anything about it—I know it," retorted Kenmore. "Thank goodness I'm safe! You're the head prefect, and the West House chaps are bitter against you—not me! There'll hardly be any mention of my name at the inquiry. You'll be the one to suffer. I'm sorry for you."

Guy Sinclair gulped.

"You—you fool!" he panted. "What are you getting at? Inquiry? What inquiry? Out with it, hang you!"

"The inquiry that Commander Rudd will set up as soon as he gets here."

"By gad! He won't start any of those tricks, will he?" asked Sinclair anxiously.

"Sir James told me that he'll probably use an iron hand. He'll quell the rebellion by force."

"Don't you believe it."

"But Sir James says—"

"With all respect to Sir James, he's several kinds of an ass!" interrupted Kenmore sourly. "He's only been left here to give this new man an introduction to the

school. He's a doddering old idiot. He doesn't know a thing about Commander Rudd, or he wouldn't tell you that rot."

Sinclair was getting thoroughly alarmed.

"Why the thunder can't you speak sensibly, instead of talking in riddles?" he demanded harshly. "Look here, Kenmore, you're just pulling my leg! It's a filthy trick—"

"My dear man, I'm doing nothing of the sort," interrupted Kenmore. "I'm trying to let you down lightly, that's all. You're in for the shock of your life. If you take my tip, you'll pack your grip and vanish."

"Pack my grip?" stuttered Sinclair. "Vanish?"

"It'll be better than a public expulsion, anyway."

"You—you exasperating rotter!" roared Sinclair, grabbing Kenmore by the shoulder.

"What do you mean? Out with it! What do you know about Commander Rudd?"

"Take your hands off me—and don't get excited!" growled the other senior. "It's a good thing you pumped Sir James. I can give you a word of warning now. I was reading an article about Commander Rudd only a few weeks ago. Have you ever noticed that when you see a name somewhere, it generally crops up again in the most unexpected way?"

"We're not talking about that!" snapped Sinclair. "Why do you think that Commander Rudd will give me a twisting?"

"Cool down a bit, and I'll explain his methods," said Kenmore calmly. "In the first place, he's not an ordinary man. It's a ten-to-one chance that he'll settle this mutiny just the same as he settled the other. He's bound to go by precedent."

Kenmore sat back, and lit a cigarette. He was rather enjoying himself. He had little to fear on his own account. The West House was bitterly opposed to Guy Sinclair, and all their evidence would be in connection with him. Sinclair's friends would hardly be mentioned. Moreover, Kenmore had done nothing to be really afraid of.

He thoroughly enjoyed the sufferings of others, and it rather tickled him to see Sinclair in such a state of perturbation. The fact that Sinclair was his best friend made no difference. If anything, this fact rather enhanced Kenmore's enjoyment.

"It's all rubbish!" growled Sinclair. "Why should I be afraid of an inquiry? I fooled old Stafford—and I fooled the Governors—"

"But you won't fool Commander Rudd," interrupted Kenmore coolly. "What's that Abraham Lincoln said? 'You can fool some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time—but you can't fool all the people all the time.' It runs something after that style—"

"Do you think I care what Abraham

Lincoln said?" snarled Sinclair. "How do you know that I can't dish this naval man?"

"Because the very first step he'll take will be to call a truce," replied Kenmore. "That'll be his dodge."

"A truce?"

"An armistice, if you like the word better," said Kenmore, with the same exasperating manner. "You mustn't think that Commander Rudd is one of these violent fellows. He won't be foolish enough to attack the West House with armed force. He'll try the peaceful way, and call a truce."

"And then what?"

"He'll give a guarantee that the rebels will be free to enter their stronghold again after a certain given time, and he'll hold a conference. Then he'll drain everybody dry of information. The man's a terror. He'll sift out every fact, and have everything detailed in front of him."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Sinclair.

"You look like tying yourself in a few knots at that inquiry," said Kenmore amiably. "You'll be cross-examined until you feel like a sucked orange. Stokes will be questioned, too——"

"But Stokes has been dismissed."

"Rudd won't take any notice of that," interrupted Kenmore. "I'm not giving you my opinions, old man; I'm stating facts. Rudd will extract the last atom of information, he's got a genius for it. He'll find out all about those gatings, and how you twisted the chaps out of that money."

"I twisted nobody."

"Come off it!" grinned Kenmore. "What about that fifty quid bail money? Thirty for Pitt, and twenty for Grey? You swindled Archie Glenthorne out of that cash, my lad. They were bailed out until five o'clock, and you tipped Grayson and Forrest and the others to hold them back. That'll all come out."

Sinclair turned white. As a matter of fact, he had rooked Archie Glenthorne of seventy-five pounds on that occasion, and had deceived his own friends regarding the actual sum. The prospect was not cheering.

"Rudd will drag everything up," said Kenmore confidently. "There's another thing. He'll find out why you were jumped on by the whole House. He'll learn about the way you dislocated young Jones' shoulder, and how you were smothered in treacle, and feathered."

Sinclair was dumb. There was something about Kenmore's manner which carried conviction. He evidently knew what he was talking about. And Guy Sinclair had other reasons for nervousness, reasons which Kenmore knew nothing about.

Ever since the beginning of term he had held a sword over Mr. Beverley Stokes' head. He had virtually blackmailed the

young Housemaster. And if Commander Rudd was such a demon for extracting facts, he would doubtless drag the whole sordid truth to light.

"You won't be able to fool old Rudd," continued Kenmore. "He'll have this revolt settled within three hours—mark my words. You take my tip, and clear out. He'll consider that the fellows were justified, and he'll recommend you for expulsion. THAT'S the way he'll quell this mutiny, old man. Complete victory for Stokes and the West House. I wouldn't be in your shoes for a pension!"

As a comforter, Simon Kenmore was scarcely a success. He had already succeeded in producing acute symptoms of panic in his companion. And Sinclair felt that Kenmore was right. The Governors wouldn't have appointed a man like Commander Sampson Rudd unless they were convinced of his suitability. He was evidently a man with the right methods, a man who knew exactly how to deal with a tricky situation. The very first quality required was tact. Without tact no boys can be controlled.

"There must be some way!" muttered Sinclair feverishly. "If this man comes to-morrow——"

"There's no 'if' about it—he's coming!" said Kenmore.

"Confound your infernal tongue—shut up!" snarled Sinclair.

"Grateful sort of hound, aren't you?" asked Kenmore indignantly. "I give you the straight tip, and——"

"I've had enough from you!" interrupted the other, flinging himself away.

He went to the window and stared moodily out into the Triangle, for this bedroom was in the front of the House. It was faintly moonlight outside, and Sinclair could see the dim outline of the fountain, the paved pathways, and the black shadows of the Houses opposite.

Then he started. A figure was moving out there, moving slowly, as though indulging in a meditative walk. He recognised it at once. The figure was that of Mr. Beverley Stokes, the dismissed Housemaster.

Guy Sinclair decided upon instant action.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNWILLING EAVESDROPPER.



"OUTSIDE!" said Reggie Pitt firmly. "But, look here——"

"Outside, by lad!"

"If you think you can talk to me like that——"

"Nick, old man, open the window," said Reggie. "Good! Now then, Handy, are you going quietly, or shall we heave you out by

force? We don't like treating a visitor in that way, but——"

"I'm not a visitor!" snorted Handforth. "I've come here to stay!"

"Merely a difference of opinion——"

"I've come here to lead you fellows to victory!" roared Handforth. "You don't know when you're well off, so I'm not taking any notice of these idiotic orders. I'm staying here, on this spot!"

"It's queer how some fellows get these delusions," said Pitt, shaking his head. "Now then, lads, all hands to the pumps. Heave-ho. Handy's asked for it, and we wouldn't dream of disappointing him. You can always rely upon the West House to be obliging."

Edward Oswald Handforth took his departure from the West House with far more speed than grace. As a matter of fact, he was seized and dumped through the window like a sack of potatoes. He hit the ground with a thud, the casement window was closed, and the barricades were jammed into position.

He had certainly asked for it. He had neglected hint after hint, and finally the rebels had been obliged to hurl him out. In their foolishness they failed to appreciate Handforth's ability as a leader.

"Well I'm blown!" said Handforth blankly.

He sat up, dazed and indignant. To him, this dramatic ejection was absolutely incomprehensible. He had taken it for granted that the West House fellows would fall over themselves with eagerness to place him at the head of things. He sat there, slowly recovering.

"They're mad!" he muttered disgustedly. "They're clean off their rockers. I've a good mind to smash my way in—— No, by George, I'm blessed if I will!" he added grimly. "I'll leave them to muddle along without me. They've brought their doom on their own heads!"

The thought was a pleasing one, and it helped to calm him. After all, why should he concern himself? The idiots had turned him down, and it was only right that they should suffer for their folly. He found much consolation in the reflection.

With a final glare at the closed window he marched off down the Square towards the West Arch. He had emerged from the Ancient House by one of the front windows, so it was necessary to go round by the Triangle.

He frowned as he thought of Church and McClure. In all probability they would start crowing as soon as they found him back. They had predicted that he would turn up again before midnight, and he had refuted the suggestion with considerable scorn.

Perhaps he could invent an excuse——

At this point his thoughts were rudely interrupted. Almost immediately in front of him loomed a figure. He had just emerged from the archway, but was still in dense shadow. The figure, on the other hand, was in the moonlight—and was obviously that of a master.

From sheer force of habit Handforth leapt for safety. By an extraordinary chance he succeeded in crouching down behind a buttress without attracting attention. In that corner he was comparatively safe, for it was inky black. He waited breathlessly.

"Old Crowell, I'll bet a quid!" he breathed. "If he spots me I shall be gated for the rest of term. It might even mean a public flogging."

There was every reason for Handforth's fear. It was a grave offence to be outside after lights-out, and even more graver now, in consequence of the West House's revolt. All the boys of the other Houses were under the strictest possible orders to recognise the school rules. The slightest offence was liable to bring down the heaviest punishment. So what would happen to Handforth if he was discovered breaking bounds at nearly midnight? The shadow of expulsion loomed before him, and he shuddered.

If he had known that the gentleman was only Barry Stokes, he would not have been so alarmed. For Mr. Stokes was no longer in a position of authority, and he was a decent sort, too. The chances were, he would let Handforth slip in without making any reference to the matter.

Handforth heard the master's footsteps come nearer. They paused just round the angle of the buttress, within a foot or two, in fact. Edward Oswald's heart nearly ceased beating. For a second he thought he had been discovered. Why on earth had the man paused?

A second later other footsteps sounded—quick ones. They came up, and halted. Handforth inwardly groaned. Until these people moved he couldn't possibly get away. He daren't even breathe freely.

"Just a minute, Mr. Stokes," said a breathless voice.

"I am not altogether sure that I shall give it to you," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "What are you doing out here at this hour, Sinclair? You and I have nothing much in common after what has happened."

"Oh, corks!" breathed Handforth. "It's only old Stokes! And I can't get away!"

He was more alarmed than ever. If there was one thing he hated more than another, it was to play the part of an eavesdropper. But how could he escape in such circumstances as these? He crouched closer to the buttress, and fervently hoped that the pair would move away. Edward Oswald was a clumsy blunderer, but his moral code was one hundred per cent honourable.

"I've got to have a word with you, Mr. Stokes," said Sinclair tensely. "I happened to see you from my window, so I thought I'd come down. We shall be quite private here, and I want to speak to you where there's no fear of listening ears."

"Then we'll remain where we are," said Mr. Stokes grimly. "But you'd better be quick, Sinclair; I'm in no patient mood."

Handforth fairly squirmed. And the situation was certainly remarkable. Mr. Stokes and Sinclair were staying on this spot purely because they wished to talk privately. And within a bare three feet of them an unwilling listener was crouching. Even if they whispered he would still hear every word.

CHAPTER VI.

HANDFORTH LEARNS SOMETHING.



FOR a moment Handforth was almost on the point of jumping out and revealing himself. Such a course would at least free him from this false position. But he hesitated. And while he hesitated Sinclair was speaking.

"You haven't forgotten that affair of the London night club, I suppose, sir?" he asked tensely. "I spotted you in the place on New Year's Eve, and I've kept your secret ever since."

"There is no need to remind me of that fact, Sinclair," said Mr. Stokes. "As events have turned out, I might as well have defied you to do your worst at the outset. I am already in disgrace. I am virtually dismissed—thanks to your blackguardly persecution."

Handforth gulped. Just these few words had made it impossible for him to reveal himself. If he did do so Mr. Stokes and Sinclair would know that he had heard, and that would be a calamity. His only course was to remain concealed. The position was forced upon him, so he gave up all attempts to excuse his presence and listened. Being only human, he could do nothing but feel interested in this remarkable conversation.

Indeed, within the space of a minute his entire point of view had changed. This was quite characteristic of him. He felt that he was no longer an eavesdropper, but a detective, engaged in an investigation. And he wouldn't have moved for worlds. Handforth was subject to these rapid changes.

"It's not fair to say that I've persecuted you, sir!" growled Sinclair. "I found your secret out by accident, and I've respected it ever since. I've even got a photograph of you in that rotten club, and I haven't shown it to a soul. You can't get away

from evidence like that. Why, if the Governors saw it they'd make it impossible for you to get another job—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Mr. Stokes furiously. "Good heavens! How you've got the nerve to say these things, Sinclair, amazes me. You've respected my secret, eh? Upon my soul! Of all the outrageous misrepresentations—"

"It's true!"

"True!" shouted Mr. Stokes, carried away by his rage. "You infernal young cur! You say it's true that you've respected my secret? Haven't you been blackmailing me ever since the beginning of term? Didn't you force yourself into my House—into the head prefectship, and haven't you taken every possible advantage of me? While you are the sole cause of this revolt, I am the one who takes the blame. I am accused of slackness, and the real truth is that you took advantage of my helpless condition. If I had a horsewhip here I'd lay it about you!"

Sinclair started back.

"No need to get excited——" he began.

"And what is this secret?" went on Mr. Stokes, speaking with fierce intensity. "In your opinion a guilty one. But you are wrong, Sinclair. As I have told you before, that visit of mine to the Smuggler's Lair was a perfectly innocent one."

"Perhaps the Governors will believe you?" sneered Sinclair.

"I have put up with your persecution for one reason only!" snapped the housemaster. "I went to that infamous resort on an errand of mercy, and I gave my word of honour that the incident should be kept secret. My lips were sealed, otherwise your rascally scheme would not have lasted twenty seconds!"

"That's all very well——"

"I was in a cleft stick, and you took advantage of it!" panted Mr. Stokes, with ominous calmness. "If I had defied you that sordid story would have been circulated throughout the school. I should have been required to make an explanation. But I couldn't do so without breaking my word of honour. So like a fool, I remained silent, and let you have the run of the West House. What is the result? The boys are in rebellion against your tyranny, and I have been compelled to resign. Take care, young man. I am in no mood to put up with any more of your nonsense!"

Mr. Stokes paused, breathing hard. And Handforth lay back against the stonework of the building, feeling rather dazed. He had heard things that cast a great light upon recent events. And he was wholeheartedly with Barry Stokes. Never for an instant did Handforth believe the young Housemaster to be guilty of disgraceful conduct.

Mr. Stokes was in a dangerous temper. His whole future was in the balance, and he had his pretty young wife to think of, in addition to himself. It wasn't a question of money. His father, the eminent K.C., was wealthy, and Barry was in no danger of poverty. But he was a man who believed in making his own career in the world, and that career, started so brilliantly, was in danger of being blighted.

And all because of this scheming senior. By some trick of chance he had discovered the Housemaster's visit to that ill-famed night club, and he had made capital out of the knowledge. Even Mr. Stokes didn't guess that Sinclair himself had been in the place.

Mr. Stokes had gone there to fetch away the son of an old friend, and there had been an altercation. In the end, Mr. Stokes had been thrown out, and the whole incident looked black in the extreme.

As though Fate had not dealt a sufficiently hard blow, both father and son had immediately gone abroad. And Mr. Stokes had been compelled to wait, hoping to obtain a release from that promise of his. For as soon as his lips were unsealed he could tell the story of his visit to the Smuggler's Lair without any fear of misunderstanding.

He was still waiting, and in a way he was still in Sinclair's power. Serious as affairs were at the moment, they might have been more so. For if he had defied the schoolboy blackmailer that night club story would have been circulated, and he could have offered no explanation. It would have meant more than dismissal; it would have meant permanent disgrace.

But for Sinclair to rake everything up was dangerously near the limit. After what had happened, Mr. Stokes had concluded that Sinclair would remain silent. During the recent inquiry, a very half-hearted one, the Housemaster had cut a poor figure, since he had been unable to justify the happenings within the walls of his House.

"It's not a question of nonsense," said Sinclair, after a pause. "I'm in a tight corner, and you've got to help me."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I've still got you fixed, Mr. Stokes, and unless you do as I want I'll have your name published, and that photograph, too!" said Sinclair recklessly. "There's going to be a big inquiry here; there's a new Head coming to-morrow, and you've got to toe the line."

"You insolent young hound——"

"It's no good abusing me, either!" panted Sinclair. "I happen to have a relative, a half-cousin, who's the editor of 'In the Limelight,' and he'd be only too pleased to get that snapshot. Your reputation wouldn't be worth a fig afterwards."

Mr. Stokes controlled himself with an effort. He was well aware that "In the Limelight" was a scandal journal, a so-called Society paper, but actually a scurrilous rag, which filled its columns with journalistic garbage. The Housemaster was by no means surprised to learn that one of Sinclair's relatives ran it. It was what one might expect of the breed.

"I have already warned you, Sinclair," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "Unfortunately, I have not yet been released from my promise, and I cannot make your rascally threats as public as I would wish. But I have finished with you. Your threats carry no further weight with me."

"Don't they?" said Sinclair, panic-stricken by the master's calm tones. "Then they'd better. You've got to tell this new Headmaster that you instigated everything in the West House. You've got to shield me, you understand? You've got to confess that you forced me to do everything against my will. Either that, or——"

"Or, what, Sinclair?"

"Or that snapshot and a highly coloured account of your night club escapade will be published in my cousin's scandal rag!" said Sinclair fiercely. "That's the alternative, Mr. Stokes!"

The Housemaster wondered how he kept his hands down.

"Very pretty!" he said, with deadly quietness. "Very well schemed, Sinclair, and quite worthy of your own peculiar cunning. So I am either to be pilloried in this praiseworthy journal, or I am to take the blame for your despotic mismanagement. Your effrontery is increasing daily."

"Well, you've got it in a nutshell!" said Sinclair, with a faint revival of hope. "You'd better take my advice, and shield me at this inquiry. If you do that you'll be safe. But if you don't, that snapshot goes straight off by the next post——"

"When this inquiry is held, Sinclair, I shall explain exactly how you gained control of the West House," said Mr. Stokes deliberately. "In fact, I have decided to dispense with this sordid secrecy. The whole truth will come out, and it is more than possible that I shall have been released from my promise by then. In any case, I shall take the risk, and I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that an unmitigated young rascal has been exposed to his fellows."

Sinclair's last hope faded.

"You won't!" he gasped. "You daren't! I'll get my cousin to add things to that story. He'll include your wife in it——"

"That's enough, Sinclair!"

"Hang you, I'll say what I like!" snarled the panic-stricken prefect. "I'll hound you down until——"

Crash!

Mr. Stokes simply couldn't help it. It wasn't dignified, but flesh and blood can only stand a certain amount. He saw that leering, distorted face in front of him, and it was absolutely asking to be punched. Mr. Stokes had no power to stop himself.

He delivered a beautiful uppercut which gave him more satisfaction than anything he could ever remember. Guy Sinclair literally had his own words flung down his throat, and he was lifted clean off the ground by the force of the blow.

He crashed over backwards, gave a gurgle of dazed agony, and lay still. Mr. Stokes didn't even look at him. He walked off, trembling in every limb.

CHAPTER VII.

A MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH felt positively weak.

He had heard so much that his brain was quite confused. Two facts stood out only. Firstly, he knew that Guy Sinclair was a far greater rascal than anybody had believed, and secondly, his faith in Mr. Beverley Stokes was tremendously increased.

More than once he had felt like springing out of his concealment, and knocking Sinclair down. Only by a supreme effort of will-power had he restrained these warlike urgings. He had been thrilled through and through at the end, when Mr. Stokes had floored the rascally senior.

Even now Handforth couldn't move, for Sinclair was lying on the ground close by, groaning and cursing. It seemed an age before he dragged himself to his feet, and reeled off across the Triangle.

"By George!" breathed Handforth huskily. "The cad! The crook! The horrible beast! I'm blessed if I can understand why old Stokes didn't slaughter him on the spot. He's only a reptile, and reptiles ought to be exterminated."

He moved out of his corner and nearly fell headlong. His left leg had gone numb, and when he rested his weight upon it he simply collapsed. He lay there, suffering the peculiar tortures of "pins and needles," while his circulation restored itself.

"My hat!" he breathed. "Never had my leg go to sleep like that before. Must be something wrong with me!"

However, after a few minutes his alarm evaporated, and he was able to get back into the Ancient House. He didn't quite know what to do, but he certainly had no intention of keeping this information to himself. He couldn't have kept it to himself if he had tried. To begin with, he would take Church and McClure into his confidence——"

"What on earth's that?" said somebody.

Handforth pulled himself up with a jerk. He had reached the upper corridor and was within a few feet of his own dormitory. A figure loomed up, and revealed itself as Fenton of the Sixth.

"Only me," said Handforth breathlessly.

"What are you doing out here at midnight?" demanded the Captain of St. Frank's. "You ought to have been asleep hours ago."

"If it comes to that, what are you doing?"

"I've been having a long talk with Wilson and Biggleswade—— But why should I give you any explanations?" said Fenton warmly. "Unless you can give me a pretty good explanation——"

"Chuck it, Fenton!" interrupted Handforth. "I've made some startling discoveries. We'd better hold a meeting at once," he added, as a new idea came to him. "It's a vital matter, and we want to be fully represented, every Form."

"What in the world——"

"You, Browne, Hamilton, and even my minor!" went on Handforth tensely. "Then we shall have the skippers of all the Forms, except the Fourth, but we can't get Boots over from the Modern House. They're not worth counting over there, anyhow!" he added. "We've got to do something on the spot."

"We have!" agreed Fenton grimly. "At least, you have. The best thing you can do is to cool down and get to bed. You're excited about something, but it'll probably wait until to-morrow——"

"It won't wait a minute!" snorted Handforth. "I've found out why Sinclair has such power in the West House. I've discovered why Mr. Stokes allowed the beast to set himself up as a dictator. Now then!"

Even Fenton was somewhat impressed—but dubious, at the same time. He had heard of Handforth's discoveries before. In nine cases out of ten they had turned out to be mares' nests.

"Well, we can't talk here," he said. "Your voice is none too quiet, Handforth. Come along to my room——"

"Without wishing to intrude upon a perfectly private conversation, may I be allowed to ask if this nuisance is absolutely necessary?" inquired a plaintive voice from a neighbouring doorway. "Ah, Brother Fenton and Brother Handforth. I was already aware of the one, but not of the other. We are not in the midst of another revolt, I trust?"

"I thought he'd wake somebody!" growled Fenton. "Sorry, Browne—I tried to calm him, but you know what he is."

"Alas, too well!" sighed Browne.

"Look here, Handforth, we've had enough of this," went on the school captain. "Come along to my room and I'll give you two minutes to get it off your chest. You'd better come, too, Browne."

William Napoleon Browne wrapped his silken dressing-gown round himself, and nodded.

"An invitation, of course, is always welcome—but I should have come, in any case," he observed smoothly. "Something tells me that Brother Handforth is bursting with information. You will say that this information is unreliable. And I will grant that you are justified. But with my own peculiar intuition I detect the genuine from the counterfeit. In a word, I am prepared to wager that Brother Handforth is in possession of the genuine article."

"We shall soon know for certain," said Fenton briefly.

He led the way to his bed-room, but Browne hurried off to fetch Nipper, and Handforth penetrated the Third-Form dormitory, and raked out his minor. If anybody else had suggested the attendance of Willy, there would have been loud protests from Edward Oswald. But as it was one of his own ideas, it was naturally in perfect order. It was very seldom that Handforth found any use for his minor, but this time he was quite keen.

"I've got hold of some startling news, my lad," he said, as he hustled Willy out of the dormitory. "But, remember, no jawing from you! I'm taking you into my confidence because you might be useful."

"Thanks," said Willy. "All the same, it's a bit thick digging me out of bed for the sake of one of your illusions."

"You cheeky young ass! This is a big honour!" snorted his major. "You seem to have an uncanny influence over the Third, so it's important that you should know. You've got to work up a revolt before long—that's why you're being taken into the secret."

"Fine!" yawned Willy, without enthusiasm.

He hadn't an atom of faith in his major's "wonderful discoveries." He was quite prepared to learn that the whole thing was a mere phantasy. And when they arrived at Fenton's bed-room they found Dick Hamilton there.

"Good!" said Handforth briefly. "We're all here now. Willy, shut the door! I'm going to give you fellows a shock."

"We are well armoured," said Browne. "In fact, I can safely say that we are all shock-proof. But do your best, Brother Handforth. Proceed with the hair-raising details."

"Well, in the first place, Sinclair has been blackmailing old Stokes ever since the beginning of term," said Handforth impressively. "He found out that Stokes visited a rotten night-club on New Year's Eve, and

he forced Stokes to appoint him Head Prefect of the West House."

"Rats!" said Nipper bluntly.

"Piffle!" grunted Willy.

"Sounds a bit tall, at any rate," commented Fenton.

"It would be no exaggeration to say that the statement is somewhat perpendicular," remarked Browne. "At the same time, I am prepared to believe it. I have already observed the glint of truth in Brother Handforth's eye."

Edward Oswald glared.

"I'm glad somebody's got some sense, anyhow!" he growled. "If you don't believe me, you can go and eat coke! I'll conduct this affair myself!"

"But how do you know——" began Fenton.

"I heard everything," said Handforth eagerly.

And after a little inducement he condescended to explain the circumstances in detail. For once he found no necessity to colour his story—it was quite vivid enough without any of his assistance. And he told it with conviction, too. The others had seldom seen Handforth in such an earnest mood. They were compelled to believe him.

"Well, of course, this puts a different complexion on the whole thing," said Fenton gravely, when he had heard all. "We can understand why Mr. Stokes gave Sinclair such a lot of rope. But I don't quite like that bit about the night-club. If it hadn't been a disgraceful visit, why should Mr. Stokes suffer from Sinclair's blackmail?"

"He couldn't do anything else," pointed out Nipper shrewdly. "It's quite clear that Mr. Stokes' lips are sealed. He can't say anything until he's released from that promise. Poor chap! What a horrible fix to be in!"

"Let me suggest that we lock this secret within our hearts," put in Browne. "Let us stow it away, and turn the key. Merely out of respect for Mr. Stokes, we must honour his secret. And while appearing to be disinterested, we will be unknown sympathisers. Any monkey business, however, and we will give concrete evidence of our strength by joining the revolt."

"That's a serious step to consider," said Fenton quietly. "Mind you, there's no doubt that the West house was justified. We know it now with even greater conviction."

"Browne's right," said Nipper. "If this new Head tries to turn us against Stokes' men—well, we ought to point-blank refuse to have anything to do with it. I'm prepared to instigate a revolt in the Remove, anyhow. We've got to show Stokes that we're with him all along the line."

"Same here," agreed Willy. "I'll stand by with the Third. There's only got to be a signal, and you can rely on the Third to a man."

ANSWERS

Every Saturday. Price 2d

"And the Fifth, of course, is naturally obedient to my slightest whim," commented Browne. "A whisper from me, and the Fifth is at my beck and call. And this, let me assure you, has been accomplished by kindness alone."

Even Fenton—notwithstanding his responsibility as Captain of the School—could not hold out against such unanimous enthusiasm. He agreed that he would have the Sixth ready if the rest of the Ancient House leaders decided upon a sympathetic rebellion.

But if Simon Kenmore's word was anything to go upon, there would be no need of further revolt. Commander Sampson Rudd was the one man to settle the trouble

seacoast home, just beyond Caistowe. There had been a sharp frost in the early hours, and it still held. The air was crisp and invigorating.

The commander's butler was superintending the fixing of baggage on a somewhat ancient touring-car. The footman was "stepping lively" in obedience to orders, and both he and the butler had the appearance of old salts.

Commander Rudd's household was a curious one.

Like many seafaring men, he was a bachelor, and he had no particular use for women. In fact, the only woman in his household was the housekeeper—and she was the wife of his gardener. Incidentally,



Guy Sinclair literally had his own words flung down his throat, and he was lifted clean off the ground by the force of the blow.

with quiet dignity and common-sense expedition.

But how could the school be prepared for the unexpected?

CHAPTER VIII.

A SURPRISING DEVELOPMENT.



STEP lively, ye lubber—step lively!"

"'I, 'i, sir!"

The household of Commander Sampson Rudd was in a state of subdued excitement. It was morning, and the February sunshine was glinting through the windows of the comfortable

the gardener was a retired merchant seaman.

The chauffeur, the butler, and the footman were all men who had spent their earlier years on the seven seas. The household itself smacked of the foam, and indoors there wasn't a room without a tang of the sea about it.

"Everything's all right, sir?" asked the footman.

"Sink my anchor! There's never a thing right with you lubbers about!" retorted the butler, in a growling voice. "Get aboard, and bring Jiggs ashore! And look lively, me lad."

"'I, 'i, sir!" said the footman, saluting. Commander Rudd's butler was an autocrat

in himself. Indeed, visitors to the household were inclined to believe that the butler was of more importance than the master. Captain Phineas Boom was a man who fitted his name to an extraordinary degree.

He was an old merchant skipper, a man who had sailed the seas in every type of craft afloat—a man who had a supreme contempt for “steam.” In spite of his sixty years, he was as active as a man half his age. Short, stocky, and broad-shouldered, he looked well in uniform, and he was the proud owner of a head of curly red hair. There was scarcely a grey one amongst them. His face was ruddy and weather-beaten, and clean-shaven, except for an aggressive tuft at the end of his chin. His eyes were overshadowed by immense, bushy brows.

He had been with Commander Rudd ever since the latter's retirement—a matter of ten years, or more. And even the commander himself was afraid of this aggressive old sea-dog.

“Avast, there!” he roared, as a man appeared at the front door. “Takin’ your time, Jiggs, ain’t you?”

“The commander ain’t ready yet, cap’n,” said Jiggs.

“It’s none o’ your business whether the commander’s ready or whether he ain’t!” retorted Captain Boom. “Your place is in this landlubber’s craft!” he added, with a contemptuous glance at the car. “Get aboard, an’ no back answers!”

Jiggs came down the steps gingerly, for they were rather frosty. He was a wizened little man, all bones and sinew. He had been the commander's body servant for over twenty-five years—on sea and land. Now that he was ashore for good, he preferred to call himself a valet. He and Captain Boom understood one another perfectly. In fact, they were the greatest of friends when off duty, and spent many an hour together of an evening.

Peter Jiggs got into the car, and seated himself in front.

“No particular hurry, cap’n,” he said, in an aggrieved voice.

“The whole thing’s wrong!” declared the butler, with a glare. “By all the sharks! It’s a pity if we can’t have a quiet time in port without the commander starting off on another voyage! A school, hey? I could deal with them boys better than the commander any day!”

“Like as rot’ you could, cap’n,” agreed Jiggs, nodding.

“At his time o’ life he ought to settle down, and keep his anchor fixed,” went on Captain Boom aggressively. “But what’s the use? I’ve talked to him, but it’s not a bit o’ good. By grog! I’d like half a chance to settle them boys myself! I’d show ‘em!”

“You would, cap’n, an’ it’s no good sayin’ you wouldn’t,” nodded Jiggs.

“Discipline—that’s what them young lubbers want!” roared the skipper. “I’ve always held that the commander’s been too lenient—too soft, in a way of speakin’. Like iron, is he? If they want iron, Jiggs, I’d show ‘em the real thing!”

“Oh, well, it’s no good talkin’,” said Peter Jiggs. “The commander says he’ll be back within the week. He’s the man for the job, cap’n—no good sayin’ he ain’t!”

“May I be mistook for a derelict?” snorted Captain Boom. “So that’s your tone, is it? I’m the man for the job, Jiggs—but what chance have I got? Not one in a thousand! An’ who’s to look after you while you’re away? Sink my rum rations! You’ll be up to mischief at that school, I’ll be bound!”

Jiggs smiled peacefully. He was just gloating over the thought that he would escape the attentions of Captain Boom for a spell. They were bosom friends, but a relief was welcome now and again.

It was one of Captain Boom’s pet vanities that he was a much stronger man than his master. And he had always held that he could control boys with much greater success. He had first met the commander when the latter was in control of a training ship, and he had always felt that he could have tackled the job in a far more able manner.

He was feeling indignant now. His master’s acceptance of the deputy head-mastership of St. Frank’s was against his own wishes. He considered the whole thing a nuisance. Anything that interrupted the even tenour of the household was a nuisance to Captain Boom.

And here was the commander starting off on a mission to a public school! If it had been a sea voyage, the captain wouldn’t have minded so much. But even so, he would have raised strong objections unless he was included in the trip.

That was his main grievance now. The commander was merely taking his body servant, while Boom was to be left in charge of the house. He didn’t like it at all. But although he made a lot of noise, he knew that it was useless. Commander Rudd was the man at the helm, in spite of all appearances.

The captain glanced at an enormous watch.

“Near to five bells, and he hasn’t appeared over the horizon!” he said gruffly. “Where’s that lubber who steers this craft, too? Things never go right aboard this ship! Always something wrong.”

“No good sayin’ there ain’t,” muttered Mr. Jiggs.

“May I look like a barnacle!” roared the skipper. “I want no back answers from you—”

“Quarrelling again?” asked Commander Rudd, from the top of the steps. “Upon my soul! You two are always arguing. I’m surprised at you, Boom. Can’t you

give Jiggs some peace just before he leaves?"

The stocky old skipper drew himself up and saluted.

"All ready for sailin', sir!" he said briskly. "Jiggs, ye wizened up lump o' tarpaulin, get down the gangway, and stand at attention! I do nothing but learn ye manners!"

Peter Jiggs promptly tumbled out of the car, and opened one of the rear doors. And at that moment Commander Sampson Rudd slipped on the frosty steps and the whole course of events at St. Frank's was changed.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN BOOM'S ERRAND.



COMMANDER RUDD did the thing thoroughly.

It was his left leg that started the trouble. There was just a touch of rheumatism in that leg, although the commander would not admit it. He set his foot on the step heavily, and the slippery surface betrayed him.

The next second he went hurtling from top to bottom—no slight accident for a man of his heaviness and age. It was over before his servants could get anywhere near him. He lay at the bottom of the steps, groaning.

"Howlin' typhoons!" ejaculated Captain Boom, rushing forward. "Avast there, Jiggs! The commander's sunk! Throw a line, blame ye!"

"Looks bad!" panted Mr. Jiggs.

They were by their master's side in no time, and tenderly hoisted him into a sitting posture. The commander was breathing hard, but he was still quite conscious of what was going on.

"Those infernal steps!" he muttered, between his teeth. "It's all right, Boom—I'm not blaming you. Confound it, my leg—Whoa! Steady, Jiggs—steady! Something broken, by the feel of it!"

There was no doubt that the commander's accident was serious. His face was screwed with agony, and when his men attempted to lift him further, he bade them cease. He sat there, breathing heavily, his face rather pale.

"Best fetch a doctor, sir," suggested Jiggs, with concern. "It won't take me many minutes——"

"No, Jiggs—it's not so bad as that," muttered Commander Rudd. "I'm better now. I think it's only a sprain. But I shall be laid up, confound it, for days. It's the left leg—and that leg's always a nuisance."

"A reg'lar nasty affair, sir," agreed Mr. Jiggs. "You'd best lend a hand, cap'n. We'll take the commander aboard straight away. He don't look any too good, and it's no good sayin' he do!"

By this time the chauffeur and the gardener had come up, and between them all they carried the injured man indoors. The whole household was in a state of excitement and alarm. Just a trivial accident—a skid on a frosty step—and all the St. Frank's governors' well-laid plans were set at naught! Fate engineers some curious pranks.

In spite of the commander's orders, a doctor was telephoned for at once, and when he arrived on the scene he found Captain Boom and Peter Jiggs applying cold water bandages to an alarmingly swollen ankle. The doctor made a swift examination.

"No bones broken," he said, with relief. "But it must have been a nasty fall, commander!"

"Yes, it shook me up pretty badly," admitted the patient. "Any chance of getting out soon, doctor? I've got an important engagement to-day——"

"Good heavens, man, you can't move for a fortnight!" said the doctor. "Even then you'll have to go about in a bath chair. I don't want to alarm you, but it'll be a couple of months before you can walk without a limp."

"But a sprained ankle——" protested the commander.

"Sounds simple, but it isn't—not in your case, anyhow," said the doctor. "I shan't let you move for three days—much less go out anywhere. Your only chance of recovery is to rest that leg for two or three weeks. You're not a young man, commander, and when the muscles are strained to this extent they're pretty awkward customers. You're going straight to bed."

"Well, I've got to obey orders, I suppose," said the commander reluctantly.

"It's not a matter of supposition—I know you too well to leave you to yourself," said the doctor grimly. "Man alive, what about these bruises? You're simply black and blue! You'll be as stiff as a rod within an hour."

The medical man did not treat all his patients in this fashion. But he had had experience of Commander Sampson Rudd—and unless he used the most emphatic language, the commander was liable to ignore him. And in this case the doctor was wholly in earnest.

Half an hour later the commander was in bed—and glad to be there. He was beginning to realise that he was crooked for many a week. Not only his ankle, but his leg up to the knee was swelling ominously. And the agony, when he shifted it, convinced him that he had better go easy.

"Well, Boom, this is a nice kettle of fish!" he said, after the doctor had gone. "I gave my word that I'd be at St. Frank's by eleven o'clock in the forenoon. What's to be done? They're relying upon me—and I'm stuck here helpless."

"There's no denyin' you're derelict, sir," agreed the skipper. "Maybe I'd better use the telephone——"

"I shouldn't like you to do that, Boom," said the commander, with a wince of pain. "I shall send you to St. Frank's—you'll leave at once. You'll take a written message from me, and you'll make personal apologies to Sir James Henson. He's waiting for me now."

"I, 'i, sir!" said Captain Boom.

"You'll explain exactly what happened, and tell Sir James how impossible it is for me to be there," went on the commander. "But I don't take much notice of the doctor. Tell Sir James that I shall be at St. Frank's within three or four days—"

"Sink me for a shark!" interrupted the skipper. "Ye'll never do it, sir!"

"I'll trouble you, Boom, to allow me to know my own mind!" snapped the commander. "I've accepted this appointment, and I'm going to stand by my word! If I have to be carried in on a stretcher, I'll be at St. Frank's before the end of the week."

"It's too much for ye, sir."

"You'll go off without any delay," continued the injured man. "You'll take Jiggs with you, and take possession of my quarters. Stay there until I arrive, Boom. It's rather a good idea—you'll make things home-like for me before I turn up. And if Sir James wants to make use of you—consider yourself under his orders."

Captain Boom knew better than to raise any objections. He knew every one of his master's moods, and he knew that there would be no getting out of this affair. He was particularly indignant at the thought of placing himself under the orders of a stranger. But he saluted, and grunted his assent.

Then he made his preparations. In a very short space of time he changed his clothes—donning a full skipper's uniform—a gorgeous outfit with brass buttons and any amount of gold braid. Captain Boom never left his master's premises unless he was in uniform. It was one of his fads. By the time he was ready he looked even more impressive than the commander himself.

"We've got orders to sail for this blamed school, Jiggs!" he said, when he went downstairs. "May I never cross the Line again if this ain't an indignity! Don't stand there starin', ye lubber! Get aboard, an' see that the steersman's at the helm!"

"I, 'i, sir!" said Mr. Jiggs.

Five minutes later they were rattling off for St. Frank's in the somewhat ancient touring car, and within half an hour they had arrived. Jiggs remained in the hall while Captain Boom was escorted to the Head's study. It happened that Tubbs, the Ancient House pageboy, was on the spot, and it was he who ushered the visitor in.

"Commander Sampson Rudd, sir!" he announced importantly.

Tubbs had made a purely natural mistake. Captain Boom had made no mention of his name, but Tubbs had made free use

of his ears during the morning, and he was well aware that Commander Rudd was expected.

"Welcome to St. Frank's, Commander Rudd!" exclaimed Sir James Henson, rising from his chair, and coming forward with extended hand. "I feel that a great load has been lifted from my shoulders. On behalf of the Governing Board, I can assure you that we have every confidence in your abilities to quell this lamentable revolt—and to conduct the school with success until Dr. Stafford is well enough to return."

Captain Phineas Boom opened his mouth to speak, but for once his tongue was tied. This was about the last thing he had expected—but he was not entirely unconscious of the honour. The gentleman had mistaken him for his master! It was partly Tubbs' fault, but Sir James was evidently impressed by the skipper's appearance.

Quite privately, Sir James had felt a certain tinge of astonishment at the weather-beaten appearance of this distinguished officer. He had expected to see a more refined-looking man. But the skipper's uniform, and his general air of authority, made it impossible for Sir James to dream that he was making a mistake. He could not be blamed for taking Captain Boom for his eminent master. Incidentally, Sir James was short-sighted.

If the other governors had remained at St. Frank's, this confusion could never have occurred. Sir James, of course, had never seen either Commander Rudd or Captain Boom.

"The honour's mine, sir," stammered the skipper, at length, as he took the extended hand. "I'm here to obey orders. I've come aboard this craft with the determination to do my duty until she's seaworthy again."

"Er—exactly," said Sir James mildly. "A somewhat quaint expression, Commander Rudd, but I gather your meaning."

"But ye've made a little mistake," went on Captain Boom, as he sat down. "The fact is, I'm not prepared to take full command—"

"Nonsense, sir," interrupted Sir James, in sudden alarm. "General Milton and Sir John Brent have informed me that everything is arranged. You cannot back out of it now, commander! Under no circumstances can I countenance such a thing. This crisis is vital. A firm hand is absolutely necessary without a minute's delay! You must take control from this minute onwards."

Captain Boom uttered a kind of hoarse roar. His ruddy face became intensely flushed, and he stared at Sir James with gleaming eyes. An idea had come to him—a sudden, devastating idea. For a moment, he was taken off his feet, but he was no fool.

He had been mistaken for Commander Sampson Rudd. Sir James was perfectly

willing to place the school under his control! What a chance to show what he could do when it came to controlling boys!

It was the opportunity he had been waiting for for years—the opportunity he had never expected. There was no fear of an interruption from the commander, for that unfortunate mariner couldn't arrive at St. Frank's for three or four days, at the earliest—and having sent Boom in advance, he would make no inquiries when Boom failed to return. Besides, Boom could ring him up, and obviate any such contretemps.

"Take control from this minute, ye say?" he roared. "Sink me for a derelict! Take me to the bridge, an' I'll assume command!"

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLE IN THE REMOVE FORM-ROOM.



MR. CROWELL rapped his desk sharply.

"This is too bad!" he exclaimed, with suppressed indignation. "I have never known such restlessness! Handforth, how many more times must I

speak to you? De Valerie, don't shift about like that! Fullwood, behave yourself! This is getting beyond all endurance."

The Remove, or at least, the Ancient House half of the Remove, was certainly very restless. It was close upon time for dismissal, and none of the fellows could settle themselves to work.

One reason for this was the condition of the West House. The fellows were far more interested in the rebels than in their work. Lessons grated upon them when they knew that so many of their Form fellows were enjoying the thrills and uncertainties of a barring-out.

But the present acute restlessness was mainly caused by the throbbing of a motor-car. Everybody had heard it passing under Big Arch, and going on across the inner court to the Head's private residence.

There had been all sorts of wild rumours that morning. Nobody knew anything definitely, except the one concrete fact that a deputy headmaster had been appointed, and would be arriving before lunch.

At one time several of the juniors had scrambled to the windows to look out, and Mr. Crowell had been obliged to distribute lines with a heavy hand.

Handforth was the worst culprit. Mr. Crowell had given him lines until he was tired of it. He had caned him twice, but these punishments made no difference. Handforth was still as bad as ever.

When he wasn't whispering to Church he was whispering to McClure, and now and again he would forget himself, and call to somebody across the Form-room. And on six distinct occasions Mr. Crowell had com-

manded him to sit down. And he was up again now.

"Handforth, I am getting positively hoarse!" said Mr. Crowell plaintively. "I have punished you until the very word is meaningless, and you show absolutely no signs of improvement. Sit down, sir!"

"But I'm not the only one, sir!" protested Handforth. "We're all anxious to know what's happening—"

"Handforth, will you sit down?"

"Certainly, sir; but—"

"I do not wish to enter into an argument."

"There's a motor-car outside, sir—"

"Handforth," stormed Mr. Crowell, "leave this room!"

"Eh?" gasped Edward Oswald. "You—you mean—"

"I am no longer able to stand you, Handforth!" roared Mr. Crowell. "I am positively exhausted. Go at once! I will attend to you when I have more strength. I have never been so disturbed!"

"But I don't want to worry you, sir—"

"Will you leave quietly, Handforth, or shall I throw you out?" shouted the Form-master furiously. "This incident shall reach the ears of Mr. Lee—make no mistake of that! Go, sir!"

"Oh, well—"

"This very instant!"

Handforth left his seat and departed from the Form-room. He badly wanted to get out, but he had had no wish to leave in this fashion. He was extremely softhearted, and Mr. Crowell's plaintive tone had touched him. His one desire was to remain, and to keep silent, in respect of Mr. Crowell's wishes.

But it was too late now, and he walked moodily down the passage and turned into the lobby. Then he wandered out of the School House, took a glance under Big Arch, and grunted when he saw no waiting car. Evidently it had been taken away to the garage, or had left the school premises altogether.

He had no further interest in the new Head. All his thoughts were with Mr. Crowell, and wondering how he could make amends. There was something humiliating in being turned out like a naughty child. It was almost as bad as being told to stand in the corner.

Handforth went hot all over as he thought of it, and he entered the Ancient House. He didn't even think of going into the Square to see how the rebels were getting on. Yet all that morning he had positively fumed for an opportunity to hear the latest.

Just inside the Ancient House lobby he heard a footstep, and looked up. Then he paused, confused.

"Hallo! What are you doing out here before lessons are over?" asked a cheerful, pleasant voice. "And don't you look glum.

Cheer up, Ted, things aren't so bad as all that!"

The newcomer was Mary Summers, Mr. Beverley Stokes' charming niece. She was looking just a little more serious than usual, but she still retained the merry twinkle in her dark eyes. There was something very fresh and winsome about her.

"I—I— Oh, as a matter of fact, I just came out for a stroll!" stammered Handforth.

"Do you usually come out for strolls like this?"

"Well, not exactly," admitted Handforth. "The fact is, I upset old Crowell, and he hoofed me out. I deserved it, too!" he went on gruffly. "I didn't realise it at the time, but I drove the poor old chap almost off his rocker. I don't like being turned out."

Mary looked at him gravely. There was something very simple about Handforth, for all his aggressiveness. If he ever did anything wrong his first task was to blurt out his guilt to somebody. His honest conscience wouldn't allow him to retain any guilty secret.

"You mustn't worry," said Mary softly. "Just wait until Mr. Crowell comes out, and then apologise to him. He's quite a good sort; he won't keep up any ill-feeling. Have you heard about the new Head?"

Handforth felt more cheerful.

"No, what's he like?" he asked eagerly. "That's what the row was about, really. We've all been keen on hearing the latest."

"Well, I haven't actually seen him, but Tubbs has," replied Mary. "And Tubbs says he's enormously broad and terribly fierce. A man with red hair, and gleaming uniform. He's a naval commander, you know."

"Then that last rumour was right?" asked Handforth, taking a deep breath. "My only hat! Fancy appointing a giddy sailor as Head of St. Frank's!"

"But it's only a temporary thing, of course," said Mary. "It's quite likely he'll do wonders."

"Yes, if he sets to work the right way," admitted Handforth. "The only thing is to give the rebels a hearing, and settle the thing peaceably. But look here, what about your uncle and aunt? Is it absolutely definite that Mr. Stokes is sacked?"

"He wasn't sacked," said Mary indignantly. "He resigned!"

"It sounds better like that—but it comes to the same thing," declared Edward Oswald. "It means that we're going to lose him, doesn't it? And that means we'll lose Mrs. Stokes, too, and you!"

"Oh, I shall be going soon, anyhow."

"I say, how rotten!" grunted Handforth. "Why couldn't you join the Moor View School?"

"There's even a possibility of that," smiled Mary. "Uncle Barry isn't leaving at once, though. We're all staying on for a week, until this trouble's all over."

"And what then?"

"I'm afraid uncle will have to leave for good."

"It's a shame!" snorted Handforth, with gleaming eyes. "Mr. Stokes is O.K. It wasn't his fault that the West House revolted. It was that blackmailing Sinclair—"

"Blackmailing!" echoed Mary, grasping his arm. "Oh! I always thought—". She paused, and looked at him with sudden alarm. "What do you know, Ted?" she asked.

"Nun-nothing!" stammered Handforth. "Only what I've always thought, you know. Sinclair's a beast. And your uncle's as true as a die. If you think we're going to let him go, you're wrong!"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Well, just between ourselves, the Ancient House isn't going to stand by and see your uncle sacked," replied Handforth grimly. "Unless he's asked to withdraw his resignation there'll be another revolt. And that's not a rumour, either!"

Mary was about to ask him some eager questions when the Triangle became filled with sounds. The juniors had dismissed, and were pouring out of the School House. Indeed, before Mary could say anything, Nipper came bustling in. He removed his cap at once.

"Hallo, Mary!" he said cheerfully. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting?"

"No, I was here before time," replied Mary, with sparkling eyes. "Oh, Dick, I wonder if you could wait a minute while I fetch some money? I forgot all about it—"

"You don't want any money," said Nipper. "Use mine—"

"Only lendings," interrupted Mary. "I've got to buy some things for Aunt Joyce, and—"

Handforth stood there, utterly blank. Mary had seized Nipper's arm, and they were both hurrying off across the Triangle, and he had been left flat. Even Handforth's slow-moving brain appreciated the fact that he was a mere nothing now that Nipper had come along. Why, Mary hadn't even said good-bye. She didn't even care tuppence about him.

"My only hat!" he muttered dully.

"Oh, here you are, Handy!" said Church, running up with McClure. "Hallo! Something happened?" he added, giving his leader a curious glance.

"It's only Mary!" said McClure with a snort. "She's just gone off with Nipper. It's no good, Handy, you've got to acknowledge facts when they're staring you in the face. Nipper's the chap she's keen on."

Take my advice, and pay some attention to Irene. You've starved her for weeks; the poor girl's going thin. Isn't it about time you woke up?"

He dodged, expecting one of his leader's rights. But Handforth was gazing dreamily into nothingness. A warm light had come into his eyes, a tender light. That idea of McClure's wasn't so bad after all. Why on earth had he neglected Irene for so long?

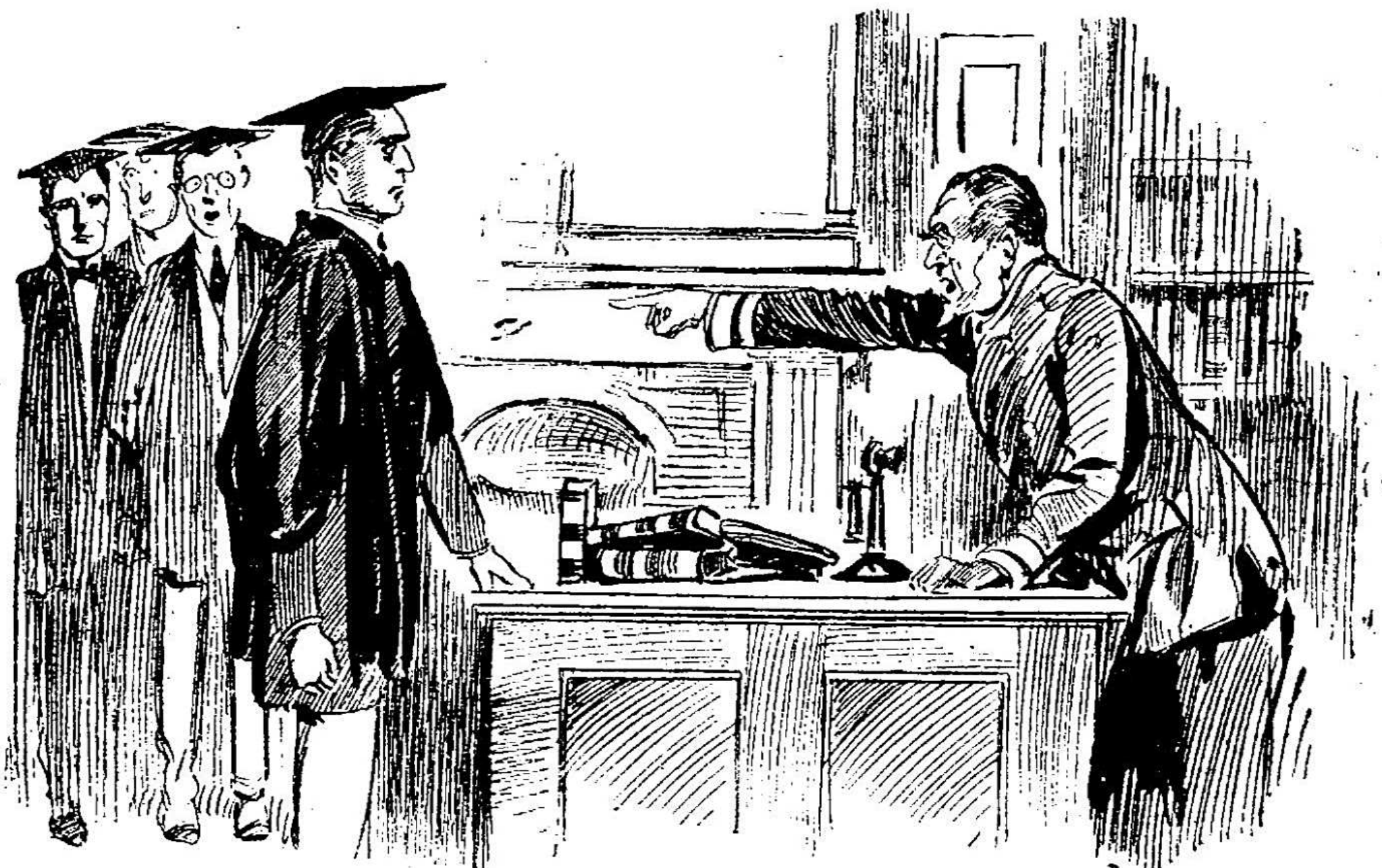
Mary Summers was a ripping girl, of course, but when it came to a comparison with Irene Manners—

Handforth took a deep breath and gave a happy sigh.

think careful, or you'll have the commander to reckon with."

"By the time I've done, the commander will be ready to admit that I'm the man for the job!" declared Captain Boom with confidence. "Sink my rum rations! Look cheerful, ye old land crab! This thing's the biggest command I've ever tackled. An' I'll steer safely into port, too!"

They were both standing in the neat suite of rooms which had been set aside for Commander Rudd's benefit. Captain Boom was gaining more confidence every minute, and he was gloating over this opportunity to show his authority over schoolboys. One of the dreams of his life had come true.



"Howling blizzards!" thundered the Captain. "So ye'll insult me, will ye? You're dismissed the ship!"

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTAIN BOOM TAKES COMMAND.



MR. PETER JIGGS looked thoroughly scared.

"It's a chance in a lifetime, Jiggs, an' I simply couldn't miss it!" Captain Boom was saying.

"As long as you don't let on, I'm safe. I'm in command of the whole blamed fleet, and it won't take me long to settle this mutiny in one o' the craft."

"Mebbe not, cap'n, but ain't it risky?" asked Jiggs, in an awed voice. "Seems to me you're takin' on a big order. You'd best

"But ain't it dangerous?" repeated Jiggs, his wizened face alight with keen anxiety. "I ain't thinking o' meself, cap'n; I'm thinkin' o' you. Trust me to keep mum. But what about this Sir James? It won't take him long to smell a rat, an' it's no good sayin' it will!"

"By grog!" breathed the skipper. "I forgot, Jiggs; you wasn't born with any brains, was you? Haven't I told you that Sir James is leavin' dock to-day? He's sailin' for London within the hour. I've got the place in my own hands!"

"Oh, well, if you say it's all right, I'm game enough!" said Mr. Jiggs, without taking offence. "But you're wrong, cap'n. It won't be no easy matter to deal with

these schoolboys. I've heard enough of 'em. Terrors. No good saying they ain't!"

"Terrors or not, they'll soon stand by when I start on 'em!" declared Captain Boom grimly. "Mutineers, by hurricanes! An' me a skipper who's never taken lip from any man who's ever sailed before the mast. Boys? By the key of Davy Jones' locker. D'ye think I'm scared o' boys?"

Mr. Jiggs was convinced at last, and he entered into the spirit of the adventure. As the captain pointed out, it wasn't his mistake. Sir James Henson had taken him for Commander Rudd, and was willing to leave the school in his hands. He had practically ordered him to assume command. And Commander Rudd himself had told Boom to take any orders that were given him. So the skipper felt that he was perfectly safe.

Later on, too, he would receive commendation from all. His master would praise him for stepping into his shoes at a crucial moment, and the school Governors would overwhelm him with rewards for dealing with the mutiny in a masterly way. Captain Boom was out to show what he could do! And he meant to have no half and half business about this job!

But for his supreme optimism about the outcome, he might have hesitated. He was so certain of deputising successfully for Commander Rudd that he entered into the affair with zest. It was a splendid opportunity to justify many an argument he had had with his employer. And as nothing but good could come of it, he was on the right course.

Immediately after lunch the school was given instructions to collect in Big Hall without delay. There were no laggards. From the smallest fag to the most dignified senior, the school congregated with eager speed. The only absentees were the inhabitants of the West House—and they thought it rather unnecessary to attend. For a very obvious reason, they remained aloof.

Captain Boom had spent an anxious hour with Sir James Henson, particularly during lunch. Sir James had given him all the information he could regarding the situation, but had assured the new Head that the various Housemasters would give him particulars in full detail.

The captain was well able to hold his own during lunch, as far as table manners went. He had served the commander as a butler for so long that he was not likely to err in this respect. So any fears that Sir James may have had were allayed by the skipper's perfect deportment at table.

Sir James merely set him down as a rough and ready sailor. His reputation was sufficient guarantee that he was the right man. Moreover, the chairman of the Governors had arranged this temporary appointment with his own lips.

It was all very confusing to Sir James, and he was relieved when he handed the captain over to Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Goole and Nelson Lee. He was anxious to return to London, where he had business interests. He and the other Governors were content to leave St. Frank's in the hands of the commander. They had no desire to come down again until peace was fully restored.

The school received "Commander Rudd" with astonishment. After all the rumours, they had expected to see a somewhat remarkable man—but hardly a weather-beaten sea-dog of this type.

The fellows very dutifully gave him a cheer when he was introduced, and they were rather disappointed when he failed to make a speech. The order for dismissal came, and the school trooped out to discuss the newcomer.

Sir James caught the early afternoon train, and left Captain Boom in sole possession of the Head's residence. The other masters held themselves ready for a conference—which they confidently expected. But no summons came, and there were many conjectures.

"I confess that I cannot quite understand it," said Mr. Stockdale, as he chatted with Nelson Lee in the latter's study. "Surely, the new Head will commence operations by holding a full inquiry?"

"One would imagine so," agreed Nelson Lee.

"And yet he has scarcely discussed the problem at all!" said Mr. Stockdale. "Sir James introduced him to us, and he has now retired into complete privacy, and makes no move."

"I am very puzzled," said Nelson Lee, frowning. "I find it difficult to believe that this man has thoroughly satisfied the Governors. I am not doubting his ability, or his integrity. But he is scarcely the sort of individual to associate with his own reputation."

"But there can be no mistake, surely?"

"No, no—I am not suggesting that," said Nelson Lee. "But it is quite a number of years since Commander Rudd retired. Unfortunately, many men deteriorate after they leave active service behind. I am only hoping that the commander still retains his old characteristics. But, at a rough venture, I should certainly hazard that he is not the man he was. He shows every sign of a coarsening process."

"Drink, perhaps?" suggested Mr. Stockdale, shocked.

"I am casting no aspersions upon the gentleman's character," smiled Nelson Lee. "I am merely saying that I am rather disappointed in him. I fear the boys will not engender much respect for him. It was absolutely essential that we should have a man of culture and refinement."

"Commander Rudd was obviously a man of that type in earlier years," agreed Mr.

Stockdale. "Otherwise he would not have his splendid reputation. But, judging by the man himself, I agree with you that he shows signs of deterioration."

In the meantime, Captain Boom decided upon action.

He was not inclined to copy the commander's methods. He had no belief in holding lengthy inquiries and long-winded investigations. His policy was to strike, and reduce an enemy to terror by sheer force. This system had never failed on board his own ships, in earlier years. Inquiries were no good when a deck-hand became unruly. It was force or nothing.

But the skipper failed to differentiate between the uncouth sailors of a past decade and the refined boys of a modern public school.

He knew that the West House was in revolt—that the boys had barricaded themselves within the building, and would not surrender. In the skipper's opinion, there was only one thing to be done—and that was to rout them out by force.

Tact was the one quality needed to deal with this critical situation, and tact was the one quality which Captain Boom lacked. There was every indication that trouble was brewing.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPREADING FLAME.



CLANG-CLANG-CLANG!

It was the big school-bell ringing—not for afternoon lessons, but to summon the entire school into Big Hall. Once again the fellows were obliged to gather in that huge apartment—and this time they felt that they would be well rewarded.

The new Head was going to start something!

Guy Sinclair was shivering in his shoes. More than once he had thought about taking Kenmore's advice, and bolting. Mr. Stokes was no longer to be intimidated, and Sinclair could see nothing but disaster ahead.

The Ancient House fellows were particularly keen. Fenton and Browne were anxious, too. They were quite willing to lead the seniors into a sympathetic revolt, if the occasion demanded, but they were far more desirous of maintaining peace.

The juniors were thoroughly excited. There was a general feeling in the air that this was to be an eventful afternoon. Even the West House was agog with suspense. The rebels had been inactive for so long that they were positively eager for something to happen. Idleness was the one factor which would reduce all enthusiasm to a minimum.

"There's bound to be something come out of this," Morrow declared, as he dis-

cussed the matter with Pitt. "We shall probably be called to an inquiry later on. This new man won't be mad enough to start any violence. We're too well entrenched."

"It'll be rather a pity if it fizzles out, though," said Reggie Pitt, with a grin. "We've got some splendid defensive methods now, and it'll be a shame not to use 'em!"

In Big Hall, the crowd waited impatiently for the new Headmaster to appear. Practically all the other masters were on the platform, but Captain Boom himself delayed his appearance. He had decided to assume a quick-fire action—one that would electrify the school.

Even the Modern House and the East House were beginning to arouse themselves from their lukewarm condition. So far, they had taken very little interest in the rebellion. They considered that it was beyond their own province, being on the other side of the Triangle.

Captain Boom strode on to the platform just when the school was beginning to grow restive. In spite of his stocky figure, he looked rather impressive as he stumped to the edge of the platform.

"I'm not a man o' words," he roared, in his powerful voice. "I've taken command o' this fleet to restore order—an', by all the sharks, I mean to do it! There's one ship with a mutinous crew aboard, an' we're goin' to storm her an' get aboard."

The school gasped.

"There's no half-measures about me," went on the skipper grimly. "Every boy who doesn't belong to the Ancient House can get back to his own ship. All the others stay here."

There was considerable confusion for a short time, but there could be no mistaking the order. The Modern House and the East House fellows dismissed. By the time they had all gone Big Hall was looking somewhat empty.

"That's what I like to see—swift action!" said Captain Boom approvingly. "Now, you young lubbers will take orders. Those mutineers have got to be routed out, an' it's your job to do it!"

The Ancient House gave a snort of disapproval.

"Not likely!"

"You can't use us as strike-breakers!"

"Why don't you hold an inquiry?"

"Sink my anchor!" thundered Captain Boom. "What's this? Silence, you mutinous swabs! Ye'll obey orders, or I'll come down there and teach ye something! Silence!"

The excited fellows cooled down.

"One moment, Commander Rudd," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Don't you think this policy is rather unwise? Surely, there can be no peace if you set one section of the boys against the other?"

"I was about to say the same thing," put in Mr. Stockdale tensely.

They both spoke in low voices, so that their words could not carry beyond the

platform. Captain Boom looked round, and his eyebrows bristled. The tuft on his chin stuck out.

"I want no advice from my officers!" he retorted. "I'm skipper of this craft, an' I've never taken lip from an officer yet! By sharks! Ye'll stand back, an' leave this to me!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Stockdale, aghast.

He glanced at Lee, and there was a world of alarm in his eyes. Nelson Lee had no wish to precipitate a scene in front of the boys, so he wisely stood back.

"As for you lubbers, look lively!" roared the captain, turning back to the school. "Get ashore, an' hold yourself ready for action. Any young idiot who refuses to obey orders will be put in irons!"

The Ancient House was taken utterly by surprise. Never for a moment had they believed that they would be called upon to storm the West House. The thing was impossible. All their sympathies were with the rebels, and it was hardly likely they would fight—even at the orders of this new headmaster.

"Up, the Remove!" yelled Handforth. "Now then, Browne—now then, Fenton. Don't forget our arrangement! We're not going to stand this sort of thing, I suppose? Let's join the rebels!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with tyranny!"

Big Hall was filled with a confused roar of angry voices, and even the Third-Formers were as keen as the others upon action. Willy Handforth had primed them up well in advance.

In the midst of the commotion, Fenton ran forward.

"One moment, Commander Ruld!" he said grimly.

In an instant Big Hall was silent. The Ancient House waited breathlessly for Fenton to go on. He was the Head Boy, and they were eager to take their cue from him. Moreover, Fenton was Captain of the whole school—and the most popular in all St. Frank's.

"What's this?" roared the skipper. "Get back to the fo'c'sle, ye mutinous dog! I'll take no—"

"I'd just like to point out, sir, that it is absolutely impossible for me to advise any of these boys to engage in a battle against the West House," said Fenton earnestly. "It would be most unfair—and very dangerous. Please reconsider your decision, sir."

"Howling typhoons!" thundered the skipper. "Raging cyclones! What's this? Who do you happen to be, you half-baked son of a landlubber?"

Fenton staggered slightly. He was hardly prepared to hear himself referred to in that way by the Head. The rest of the school was startled, and the masters were positively aghast.

"I am the Captain of the School, sir," said Fenton coldly. "I know a good deal about the whole situation, and I strongly suggest a full inquiry into the cause of the trouble. Mr. Stokes has been dismissed, and it would be a big step in the right direction if you reinstated him until a fair investigation has been made——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Stokes!"

"HURRAH!"

The Ancient House fellows yelled themselves hoarse, and Barry Stokes, hearing those cheers in Big Hall, wondered what they meant. He would have taken heart if he had known that they were for him.

"Stop!" roared Captain Boom. "Avast there! Enough of this blamed mutiny. Mr. Stokes was paid off by the owners, an' he'll not be signed on again by me. An' ye'll obey my orders, or——"

"Hear that?" hooted Handforth. "He won't do anything about Mr. Stokes, and we've got to obey his orders. Yah! We're not going to obey a bounder of this sort!"

"Not likely!" shouted Nipper. "Come on, Remove! Let's show the way to the others. We'll do the same as the West House—and hold a barring-out!"

"Hurrah!"

"The Third's with you!" yelled Willy Handforth. "In fact, we'll be out first if you're not careful. Follow me, my lads!"

The entire junior section of the Ancient House crowded out of Big Hall in a noisy mob. The seniors, under Fenton and Browne, walked out by the opposite doorway. And Captain Boom stood on the platform and raved.

He had started his regime at St. Frank's by adopting force, and the very type of force that stood no chance of success. It was just an example of how a lack of tact could produce the most devastating results.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ANCIENT HOUSE REBELS.



"SINK me for a mackerel!"

Captain Phineas Boom shouted out the ejaculation as he stood in the headmaster's study, five minutes later. One or two of the Housemasters had tried to detain him in Big Hall, but he had shaken them off. His one desire was to get away to himself. And now he stood in the Head's study, breathing hard, and muttering imprecations.

He was not only startled, but intensely alarmed.

He had received the shock of his life. It was his first experience of schoolboys. In theory he had quelled many a mutiny, but in practice he had never attempted it. He had indeed always regarded Commander Rudd's methods with a pitying contempt. They were successful methods, but slow and tedious. The skipper was convinced that he could reach the same goal in a quarter of the time.

It had seemed so easy to him, too. On board ship he had quelled many a disturbance by ordering the bulk of his men to attack the malcontents. And such was his volcanic power, he had never failed.

Public schoolboys were not quite so easy to handle. With such a great crowd of them at his disposal, he had thought it perfectly simple to use them as an attacking force. And within five minutes they had revolted, and had joined the mutineers. Even now the sound of distant shouts floated in through the window.

"Anything wrong, cap'n?"

Captain Boom turned round at the sound of the anxious inquiry, and found Mr. Jiggs looking in the doorway. Mr. Jiggs was obviously nervous.

"Matter enough!" growled the skipper. "Them blamed lubbers have turned against me, Jiggs. There's another craft mutinied. But they needn't think I'm beaten. I'll settle 'em yet, the swabs!"

"Best get back to the commander and report," suggested Mr. Jiggs. "It ain't so easy as it seems, cap'n. I reckon these boys are a rare handful, an' it's no good sayin' they ain't!"

"By grog! I'm not the man to lower my flag, Jiggs!" snorted Captain Boom. "It's too late to go back now, anyway. I've accepted this command, an' I mean to stick to it. I'll not steer for port until I've made a success of this affair. Leave it to me, Jiggs, we'll soon have these young varmin'ts under control. Maybe I was a bit too hasty. I'll get the officers into it now; I'll give orders for quick action!"

"Mebbe you're right—an' mebbe you ain't!" said Mr. Jiggs gloomily. "But it strikes me you've made a mistake, cap'n. Best steer for port. I know what boys are! I've had some of 'em. They won't take no more notice o' you than they would of a deck hand. Or if it comes to that, an admiral. Boys don't take no count o' rank. They just get excited, an' there's no holdin' 'em!"

"I'll ask for your advice when I want it!" snorted the skipper.

"Well, this ain't my affair," said Mr. Jiggs defiantly. "So don't you drag me into it. You've took it on yourself, cap'n, an' I don't hold with it. No good sayin' I do!"

He walked out, thoroughly alarmed. And in the meantime the Ancient House was

letting itself go with a vengeance. Even Fenton was enthusiastic about the revolt. He considered that the whole school had been insulted by the appointment of this uncouth mariner. It was a slight on the school. Any fellow with an ounce of self-respect couldn't possibly take orders from him. It was essential that the fellows should show their disapproval, and compel the Governors to come to their senses.

Nobody guessed that the wrong man was in control. Captain Boom had been taken at his word; he was accepted without question as Commander Sampson Rudd. Nelson Lee perhaps was the only one who had a vague suspicion that something was gravely wrong. But this suspicion was not strong enough to allow him to speak. Indeed, he hardly knew of it himself. He concluded that Commander Rudd had taken the downward path since his retirement.

As it happened, Nelson Lee was called upon by Captain Boom to attend the Head's study, with every other master. The skipper was holding a conference which demanded the presence of every House-master and Form-master.

And during this period the Ancient House let itself go.

The servants were given half an hour to leave—everybody, in fact, was firmly told that the House had been taken over by the boys. And once again Mrs. Stokes and Mary Summers found themselves ejected. But they went willingly—gladly. They knew that all these boys believed in Mr. Stokes, and that this very revolt was partly engineered on his behalf.

"It seems an awfully shabby trick to turn them out," said Nipper with a worried frown. "But I don't see what else we can do. There might be a lot of trouble, and we shouldn't like them to be involved."

"Good man!" agreed Tommy Watson. "We've got to think of the ladies——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, nodding. "I mean to say, we can't allow them to be in any of this dashed turmoil, what? Odds visions and fairies! Mary's on the good old spot, laddies!"

Mary Summers came up, looking flushed. "I say, we're perfectly willing to go, you know!" she exclaimed. "But why should we? Aunt Joyce is quite ready to stay, if you wouldn't mind, and so am I."

"But the risk!" protested Nipper. "If this man launches an attack——"

"We're ready to stand our chance with you fellows," interrupted Mary. "Besides, we could make ourselves useful. Aunt Joyce will be cook for the entire rebel camp. She'd love to be."

"I'd better go along and see her," said Nipper briskly. "If she's really keen, we'll be only too jolly glad to have her here—you too, Mary."

It was settled within five minutes, and Mrs. Stokes and Mary elected to remain. Feverish activities were in progress everywhere. The Ancient House was guarded and watched, and swift preparations were made for the defence of the House. And while these things were going on the original rebels were holding impromptu celebrations.

Cheers were exchanged across the Square, and one side of the Triangle was entirely devoid of control. Pitt and his men were so overjoyed that they came out of their stronghold and lent a hand in barricading the Ancient House.

Half the school was in revolt, and the other half looked on.

John Busterfield Boots of the Modern House was one of the Fourth-Formers who had been keen on the rebellion ever since the start. But he had never succeeded in arousing the interest in the others.

He redoubled his efforts now.

"Look at these chaps!" he roared, as he and a mob of other Fourth-Formers stood in the West Square. "Isn't it about time you woke up, you bounders? Why shouldn't we join in this rebellion? Let's make a thorough job of it, and bring it to an end."

"It's not our quarrel," said Armstrong of the East House. "It's all about Sinclair, and Stokes, and they're nothing to do with us."

"He's right, Buster," said Clapson, shaking his head.

Boots snorted.

"A fine lot of enthusiasts, aren't you?" he shouted disgustedly. "What the dickens does it matter whose quarrel it is? If every House joins the barring-out we shall have peace within twenty-four hours, and a good old spree in the meantime. Come on! Who's game?"

"But these giddy Remove chaps are fighting to have Sinclair kicked out," objected Turner. "If the barring-out succeeds, it'll mean that Sinclair comes back to the East House. Thanks all the same—nothing doing. Why, we should be fighting against our own interests!"

"Of course we should!" agreed Armstrong warmly. "We got rid of Kenmore and Sinclair nicely, and now they're back again. Do you think we want to keep 'em?"

There was certainly something in his point of view, and the East House fellows at least were by no means keen on joining the revolt, for, as Turner had pointed out, they would be fighting against their own interests.

So Buster Boot's efforts to involve the Fourth were in vain. But half the school was out of hand already, and there was no telling what the next few hours might bring.

But in the Remove there was a feeling of supreme optimism.

This new man had been brought to the school to restore order, and he had immediately incited another House to join the rebels. Instead of pouring oil on the troubled waters, he had caused them to gather their forces.

With only one House defying orders, there had been a danger of defeat. But with half the school in open mutiny there was every prospect of swift and dramatic victory.

CHAPTER XIV.

EVENTS MOVE SWIFTLY.



"THERE'S only one thing to be done, gentlemen, we've got to use force!"

said Captain Boom gruffly. "I'm new here; you're familiar with these craft."

I'm looking to you for suggestions, but, by barnacles, these boys have got to be quelled by force, or not at all!"

There was an ominous silence.

"There's another ship mutinied, an' that makes the position worse!" went on the captain. "It's more than ever necessary to bring these young lubbers to their senses by——"

"Not by force, Commander Rudd," said Mr. Stockdale curtly. "I cannot countenance this foolhardy policy. Yes, I feel bound to speak. You have been appointed headmaster, but I claim the right to state my views in consideration of my many years of residence."

"That's enough!" roared Captain Boom. "I've brought you all here to give my orders, not to listen to objections!"

He was feeling rather less comfortable. These schoolmasters were not so helpless as he had always thought them to be. And Captain Boom was beginning to think of the possible consequences when the truth came out. Unless he settled this dispute quickly he would be undone.

For the time being he had ceased to be a butler. The sudden accession of authority had got into his head, and he fancied himself on the poop of an old windjammer again. Otherwise, he would never have adopted such an aggressive, authoritative tone.

All these men were his superiors, and he knew it. To keep his own end up, to maintain the fiction that he was Commander Sampson Rudd, he was compelled to act the part. Unfortunately, he took no trouble to copy his employer's methods. He considered his own to be better.

Captain Boom was a hearty, bluff old mariner, as honest as the day, but absolutely hopeless in his present environment. But for the seriousness of the situation, the whole affair would have been comical in the extreme. He was doing an immense amount

of harm without knowing it. But as this harm might possibly result in ultimate good, his advent was not so fatal as it might have been.

The real Commander Rudd would have set to work methodically and deliberately; he would have taken some little time to thresh out the truth, and rest in peace. But Captain Boom's methods were liable to bring matters to a head with a rush. And then, of course, some sort of settlement was bound to occur.

They came to a head all right!

The Head's study was fairly well filled. In addition to the three House-masters, all the Form masters were present—such men as Mr. Crowell, Mr. Pagett, Mr. Suncliffe, and Mr. Langton. And not one of them viewed the situation with any optimism. The new Head's policy had left them breathless with dismay. And they had been led to believe that such good results would follow!

"You must realise, Commander Rudd, that while you are nominally the headmaster, we cannot submit to any rough-shod methods," said Nelson Lee quietly. "We are all opposed to your policy of armed force."

"Hear, hear!"

"The thing's madness!"

"You can't do it, Commander Rudd."

"Sink my anchor!" snorted the captain. "I know what I can do, and I expect my orders to be carried out. You're my officers, an' I've never had anything but obedience from officers. When a man's defied me, he's regretted it."

"But you are not on a ship now," said Nelson Lee curtly.

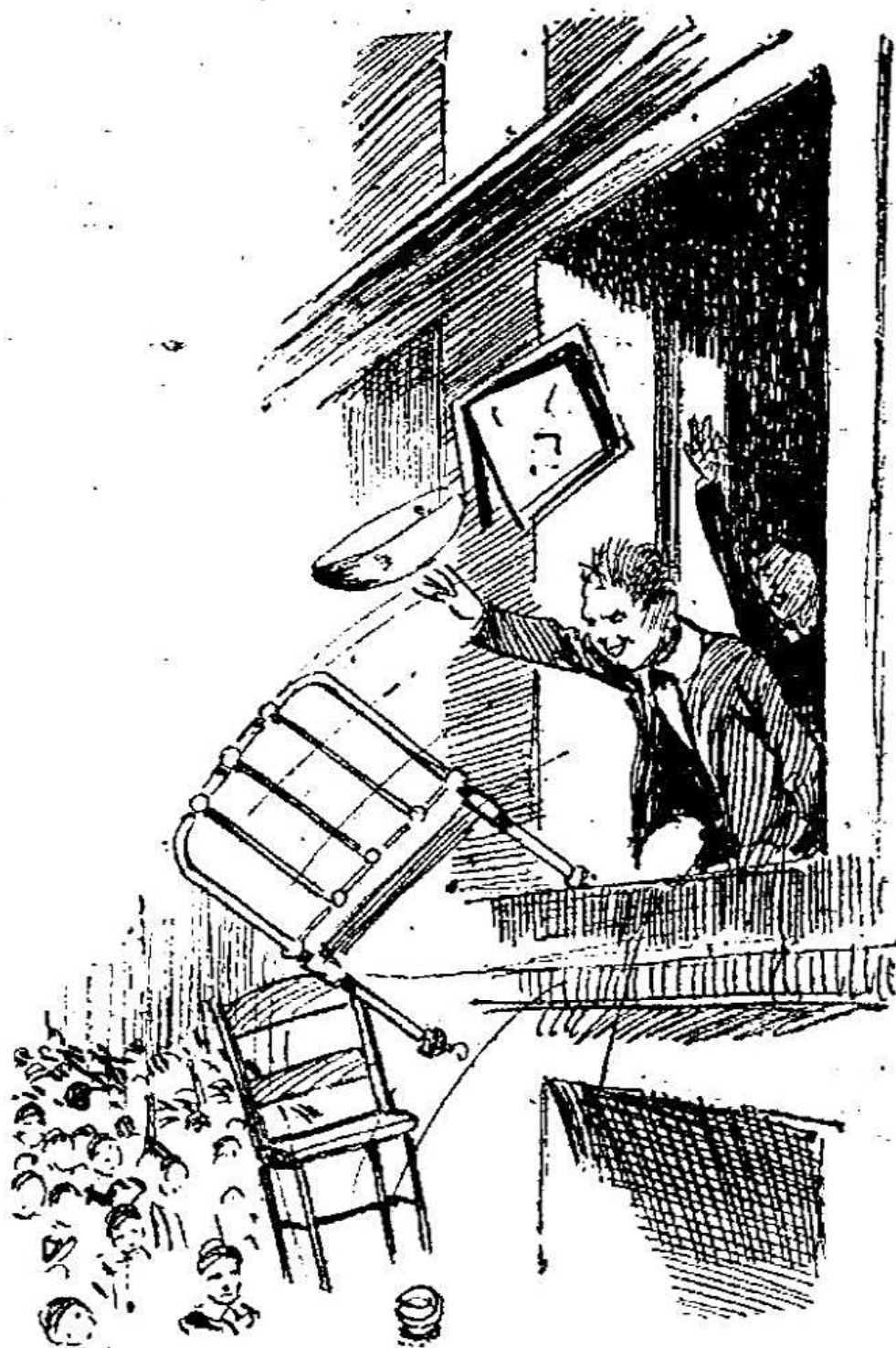
"That makes no difference!" retorted the skipper. "Whatever my methods, you've got to accept them, and help me. This fleet is in a state of disorder, an' I'm here to pull things together."

"Then you cannot do better than adopt a policy of diplomacy," interrupted Lee. "I suggest a full inquiry, a sympathetic hearing of the West House boys. I am inclined to believe they had plenty of justification for rebellion. You must be very cautious, commander."

"There's no excuse for mutiny!" growled the old mariner. "I've dealt with plenty of it in my time, an' even when the lubbers have got a case, it's no good admitting it! Restore order first, an' hold inquiries afterwards."

"That system is only satisfactory when order CAN be restored," said Mr. Stockdale hotly. "And I can see no hope of settlement. Indeed, matters are far, far worse! You have stirred up a hornets' nest, sir—a literal hornets' nest!"

"There is still time to recover the situation," declared Lee. "Sinclair is the bone of contention. The West House boys only demand that he shall be deprived of the head prefectship, and I strongly suggest that their case should be heard. In common



One of the upper windows had been flung open, and a bed was being thrown out. It was just one of those objectless, senseless things that a crowd of irresponsible "raggers" will do.

justice, it is the only fair course. I exceedingly regret that Dr. Stafford did not take that view."

Captain Boom felt it necessary to assert himself. The whole consultation was being taken out of his hands, and he had collected his "officers" together in order to give them his instructions.

"Avast there!" he roared. "By all the Arctic blasts! Am I to stand here, listening to these mutinous words? You'll all take my instructions! These mutineers have got to be stormed! You'll go and collect the rest of the school together and prepare an attack!"

"That is impossible!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "Good heavens! I refuse to lend myself to such a degrading exhibition!"

"You must realise, commander, that you are asking too much," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You have already seen the folly of setting the boys against one another. The Ancient House has rebelled in sympathy. What will happen if you proceed with that course? Why, within an hour the whole school will be out of hand!"

"Not if these young landlubbers are dealt with firmly," retorted the skipper, feeling the ground slipping from under him. "You'll get below," he went on, glaring at Nelson Lee. "I've had enough of your interference! I've a blamed good mind to put you in irons!"

"My dear sir——"

"Insubordination aboard my own ship!" roared Captain Boom. "That's what it is! Great derelicts! Things have come to a fine pass when a skipper can't give orders to his own officers! Get below! I'll deal with you later!"

"Am I to understand that I am expelled from this conference?" asked Nelson Lee grimly.

tain. "So ye'll insult me, will ye? You're dismissed the ship!"

Lee's words had sent him into a momentary panic. It was the first hint he had received that his deception was penetrated, and he sought to cover up his confusion by an exhibition of violence.

"There is no necessity for you to dismiss me," said Lee. "I had already decided to submit my resignation. I regret, Commander Rudd, that I can no longer lend my services to the school. It is particularly grievous at such a time, for all of us are needed. I cannot, however, suffer the indignities you attempt to thrust upon me!"

"Ye've resigned, eh?" snapped Boom.

POPULAR BOOKS FOR READERS OF ALL AGES!

THE Boys' Friend Library (New Series.)

No. 33. THE ALL-STAR TEAM.

A superb story of the footer field, introducing the Red Star Rovers. By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

No. 34. JIMMY MACK, MINOR.

A ripping new yarn of school life and adventure at Haygarth, introducing the Four Macs. By JACK NORTH.

No. 35. DON DARRELL'S REPUBLIC.

A topping tale of fun and adventure. By VICTOR NELSON.

No. 36. THE TWO-GUN SHERIFF.

A thrilling Wild West yarn, introducing the Cowboy 'Tec. By JAKE DENVERS.

THE Sexton Blake Library (New Series.)

No. 33. THE IMPERSONATORS.

A strange story of WALDO, THE WIZARD.

No. 34. THE WHITE DEATH; or, The Island of Sharks.

A fascinating story of detective adventure in Ceylon and England. By the author of "The Priest's Secret," etc., etc.

No. 35. THE CASE OF THE MUMMIFIED HAND.

Introducing Sexton Blake, Tinker, Prince Menes, The Black Eagle, Wu Ling, The Three Musketeers, Mathew Cardolak, Madame Goupolis, Huxton Rymer, and Mary Trent.

No. 36. THE BLACKMAILED BARONET.

A tale of thrilling adventure and detective work. By the author of "The Hunchback of Hatton Garden," etc., etc.

THE SCHOOL- BOYS' OWN LIBRARY

No. 21. THE GREYFRIARS' JOURNALISTS.

A rousing story of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

No. 22. D'ARCY OF ST. JIM'S.

Featuring the one and only "Gussy," and the famous schoolboy characters—Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NOW ON SALE!

PRICE FOURPENCE EACH!

"This is outrageous——" began Mr. Stockdale.

"Don't go, Mr. Lee!" urged Mr. Goole.

"Sink my rum rations!" stormed the skipper. "Have I got to tell you again, you insubordinate land crab?" he went on, turning to Lee. "I'll have you clapped in irons——"

"The whole situation is impossible," interrupted Lee curtly. "Naturally, I cannot submit to this treatment, Commander Rudd. I am addressing you as Commander Rudd, but I am by no means sure that it is your right name. There is a very extraordinary——"

"Howling blizzards!" thundered the cap-

"Then get ashore, an' keep ashore! I want none o' your sort on my ship!"

"In that case, you can easily dispense with my services, too!" said Mr. Stockdale angrily. "I am whole-heartedly with Mr. Lee, and you shall have my resignation at once, Commander Rudd!"

Mr. Barnaby Goole was pale with agitation.

"I must join in this protest," he exclaimed breathlessly. "While being amazed that you should have been appointed by the school governors, Commander Rudd, I assume that you have full powers over this famous and dignified college. To remain here under your jurisdiction is insufferable

to a gentleman. I will join these other

"I can do without the lot of you!" shouted Captain Boom in desperation. "What help are ye? When I suggest a way to quell the mutiny, you desert me! Get ashore—every man Jack of you! I'll deal with this affair myself—an' I'll prove that my methods are the best!"

After that, of course, there was only one possible thing to do. Every master in the room resigned on the spot.

Then, without another word to Captain Boom, they walked out. In the corridor they paused, flushed and heated.

"This is appalling, Mr. Lee!" panted Mr. Stockdale. "A dreadful situation! What on earth can be done? We cannot allow this man to remain in control!"

"The thought is too much," declared Mr. Goole.

"Gentlemen, we must keep our heads," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I am convinced that there is either a mistake or a deliberate attempt on the part of this man to fool us. We have resigned, but I am certain that it will be a temporary business."

"But what can be done?" asked Mr. Stockdale agitatedly.

"While Commander Rudd remains, our only course is to disassociate ourselves with the school."

"But there may be an appalling catastrophe!" protested Mr. Pagett.

"I hardly think so," replied Lee. "The school will be devoid of masters, but even if the boys lose their heads for a time, they will very quickly come to their senses. In the end, it may be the better way. In any case, we cannot remain here to be brow-beaten by this uncouth seaman!"

"You suggest that we should leave the school?"

"We can do nothing else, Mr. Stockdale," replied Lee. "If we remain, we shall probably be involved in the vortex. Commander Rudd has been appointed by the school governors, and the responsibility is entirely theirs. Let this man control the school if he can. It is none of our business. There can be no question of desertion on our part, for it is impossible for us to remain."

"Then I suggest wiring to the governors, and following by the first available train," declared Mr. Pagett. "Our united arrival in London will be sufficient to convince the governors that drastic action is necessary."

"But what of the school?" asked Mr. Stockdale. "Good heavens! I tremble to think—"

"You need not regard our departure as an act of desertion, Mr. Stockdale," said Lee quietly. "Commander Rudd has determined to take drastic action, and that will inevitably lead to a general revolt."

"But if we remain we may quell—"

"Have no delusions on that point, Mr. Stockdale," interrupted Lee. "The boys will take no notice of us. The feeling is already

high, and we should do more harm than good by remaining, for our orders would only be flouted, and our authority would be jeopardised for good. If I thought for a moment we could do anything, I would suggest staying. But we shall only lay ourselves open to humiliation and assault. If the school is determined to rise, let it rise against this newcomer, and not against its recognised masters."

Nelson Lee's suggestion was a shrewd, far-seeing one. He could tell that the flame of rebellion had got beyond control, and that it was only a matter of an hour or so before the whole school was involved.

The new headmaster had precipitated the trouble, and it was only meet that he should take all the responsibility.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST STRAW.



"HEARD the latest?" gasped Bob Christine excitedly.

He ran up to a group of Modern House juniors in the Triangle, and he was breathless with the import of his news. Other groups of fellows were standing about everywhere, watching the two rebel Houses, where defensive preparations were still developing.

"Something fresh?" asked Boots. "We don't know which to believe, and which not to believe."

"But this is official!" panted Christine. "All the masters have resigned!"

"What!"

"Fact!" said Bob. "I heard it from Phipps! He's just come from the Head's house, and he's heard—"

"Oh, rot!" snorted Armstrong. "Who ever heard of such piffle? Do you mean to say there aren't any masters in the school now?"

"They may be in the school, but they're not acting as masters," declared Bob Christine. "They've all resigned—even old Stocky! Crowell's in it, too, and Pycraft, and Lee, and all of them! I understand that old Pycraft wasn't there at the time, but he's resigned as a matter of course. He couldn't very well stand out alone."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Buster Boots. "There seems to be something in it, too! Afternoon lessons ought to have started half an hour ago, and there's no sign of the bell even! Things are in a pretty pickle!"

The rumour concerning the masters went through the school like wildfire. In the West House and the Ancient House the rebels heard the report with incredulous wonder. But, like the others, they were compelled to believe it. The very lack of authority was significant. The prefects were at a loose end, and they could find nobody from whom to take orders. The chaos was growing worse every minute.

And the Modern House and the East House were losing their lukewarm attitude. With every moment that passed they were becoming more and more interested in the rebellion. Somehow, they could feel that it was impossible to escape it. And it wasn't long before they, too, were forced to take action.

Captain Boom himself came striding through Big Arch, and he took stock of the Triangle—crowded as it was with fellows. They were all non-participants, and still under the authority of the school. Practically everybody was there, and the new Head felt that his opportunity had come.

Thoroughly scared by the disastrous result of his conference, he had decided to take action off his own bat. It was, indeed, the only course he could adopt. He either had to restore order, and justify his methods, or make a swift and ignominious departure.

"Ahoy, there!" he roared, his voice carrying to every corner of the Triangle. "Who's in command here?"

Several of the prefects went up, filled with curiosity.

"We're not exactly in command, sir, but we're the prefects," said Reynolds, of the Modern House. "We're rather worried about lessons. There's been no bell this afternoon—"

"There'll be no lessons!" interrupted the skipper curtly. "Give orders for all these boys to form up into line! I'll have no more of this slackness! Sink me, who's in command of this fleet? Look lively, ye lubbers!"

"Yes, sir," gasped Reynolds. "Is—is it true that all the other masters have resigned—"

"I'm givin' orders—not askin' questions!" interrupted Captain Boom. "Get these boys in a line! I want none o' your lip—"

The prefects hurried up and down, giving orders. And within a few minutes all the Forms were lined up neatly. Even the Sixth was compelled to stand at attention.

Captain Boom inspected the whole school as though he were a general looking over his troops. In the meantime, the upper windows of the Ancient House and the West House became crowded with eager rebels, all watching this interesting scene.

"Buck up, you chaps!" yelled Handforth, from one of the windows. "Why don't you show a bit of spirit and join us? Don't take any notice of that rotter—"

"Silence!" roared Captain Boom.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth. "We don't take any notice of you! Not likely!"

"Yah! Go back to your ship!"

"We're not sailors!"

The skipper had been very unwise in taking any notice of the shouts, for it did him no good in the eyes of the other boys. He pointed a quivering finger at the rebels.

"By sharks, this has got to stop!" he shouted thickly. "Now then—take orders! Every boy here will obey me, or I'll string

him up on the yardarm! Storm these craft, an' take 'em by force!"

"You can't do that, sir!" shouted Carlile urgently. "You'll only have the whole school involved! Don't forget what happened to the Ancient House."

"You'd better be careful, sir!" warned Reynolds.

He and Carlile were the chief prefects of the Modern House, and they could see disaster straight ahead.

"Silence, blame you!" roared Captain Boom. "Lead these boys to the attack, and not so much of your insolence! I'm determined to bring this rebellion to an end—an' I'm standin' no nonsense!"

"They'll never attack us!" yelled one of the rebels.

"Not likely!" replied Boots excitedly. "Come on, you fellows! Why should we stand out? Let's join the rebellion!"

"Hurrah!"

"Duck this old fossil in the fountain!"

"Hear, hear!"

"On him!"

A dozen of the highest spirits in the Modern House broke ranks, and swept upon the unfortunate Captain Boom. It was the signal for a general melee. It was just like the explosion of a dynamite charge after the fuse had been lit. In less than twenty seconds the Triangle was a solid mass of yelling humanity.

The prefects could do nothing—indeed, many of them were only too ready to join in the general commotion. The feelings of the school were at fever-pitch—for Captain Boom had done more to arouse indignation than any master within history. He had come to St. Frank's to subdue the West House, and within two short hours he had got rid of every master, and the whole school was out of hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GRAVE SITUATION.



DRAMATIC as the earlier surprises had been, this was the most sensational of all. Nobody had anticipated such a complete and utter disintegration of authority.

And the situation was fraught with actual peril.

Exactly how Captain Boom escaped, he hardly knew. He was obliged to flee, and he just managed to reach the Head's residence before the crowd could seize upon him. They were like a pack of hungry wolves, and they might have done serious damage in their present ugly mood.

"Jiggs—Jiggs!" panted Boom, as he clutched at the desk in the Head's study. "The whole fleet's mutinied, an' we've got to steer a course for port!"

Mr. Jiggs was near at hand—his bony face pale with apprehension.

"I told ye what it would be, cap'n!" he said nervously. "What a fool you was to stop here! This'll mean the sack! The commander will shove ye in irons, an'—"

"Avast, there!" rumbled the skipper. "That's enough from you, Jiggs! By all the whales, I reckoned I'd settle this thing in two hours—an' these blamed boys have gone mad!"

"It was your own fault," panted Jiggs. "You oughtn't to have interfered. Look what you've done now! There ain't a master left here, an' the boys look like settin' the place on fire! They're out for mischief, cap'n—they're out for blood, an' it's no good sayin' they ain't!"

"By the heat o' the tropics, I believe ye're right!" said Captain Boom uneasily. "We'd best sail, Jiggs."

"Like as not we'll be caught afore we get clear o' harbour!" growled Mr. Jiggs. "I ain't in any cheerful mood! No good sayin' I am! We'll be lucky to escape alive!"

In the meantime, events were developing with dramatic rapidity.

The wild spirits of the East House had got out of hand. It had taken a great deal to arouse them, but now that the revolt had come, they were apparently taking leave of their senses. The East House was famous for its collection of undesirables, and these were the fellows who commenced the rioting.

Considerable numbers of the Modern House followed suit. There was no guiding hand—no voice to stay the tide. Without a master in the school, this new rebellion was the most serious of all.

Egged on by the wild ones, many of the more level-headed boys lost control of their wits and joined in the wild excesses. It was all started as a kind of rag—but it was rapidly developing into a scene of dangerous chaos.

A party of yelling fellows—seniors and juniors—crowded into Big Hall, and took possession of the platform. Wild, senseless speeches were made, and a good deal of furniture was thrown about. Groups of fellows capered up and down the East House, and occupied the domestic quarters. Food was grabbed, and the household staff was chased out. It was almost the same in the Modern House.

There was a spirit of reckless madness in the air, and it was growing worse with every minute that passed.

In the West House and the Ancient House the rebels realised that barricades were no longer necessary. Why should the fellows bottle themselves up? The whole school was in revolt now, and there were no masters.

Arthur Morrow and Reggie Pitt were aghast.

They had instigated this rebellion in the first place, but they had conducted their own affair sedately and in a calm, orderly fashion. They had hoped for support—but they had never expected such scenes as these. The sensible boys kept their heads, and were acutely aware of the danger.

"Something's got to be done!" said Nipper breathlessly. "My only hat, look at that! And it's only the beginning, too! They're going mad! The whole school's taking leave of its senses! There'll be a catastrophe before long!"

He was standing on the Ancient House steps and gazing across at the East House. One of the upper windows had been flung open, and a bed was being thrown out. It was just one of those objectless, senseless things that a crowd of irresponsible "raggers" will do. And after the bed had crashed to the ground, crockery came hurtling out, narrowly missing the yelling groups below.

"And it's only the beginning!" repeated Nipper, looking grave. "Something's got to be done!"

"But what?" asked Tommy Watson. "There aren't a dozen sane chaps left!"

"Then we've got to collect that dozen together, and decide upon something quickly!" retorted Nipper. "Run round, Tommy, and chase them up! You help, Montie."

"Anythin' you say, dear old boy," agreed Tregellis-West. "Begad, I'm beginnin' to get frightfully windy! Some of these crazy idiots will set fire to the place next!"

Without delay, they sped off—but not until Nipper had instructed them to meet in the gymnasium. So far, this building had not been touched by the rioters, and it was a haven.

Within ten minutes, about fifteen fellows had collected there—and they represented the level-headed fellows of all Houses—Nipper, Pitt, Handforth, Boots, Fullwood, Morrow, Fenton, Browne, Christine, and a few others. They had all succeeded in keeping calm. There wasn't a smiling face among the lot—all were grave and anxious.

"The school's gone off its head!" Fenton was saying. "And it's no good trying to knock sense into these idiots! One word, and they'll pounce on us and beat us to pulp! They're just in the right mood!"

"I am inclined to agree with you, Brother Fenton," said Browne. "Without wishing to push myself forward, I urge you to let me take command of this situation—"

"This is no time for your rot, Browne," said Boots gruffly.

"Alas! Was I ever more serious?" asked the captain of the Fifth reproachfully. "In the interests of the school, I suggest—"

"This isn't a one-man job, Browne," interrupted Morrow. "Don't think we're belittling your powers—we're not. But we've all got to take a share in restoring order. The honour of St. Frank's is at stake!"

Nipper nodded.

"That's just why I suggested this meeting," he said grimly. "The whole situation has come upon us without any warning, and we couldn't be prepared for it. But it's up to us to bring the riot to an end."

"If we don't, St. Frank's will be the talk of the country," declared Fenton, with a worried frown. "Not only that, but the

whole place might be destroyed. These idiots are capable of anything in their recklessness."

"There's not a master left, and something drastic must be done," said Nipper, with quiet calmness. "Look here, you fellows, let's enter into this thing coolly. We've got to restore order! For the honour of our school, and the very safety of it, it's up to us to undo the harm that Commander Rudd has accomplished. Listen!"

They all stood still, and from every quarter of the school came the yells and roars of ever-increasing rioting. The situation was becoming graver every second.

"It's appalling!" muttered Morrow, pale to the lips.

"But it's not beyond us!" declared Nipper, his eyes glinting. "There's a way—there must be a way! In another hour it will be too late. We've got to act now, or not at all!"

"But how—how?" panted Reggie Pitt.

"Let us put our heads together, and let us conspire!" suggested William Napoleon Browne. "Always remember, brothers, that the darkest hour is just before dawn. I have a conviction that we shall not labour in vain."

But as they listened to those ominous sounds, the others were dubious. The famous old school was in the hands of the mob. It was the most dramatic rebellion St. Frank's had ever known. And the immediate outlook was utterly black.

THE END.

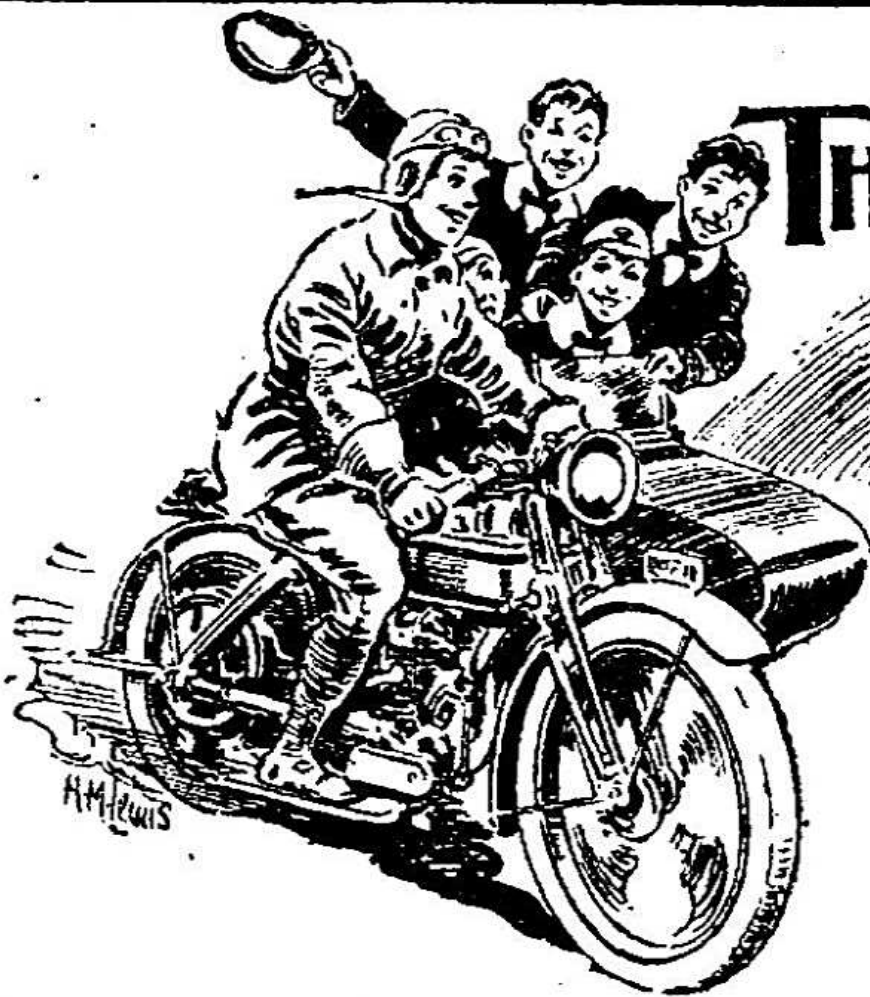
The flame of rebellion, at first confined to the West House, has now spread with amazing rapidity throughout the whole school. There is no one in authority to keep the wilder spirits in check, and events at St. Frank's, as related in next week's story—

"THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS!"

—are likely to prove unprecedented in the utter disregard of law and order, and in the total absence of respect for individuals and property.

It is going to be an exceptionally thrilling yarn; so make sure of your copy by ordering in advance.

Grand New Serial Just Started.



THE CALCROFT CASE.



Another Clever Story of Sexton Blake, Tinker and the Boys of Calcroft School.

By
SIDNEY DREW

FOR NEW READERS.

In the preceding chapter of this new story of Calcroft, Tinker, the clever young assistant of the world-famous detective, Sexton Blake, pays a surprise visit to his old school, where he meets some of his former chums, who are still at the school, for it is not long since our young hero had left Calcroft for the more serious and dangerous occupation of criminal detection. But if Tinker hopes to have escaped for a few days from the excitements of his calling, he is sadly mistaken, as you will read in the following instalment.

(Now read on.)

THE MOTOR-CAR SMASH.

"DISGUSTING animal!" said Fane. "Souse his head in it, and send him back for some clean stuff!"

As Manners, Fane, Bindley, and Tinker ran out, Wilberforce was such a pathetic sight that there was a roar of laughter.

"I believe he's in a pig fit or something," grinned Pye. "What's the matter with you, Wilb? What have you got in your hair?"

"Really, I—I don't quite know," said Stott, blinking through his glasses. "Ah, yes, my matches. I—I have been assaulted by that fellow Roath. He asked me for a match, but when I saw that he wanted it to light a cigarette, I refused. He snatched the box most rudely from my pocket, and when, in the heat of the moment, I described him, quite truly, as a cad, he flung the contents of the box, nearly a full one, into the pail, and pushed my head in after them."

Everybody laughed again, except Bindley, who crossed the corridor, and, turning the handle of Roath's door, shot into the study. Roath was reclining in a chair, with his riding-boots on the writing-table and the cigarette in his mouth. Roath was tall, muscular, well-built, and well-dressed. His

coal-black hair, dark eyes, and thick skin suggested a trace of Spanish or Italian blood. Even his worst enemy would have admitted that he possessed good looks.

"You're a bit previous, aren't you?" he asked, giving Bindley a glance of mingled surprise and contempt. "If you want me, go outside and knock at the door; and then, if I want you, which isn't at all likely, I'll ask you to come in."

"When I go and knock at your rotten door, you'll wake up and find you've been dreaming," said Bindley. "Look here, Roath, you've not been in this house long, and you're only a sort of visitor, so we don't want to be rough on you; but you jolly well keep your hands off our kids. We don't stand any bully tricks, even from Sixth-Formers in Pycroft's House, so you can be pretty sure we'll take none from a measly Fifth-Former like you dumped on us from Windover's."

"You terrify me," said Roath, letting the cigarette-smoke trickle from his nostrils. "I notice you've got a whole crowd at the door to back you up, my gallant hero! Is it to be an assassination? There seems to be enough of you to murder me."

"Hi, chaps!" shouted Bindley. "Bring in that pail, and we'll teach this guy manners. We'll duck the beast!"

Roath removed his feet from the table, jumped up, and stood at bay, with his gold-mounted riding-switch in his hand. Another hand—Tinker's—grasped Bindley by the collar and dragged him back so swiftly and violently that Bindley found himself in his own study before he knew it, and he turned furiously on Tinker, though he had a great liking for him, but Fane and Manners pounced on him, and held him fast.

"Simmer down and don't be an ass, Bindy," said Fane. "If we're going to start a full-sized row the very moment he comes to see us, Tinker says he'll clear off and chance the rain. We can settle with

that cad another time. I'm as keen as you are to have a go at him, but it may cause a horrible shindy and spoil things; so let's leave it over till old Tinker has cleared out."

"And, really, I do not wish to be the cause of any trouble, Bindley, although I shall be compelled to change my trousers," said Wilberforce Stott. "At least, he knows my opinion of him, and if he possesses any conscience at all, that should be sufficient punishment. And it would grieve me to have Mr. Jack Tinker Hasland's brief visit rendered unpleasant in any way on my account."

"And ten to one if we ducked him he'd go bleating to Pycroft," said Pye, "or even to the Head. We shall catch the beast bending right enough one of these days. He didn't hit you with that horse-tickler, did he?"

"He didn't," said Bindley, feeling his neck. "If he had hit me, I'd have gone for him bald-headed. Gosh! I don't know what you've done to my Adam's-apple, Jack, for I can't find the thing. Squint round the back of my collar and see if it's anywhere there. Pye, you've got a hefty sort of grip, my lad, and it's a bit of a wonder you didn't yank my head off."

"You're such a spitfire when you start," said Tinker. "Roath looks a likely sort in a scrap, and though you're a good 'un, I think he carries too many guns for you. If I'd had to wade in to help you and Mr. Pycroft had come along, I should have been booted out."

"All serene, we'll save it up," said Bindley; "but if Roath doesn't draw in his horns and keep 'em in, it will be his funeral."

A bell rang in Calcroft's famous clock-tower, and its notes went clanging across the quadrangle in the rain, telling the boys in Calcroft's many houses that it was time for evening preparation.

"Sorry to have to leave you to amuse yourself for an hour and a half, old thing," said Fane to the visitor, "but the beastly grind has to be did. Crawl over to the library if you want a book, or go and play dominoes or bagatelle with yourself in the Rag. Was he floury?"

"If you mean Mr. Pycroft, I didn't notice it," said Tinker.

"Well, so long. Perhaps they scraped the flour off, and Chules took it away in Bindley's hat to make buns, for Chules is a careful old guy. Don't let anybody pinch our study while we're away. There goes the second bell, so I must hop it."

The noise of hurrying feet died away in the corridor, and Tinker was alone, watching the elms tossing in the breeze and the dark rain-clouds driving over Barren Tor. Even in the rain there was a charm about Calcroft, with its quaint old-world houses, winding cloisters, and its stately towers. As Tinker peered out through the blurred window the quadrangle was deserted except for one human figure.

A boy with a fawn mackintosh belted round his waist and a check cap on his head, was walking down the asphalt path towards the gate.

"There's one chap dodging prep., and by the back view of him and the boots, it's Roath," thought Tinker. "Hallo! It's going to clear up, after all. Wednesday to-morrow, and a half-holiday. If the guv'nor doesn't want me, I've a good mind to stay over."

"There's one chap dodging prep., and by got his call through to Baker Street without much delay or trouble. It was not the voice of Sexton Blake that answered, but the voice of the housekeeper, Mrs. Bardell. Luckily, she was accustomed to the telephone.

"Mr. Blake was in to lunch, Master Tinker," she said; "quite unexpected, as usual, and nothing in the 'ouse except an egg or two and a bit of 'am, and raining in torrents. No, he didn't say when he'd be back, but I hear quite distinct, thank you, except when it fizzes. You're at Calcroft School, and will come home to-morrow evening, unless wanted and telegraphed for previous. I've just baked a lovely steak-and-kidney, which you'll find cold in the larder if you fancy it for your supper, and I don't think this awful rain ever will stop."

"Phew! How the old lady rattles on," thought Tinker, as he hung up the receiver. "Well, that's that, anyhow."

As the rain had stopped, Tinker went out to look at his machine, and found it to all outward appearances intact and untouched. He mounted and rode into Calcroft town to buy a London evening paper. They had not arrived, so he thought he would kill time by having a cup of coffee in the old-fashioned tuck-shop and restaurant where generations of Calcroft boys had spent their pocket-money.

A few minutes later, before the coffee was cool enough to drink, Bindley came in.

"Guzzling again, are you?" grinned Bindley. "I saw your old rat-trap outside, and that gave you away. What do I want? Oh, I'll try a dry ginger-ale. I was lucky. Pycroft had sent a pair of his eye-glasses to be mended, and he wanted 'em, so he picked on me to bike down and fetch 'em. I've got the things, but I'm not going to break my neck pushing back."

Tinker ordered a dry ginger-ale for Bindley.

"Anything lively fixed up for to-morrow afternoon?"

"My dear old Tink, didn't I tell you that nothing lively has happened at Calcroft for what seems like umpteen billion years?" said Bindley. "There was some talk about a paper-chase, but after this rain it will be all stop and mud, so that will be off. Have another coffee. Here, have any old thing you fancy in the shop."

"Hit a fortune all at once?" asked Tinker.

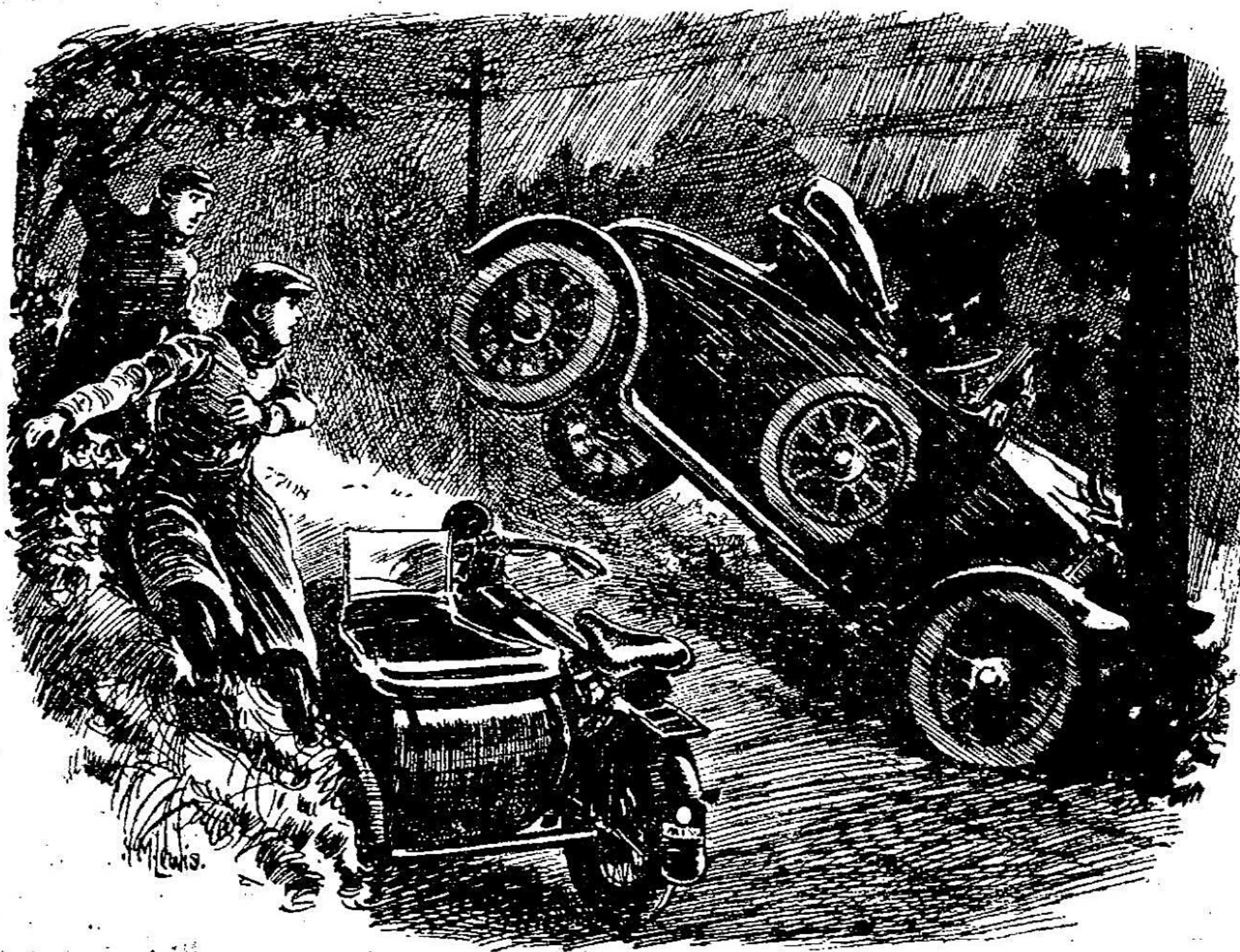
"Not quite, but a bit towards it," said Bindley. "You must have brought us luck, for when we got down to the hall for prep. there they were sticking in the merry old letter-board, a letter for each of us—Fane, Manners, Pye, and myself, and cash in each of 'em."

"Well, I don't mind having a bottle of champagne and a couple of five-bob cigars with you, to show there's no ill-feeling," said Tinker. "That won't cost more than thirty shillings. As it's decent coffee, I'll try another cup. Who's that chap Roath, anyway?"

Screwhammer's, with the training stables and bags of shooting. In the frozen meat trade, I think, and rolling in dollars."

"If he's so close, why does he live in the school, Bindy?"

"Because the Governors of Calcroft have put the kibosh on day-boys," said Bindley. "I don't know why, but they won't have 'em at any price. Too easy to run home and cry to your mummy if you got slapped, or some nasty, cruel kid gave you a thick ear. There was a shindy about a couple of louts at Windover's—Brace and Colwith, two gay sports, who used to have merry little



The car raced straight at the motor-cycle, but swerved just in time to miss it, lurched drunkenly across the road again, struck a telegraph post with a terrific crash and jangling of wires, and then collapsed.

"What makes you ask that?"

Tinker shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, honest injun," he answered.

"Only he's a striking sort of youth, and you want to look at him twice."

"I don't know that he's such a striking sort of youth, Tinker, but he's the sort of youth I'd jolly well like to strike," said Bindley. "If he'd ducked Beilby it wouldn't have mattered, but Stott is such a silly, harmless, good-natured sort of ass, we won't have him bullied. Roath's father or uncle, or something, has bought Rillsedge, the big house and estate next to Admiral

card-parties and back racehorses. A day-boy from the town here, silly little ass, used to smuggle them in wine and spirits, and put their bets on for them. It was hushed up, of course, but the three of 'em were quietly booted out, and that was the last of the day-boys."

Tinker bought his paper. It was a long uphill push to the school.

"I'll unstrap my bag and we'll put it in the sidecar with your bike, and then you can sit up behind me," he said.

"Right-ho!" said Bindley. "The road's

wet, so don't have a sideslip and make me spoil my face."

"I'll watch it," said Tinker. "Back light all right?"

"O.K.," said Bindley.

All went well until they were near the crest of the hill, and then the engine stopped dead.

"A fat lot of good that notice Fane chalked on the wall did," said Tinker, with his feet on the ground. "Oh, such a lot of good!"

"What's wrong with the old crock?"

"Nothing, except that she's been milked," growled Tinker. "Some thief of a kid has run off my juice in spite of your notice. The tank's dry."

"Perhaps she leaks."

"Oh, come off it!" said Tinker. "If she leaked I should have seen it and smelt it. She's been milked of a good gallon."

"I expect it must have been Beilby, then," said Bindley. "Seeing all that tuck, and not being able to get his hungry teeth into it would make the little cad wild enough to do anything. Lots of our chaps have motor-bikes, and some of 'em cars. I'll nose round to-morrow and see if Beilby has sold petrol to anybody. If he has, I'll make him wish he hadn't."

"I'd like to soak him in petrol and put a lighted match to him," said Tinker. "There's nothing for it now but to shove. A nice way to treat a visitor, isn't it? A gang of petrol-pinchers, I call you. If it doesn't start raining pitchforks and hay-ricks before we're home, I shall be surprised."

"I'm jolly sorry, old man, and if I could only prove it was young Beilby, I'd flay him," said Bindley; "but the cunning little pig wants a lot of catching. Fish out my bike and ride home on it, and I'll push your bunch of barbed wire and tin-cans back. You're not getting ratty, are you?"

"Nothing to notice, but I should have said a few kind words if it had happened at the bottom of the hill," said Tinker. "And you do waste some light on your roads, too. It's so jolly dark, you can't see to remember your own name and address. Cheer up, and barge her along."

The night wind swayed the wet trees and shook the chilly rain out of them unpleasantly. The two boys put on their mackintoshes. Tinker's headlamps were beginning to fade out; but the worst was over, and they were on the level again.

"Car coming," said Tinker. "As the glims are looking a bit sickly, I'll give her a chi-ike to keep on her own side."

The lamps of an advancing car flashed out brightly, and were reflected in the wet road. Tinker's hand found the rubber of the horn, but he did not squeeze it. Three quick reports sounded in their startled ears. The car had been travelling slowly, but

suddenly it gathered pace, stopped, whirled completely round as if on a pivot, and then came on again with a leap.

"Up the bank, Tinker!" yelled Bindley. "Somebody's gone mad!"

Dashing clear of the motor-bicycle, the two boys scrambled up the roadside bank. The car raced straight at the motor-cycle, but swerved just in time to miss it, lurched drunkenly across the road again, struck a telegraph-post with a terrific crash and jangling of wires, and then collapsed on its side and lay motionless, and the lamps went out.

"Gee! Here's a mess!" said Bindley. "Three punctures the poor beggar had all at once. I—I wonder if he's dead!"

"I'll go and look," said Tinker in a queer tone of voice. "You stop back a bit, old son, for I'm more used to this sort of thing than you are, and it may not be pretty."

Tinker stood still for a moment, but as they heard no sound except the rustling of the branches and the drip of water from the trees, he went to the sidecar and obtained a flashlamp, and moved in the direction of the overturned car.

"Is he knocked out?" asked Bindley, from the gloom.

"Stone dead," answered Tinker.

There was a brief silence, and Bindley, who disliked horrors, experienced a curious, prickly feeling at the roots of his hair. Tinker spoke again:

"Where's the nearest 'phone?" he asked.

"At the school, I expect."

"I don't see why we should bother them there. There's a motor repair shop up the Barren Tor road, quite as near as the school, and they're sure to be on the 'phone. Jump on your bike and tell the Calcroft police to come along. I'll wait here with my flashlamp to stop another car from smashing into this one."

Bindley lifted his machine out of the sidecar and lighted the lamp. Much as he detested horrors, he went forward to look at the unhappy motorist who had been pitched out into the road, but he saw nothing except a pair of well-shod feet, for Tinker had taken off his mackintosh and thrown it over the body.

"Get going, old son," said Tinker, "for if it isn't going to rain waterspouts I'm no judge of the weather."

As Bindley rode away Tinker lifted away the mackintosh and turned the light of the electric lamp on the motionless figure that lay there.

"Bindy?" he called.

"Chi-ike!" replied Bindley, over his shoulder.

"My name's Jack Hasland."

"All serene, Jack," answered Bindley, and bent over the handlebars.

CHAPTER IV.

THE POLICE INTERRUPT A SUPPER-PARTY.

"HALLO, who's that?" asked a hoarse voice that was quite familiar to Bindley.

"Hallo, Blagg!" said Bindley. "You'll do if Sergeant Siler isn't there. It's Bindley of Pycroft's House, the school, speaking from Horrick's Garage. There's been a motor smash about three hundred yards from the school avenue on the town side, and the driver has been killed. No, I'm not pulling your leg. Do you think I'd pull your leg about a serious thing like that?"

Blagg, who had tramped the school-beat for years, and knew what the Calcroft juniors were capable of, uttered a doubtful grunt.

"Perhaps you wouldn't, Master Bindley; but there's some as would, and I ain't sure that it is you," he said doubtfully.

"But it is true. Horrick has gone down there with a lamp to relieve my pal Jack Hasland, who's warning cars to keep off the ruins!"

"Right! We're coming, sir," said the constable, consoling himself with the thought that even if the message turned out to be a bluff he would have a ride in the police-car almost to his own doorstep. "If it ain't jonnick, I'll go straight to Mr. Pycroft and see what he thinks of such gags."

Tinker, with his motor-cycle, was at the gate of the private road, and he hailed Bindley.

"I've turned it up," said Tinker, shrugging his shoulders, "and left the chap you sent along there. I shan't be able to turn up the inquest so easily, nor you. That's twice in the last three times when I've tried to take a short holiday and shake a loose leg that something nasty has happened. As we seem to be the only two people who saw it, the coroner is sure to want our evidence."

"Like a good many nasty things, it was short and quick," said Bindley. "My evidence won't amount to much. I heard three of the tyres go bang, one after the other, saw the car jump ahead, whizz right round, make a dive at your bike, sheer off, hit the telegraph pole, and tumble over. I didn't even see the poor beggar of a driver chucked out. Was he badly messed, Tinker? Is that why you covered him up?"

"When a chap gets killed that way he's very seldom pretty to look at, old pal," said Tinker evasively. "If that sneak thief had let my petrol alone we'd have missed that, and I wish we had, for your sake. You'll have Pycroft jumping on your neck for being so long, won't you?"

"He can't say much when I tell him what stopped me. I wonder if I've lost the

things. No, got 'em safe. But how the thump did that unfortunate chap get three punctures all in a bunch, unless somebody spilled a cartload of nails?"

Tinker mumbled something that was inaudible. They pushed the motor-cycle into the shed, and Bindley hurried away to give the eyes-glasses to the Housemaster. Preparation was over, and Mr. Pycroft was in his private room writing a letter.

"Your glasses, sir," said Bindley.

"Er—oh, thank you, Bindley!" said Mr. Pycroft. "I am very much obliged to you. Has our young friend gone?"

"Hasland, sir? He's staying the night, sir," said Bindley. "We've had Condor's bed made up for him in our dormitory, sir."

"Hu—hum, yes!" said Mr. Pycroft, going on with his letter. "Exactly. Good-night, Bindley."

"Good-night, sir."

To see a man killed suddenly, even a complete stranger, is a very unpleasant experience, and though Bindley had not seen the actual death of the unhappy motorist when he had been flung from the car, he felt slightly shaky. The wireless was going on in the Rag, and as it was a high-powered set it made plenty of noise.

"If Tinker hasn't told them I won't mention the miserable business till after supper," thought Bindley. "After getting cash from home they're sure to be pretty cheerful, and won't want to hear about horrors."

When Bindley opened the study door he recoiled as if dazzled by the beauty of the scene. A four-branched silver candlestick with lighted candles in it decorated the centre of the supper table and the tablecloth was spotlessly white. The glasses, though rather a mixed lot, were uncracked and unchipped. The ginger-wine sparkled in a cut-glass decanter, and the plates and dishes were of real china. A couple of geraniums in pots, lent by that celebrated gardener, Wilberforce Stott, added an artistic touch, and Stott had also supplied some rather yellow-looking parsley to garnish the sliced tongue and ham.

"Scrumptious, isn't it?" said Pye. "We've been round borrowing things. What they wouldn't lend we just bagged. Old Partridge wasn't in when we went for his dinky candlestick, and if he comes back and misses it and thinks he's been burgled he'll raise a horrid howl. That's his decanter, too. He's got an eye for pretty stuff, has Partridge. How does the show strike you, Bindley?"

"Tophole!" said Bindley. "We may not have much money, but there's a style about us. Where did you get the merry old tablecloth?"

"Out of Partridge's drawer," grinned Manners. "He won't mind; but I think we ought to have left a note or something. It's

a thousand pounds to nothing he won't miss the tablecloth, but he'll holler blue murder if he thinks his decanter and candlestick have gone West."

"Oh, you needn't worry about Partridge! He's the best in the world," said Bindley. "I've not much time for prefects, but Partridge is a good one. What have you done with Tinker. Has he gone to wash and brush his hair and make himself look pretty?"

"Dunno," said Fane. "I haven't set eyes on him since just before prep. Perhaps he went across to see the Head."

"If he did, we may as well get on with it," said Manners. "Rose Halcart is sure to ask him to supper."

"It isn't very easy to wriggle out of a thing when Rose asks you; but old Tinker knows he's booked to feed with us, so he wouldn't stop," said Fane. "What did I tell you? Here he comes floating in, face and feet, and everything complete. As the bouncer has paid for the supper, I suppose we'd better give him a sniff at the ham-bone and a bit of parsley. Sport our oak, Pye, and hang a cap over the doorknob. Tinker, my lad, we're proud to have you with us. We just love to entertain a jovial pal who pays for his own grub, and even more so when he pays for ours, too. On those terms, Tinker, we hope you'll never leave us."

"Cut the cackle and show me the ham-bone," said Tinker, with a quick, meaning glance at Bindley. "I like to eat when I can, for in my line you get disturbed pretty often. Let's postpone the speeches till after the banquet. What frabjous luxury and wealth! A ripping old candlestick that, and everything is very nice indeed. This for me? Thank you, Manners, my merry old warrior!"

"Where did you hop off to? Seen the Head?" asked Fane.

"Nope. I got a 'phone message through to Baker Street to tell my guv'nor not to expect his wandering boy to-night, and then I pushed down to Calcroft Town for a London evening paper, to see if anybody had died and left me a few fortunes. I pushed a lot of the way back, too, for some kind guy had cleared about a gallon of petrol out of my tank."

"Beilby," said Manners, Fane, and Pye in a breath.

"If you tell such awful lies about me I'll come in and rattle your wooden heads together till the splinters fly," cried a shrill, indignant voice through the shaded key-hole. "And there wasn't a gallon in it. That kid never had enough money in his life to buy a whole gallon at once."

Manners rose, grasped a cricket-stump, and tiptoed to the door. It was no use, for a piece of wire thrust through the key-

hole pushed away the cap off the doorknob, and Beilby saw what was intended.

"All serene, Manners," he said. "I'm only watching the animals feed. O-oh! Talk about thieves! That's Partridge's candlestick, and you must have pinched it, for Partridge has gone to London. Thieves, thieves, thieves! Hi, Mallory, Nelson, Widgett! Come here, you kids. Come and have a squint at the robbers' den. It's full of stuff they've pinched, candlesticks and decanters and knives and forks and plates——"

Manners bolted out, but Beilby was used to being chased and was extremely fleet of foot. When he saw that Beilby had reached the head of the staircase, Manners knew that pursuit was useless. When hard pressed, Beilby had been known to take refuge in the Housemaster's room when Mr. Pycroft was in possession, and he was so astonishingly quick with excuses that Mr. Pycroft never suspected that he had only come in to escape a hiding.

Beilby looked over the banisters, put out his tongue at Manners and danced with glee.

"Huray!" he shouted. "They've got you and your gang at last, Manners. Your number's up, my lad, for here are the police."

Manners shook the cricket-stump menacingly, and went back to his supper.

"A nice sort of kid, that," said Tinker.

"A regular beast. The worst little bouncer in the whole school," said Fane.

"You can't help laughing at him, though, sometimes; he's such a cunning little twister," said Bindley. "He wouldn't steal money or anything like that, but I think he could almost sneak the socks off your feet without unlacing your boots and then sell them back to you before you found out you'd lost them. If you want to catch Beilby you'll have to get up, not before breakfast but nearly before supper. What was he shouting, Manners?"

"Some tosh about the police," said Manners. "They were down in the hall waiting to arrest us. If that yellow stuff in the saucer is mustard, shove it along here, Pye. And what about the ginger-wine? Landlord, fill the flowing bowl, but for the love of Mike don't spill any on old Partridge's tablecloth or we shall have to pay for getting it washed. Gosh! If that's Beilby again I'll smash him into forty pieces!"

Someone had knocked. Once more Tinker shot a meaning glance at Bindley, and then looked at the door.

"Come in!" cried Fane.

"Good-evening, young gentlemen. Not intruding or disturbing you, I hope? Oh, at supper! Sorry, gentlemen, but I can wait!"

Police-sergeant Siler of the local constabulary appeared in the doorway, plump and smiling, made his few remarks, and then withdrew.

"You've come to the right place this time, sergeant," they heard Beilby say. "Lock 'em up, and give 'em fifty years, with a dose of the cat twice a day."

"What the thump does he want?" asked Fane. "Hi! Come in, sergeant! You needn't wait outside in the draught."

"No great hurry; no desperate hurry," said the sergeant, reappearing once more. "I'm not fond of being disturbed at my meals myself. I'd like to speak to Mr. Bindley, and Mr. Disland. I think it's Mr. Disland. I got the name from Horrick of the garage, but I'm not quite sure of it."

"Hasland," said Tinker. "I gave him my name when he took my place."

"The fact is, kids, Tinker and I saw a motor-smash, and the poor beggar was killed," explained Bindley. "As it's not a very nice thing to talk about, I thought I'd tell you after supper. That's what you want us for, isn't it, sergeant?"

"That's what brought me along, sir," said the sergeant, with another cheerful smile, "hearing you were eye-witnesses, you see."

"Was it a collision?" asked Pye.

"Three punctures," said Bindley. "He wasn't coming fast, either. I expect the poor chap was so startled that he accelerated and then lost control. The car jumped, and then buzzed clean round and shot ahead. I don't know how he missed Tin-Jack's bike, but he managed to swerve off and hit the telegraph-pole on the other side. It was a smack, too, for it made the telegraph wires fairly rattle. Then she—"

Bindley stopped when he saw that Sergeant Siler was staring at him with a look of utter bewilderment on his plump, pink face.

"Bindley didn't see the body," said Tinker quickly. "I covered it over with my mackintosh."

"Or the car, sir?"

"I didn't notice how much smashed it was," said Bindley. "I saw that it was lying on its side."

"Oh, of course!" said the sergeant. "Three punctures, eh? Yes, to be sure, Mr. Bindley. And you didn't notice the car much, or the body?"

"He didn't see the body at all," said Tinker. "Bindley had his bicycle in my sidecar. I asked him to get it out and go to the garage and telephone to you. When he came to where I was standing I had covered the man up, knowing he was dead. I had the only light, my flashlamp, and I did not shine it on the car, so my chum could only have seen it very dimly."

"But you saw it, sir?"

Tinker nodded.

"And the other thing?"

Again Tinker nodded, and asked the sergeant to shut the door.

"I suppose it will be common talk to-morrow, chaps," Tinker went on, "but it's no good shouting it all over the school to-night. There'll be an inquest, and I was trying to keep Bindley out of it."

"If that's all Mr. Bindley knows, I think he will be out of it, sir," said the sergeant. "Three punctures, he says, and there's not one puncture."

"Not one puncture?" cried Bindley. "Why, I heard them go pop, pop, pop, like revolver shots."

"That's just what they were, old scout," said Tinker. "One went through the wind-screen, and another through the poor chap's brain, and where the third went I don't know. He must have put his foot on the accelerator just as he was hit, which would account for the pranks of the car on a wet, greasy road. I don't know quite how it missed my bike, for the driver must have been stone dead then, but a car without anyone to steer it will do jolly queer things."

"You mean to say the man was murdered?" asked Bindley, with a gasp and a shudder.

"Sniped in cold blood," said Tinker. "What's the next move, sergeant? Do you want us to go to the police-station and have our information written down, or mine rather, for Bindley hasn't got any? Don't you think you can cut him out of it, after what you've heard?"

"I'm not quite in a position to do that, sir," said the sergeant. "I'm expecting the inspector any minute, and he'll have to decide. It looks a funny and ugly business, but it may be very simple after all. I suppose I'll find you here if I want you, gentlemen?"

"I expect so," said Tinker gloomily. "As some wise guy remarked just now, what about the ginger-wine? Let's taste it!"

(To be continued next week.)

BE PREPARED FOR THE GREAT BATTLE OF LIFE

by reading our forthcoming series of articles:—

CAREERS FOR BOYS

By an Expert.

BEGINS NEXT WEEK!

These articles are specially written to aid readers in the difficult problem of choosing a career.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 31. Feb. 13, 1926

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A

and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of the THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

My dear Leagueites,

I am so often being asked when the League Mag. is going to appear that I feel I must explain why this much anticipated attraction does not materialise. The Mag. certainly ought to have been started a month ago, and it would have been started if I could have been assured that a large number of my readers really wanted it. The only indication of a popular demand for the Mag. is in the number of readers who join the League, and since only a comparatively small proportion of my readers have so far enrolled, I cannot devote several pages of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY to a Mag. in which only a small minority are interested.

The question of the Mag. or the League is a matter for readers themselves to decide. While I am willing to continue to give the League every support and encouragement, because I believe it is capable of achieving great social benefits among readers in all parts of the Empire, I cannot do more than ask you, one and all, to rally round your Editor, and make this magnificent conception a real League of Fellowship, embracing readers in all walks of life and in every corner of the world where the Old Paper is read.

Though the time is not yet ripe to start

the League Mag., I still have hopes of getting sufficient support for it later on. In the meantime, a new serial of Calcroft School, introducing Sexton Blake and Tinker, by that gifted writer, Mr. Sidney Drew, is making its appearance, and should prove a worthy successor to "The City of Masks," by the same author.

Whatever disappointment may be felt by my faithful band of Leagueites at the postponement of the League Mag., I trust they will feel some compensation at the news I am about to unfold. You will remember that one of the main features of the Mag. was to be a series of articles on "Careers," designed for the purpose of helping you to choose a suitable calling in life, and to avoid the misfortune of finding yourselves "round pegs in square holes." I have decided to begin these articles without waiting for the Mag., and as soon as possible—probably within the next two or three weeks.

As I must not encroach further upon space intended for another list of O.O.s, I will reserve what I was going to say about our forthcoming series of articles on "Careers" until my "Chat" next week.

Wishing you all of the best,

Your sincere friend,

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

A further list of names and addresses of Organising Officers.

288. Charles Edgar Bullock, 31, St. Michael's Square, Gloucester; 289. William A. Chapman, 3, Dagmar Road, Camberwell, S.E.5; 290. Tom Lord, 9, Trafalgar Row, Wisbech; 291. Jack Bertram Scofield, 8, Arabin Road, Brockley, S.E.4; 292. Kenneth Percy Syms, 24, Evelina Road, Nunhead, S.E.; 293. Albert Kirk, 6, Haig Road, Leek, Staffs; 294. Master John Atherley 5, Townsend Road, S. Tottenham, N.15; 295. Charles E. Watkins, 20a, Imperial Buildings, N. Camberwell, S.E.16; 296. Alexander Stewart, Medical Hall, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal; 297. Jack H. E. Beard, Tullion Street, Carlow, Ireland; 298. William Barrett Commons, 70, Lamcote Grove Meadows, Nottingham; 299. Bernard Wood, 12, Estcourt Avenue, Headingley, Leeds; 300. William Leslie Beames, 167, Droop Street, Queens Park, W. 10; 305. James Dennis Archer, "Haslemere," 26, Bishop's Park Road, Norbury, Surrey; 324. Edith Bowman, 6, Beaconsfield Street, Princes Avenue, Liverpool; 344. Fred Carter, 159, York Road, Battersea, S.W.11; 357. George Daniel Collins, 7D, Peabody Buildings, Farringdon Road, London, E.C.1; 375. Glyn Davies, 6, Brunswick Street, Merthyr Tydfil; 377. Bertram Reginald Day, 1, Alfred Place, Kingsdown, Bristol; 386. John Emmott, "Peer Gynt," Washway Road, Brooklands, Manchester; 393. J. E. Forsyth, 65, Blair Athol Road, Ecclesall, Sheffield; 399. Reginald H. J. Gange, 52, Honley Road, Catford, S.E.6; 407. William J. Greaves, 3, Row 103, Great Yarmouth; 420. Frederick Hoadley 62, Nasmyth Street,

Hammersmith, W.6; 421. Edward Hodge, 7, Mayor's Walk, Waterford, Ireland; 435. Solomon Kaminek, 30 and 32, Eileen Mans., Christian Street, Commercial Road, E.1; 437. Michael J. Kavanagh, 132, Oxmantown Road, Dublin, Ireland; 445. Thomas Franklin Levy, 53, Dragon Road, Peckham, London, S.E.15; 452. John Joseph Mackesey, 24, Arbour Hill, Dublin; 456. William Magee, Abercorn Square, Strabane, Co. Tyrone; 462. James McCarthy, 1, Moore Street, Cork; 466. Gerard Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, Liverpool; 472. Jack Morrin, 13, Upper Mount Pleasant Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin; 475. Stanley W. Moulson, Burnley Avenue, Ainsdale, Southport; 477. Frederick Nash, 157, York Road, Battersea, S.W.11; 482. Herbert Leslie Norton, 42, Oxford Street, Liverpool; 493. Augustus Pasback, 7, Leeland Mansions, W. Ealing; 494. Harry Gainsford Payne, 38, Isabel Grove, Clubmoor, Liverpool; 517. John Owen Seammes, 3, The Avenue, Hadleigh, Essex; 519. Ralph Sewell, East Street, St. Ives, Hunts; 530. Bert Smith, 81, Southern Road, Washwood Heath, Birmingham; 542. Horace V. Stone, 50, Norway Street, Waterloo, Liverpool; 547. Frank Nathaniel Tame, 21, Victoria Road, Kilburn, N.W.6; 549. Merlin Thomas, 36, Brighton Road, Birkdale, Southport; 551. Walter William Thorne, 42, Aquita Road, St. Helier, Jersey; 553. Master S. Townend, 61, Hough Lane, Lower Broughton, Manchester; 556. Andre van der Naatan, 94, Nightingale Lane, Wandsworth, S.W.12; 581. Winifred E. Wood, 95, Nansen Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham; 599. Samuel Cohen, 85, Bristol Street, Belfast; 612. Norman Hartley, 35, Lightburne Avenue, St. Anne's-on-Sea.

A TALE YOU MUSTN'T MISS!

Lads, here's something extra-special—a tale you certainly mustn't miss.
It's a grand, long complete yarn of Army life and football.

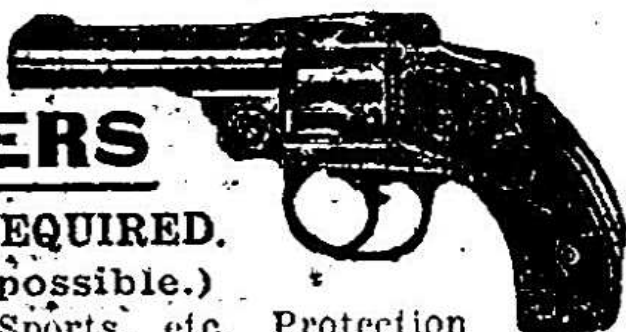
"THE OUTCAST OF THE EASTSHIRES!"

By **ROBERT MURRAY.**

There's enough reading in this tale alone to keep you busy for the best part of an evening—and don't forget there are **FOUR** other ripping sports stories in that whopping twopennyworth—

THIS WEEK'S "BOYS' REALM"

SAFETY REVOLVERS



NO LICENCE REQUIRED.

(Accidents impossible.)

For Theatricals, Sports, etc. Protection
against footpads, dogs, etc.

NEW MODELS blue steel or nickel finish.
Six-chamber pocket model..... 7/6 post free.
Eight-chamber, small..... 10/6
Ten-chamber Cowboy model..... 15/-
Single-chamber..... 2/6

**FREE SUPPLY OF CARTRIDGES GIVEN TO ALL
CUSTOMERS ENCLOSING 9d. FOR CARRIAGE.**
CATALOGUE Cameras, cycles, Gramophones,
etc., free on request.

JAMES MANSFIELD & CO., LTD.,
71, High Holborn, London, W.C.1.

100 Different Stamps
2 Triangular Stamps
24-page Duplicate Album

FREE !!

An extraordinary offer absolutely free. Just request our famous approvals on a p.c., when this fine parcel will be sent per return.—**Lisburn & Townsend, London Road, Liverpool.**

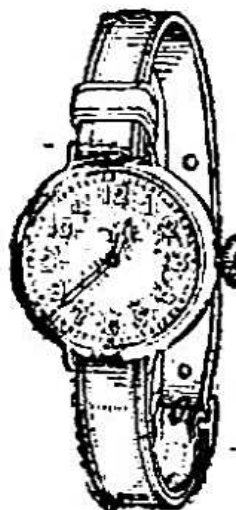
£2,000 worth cheap Photo Material. Samples catalogue free. 12 by 10 Enlargement, any photo, 8d.—**Hackett's Works, July Road, Liverpool.**

Height Increased **5/-** Complete
In 30 Days. Course.

No Appliances. No Drugs. No Dieting.
The Melvin Strong System **NEVER
FAILS.** Send stamp for particulars
and testimonials.—**Melvin Strong, Ltd.**
(Dept. S), 10, Judgate Hill, London, Eng.



150,000 ft. of first-class Films, Dramas, Comics,
from 5/- per 1,000 ft. Bargains to clear. Re-
stocking sale. 100 ft. samples, 1/- post free.
FILMS, 11, BARGATE, LINCOLN.



YOURS for 6D

Handsome Gent's size
Lever Wristlet Watch,
complete with leather strap.
Luminous Hands and Dial. **DEPOSIT**
See time in the dark. Lever Move-
ment, Jewelled Balance, warranted 5
years. Sent upon receipt of 6d. 1/6
on receipt, balance 2/- monthly until
only 16/- is paid. Price, full cash,
with order, or 7 days, 15/- only.
Cash returned if dissatisfied.

SIMPSON'S (BRIGHTON), LTD.
(Dept. 1869), Queen's Road,
BRIGHTON, Sussex.



HEIGHT COUNTS

in winning success. Let the Girvan
System increase your height. Send
P.C. for particulars and our £100
guarantee to Enquiry Dept. A.M.P.,
17, Stroud Green Rd., London, N.4.



DON'T BE BULLIED.

Send 4d. Stamps for Two Splendid Illus.
Lessons in Jujitsu; the Wonderful Jap-
anese art of Self-Defence without
weapons. Better than boxing or any
science invented. Learn to
take care of yourself under
all circumstances and fear
no man. Monster large

Illus. Portion for P.O. 3/9. Send Now to "YAWARA"
(Dept. A.P. 25), 10, Queensway, Hanworth, Middlesex.

Stop Stammering!

Cure yourself
as I did. Par-
ticulars **FREE.**—**FRANK B. HUGHES,** 7
Southampton Row, London, W.C.1.

**BE SURE TO MENTION "THE NELSON LEE
LIBRARY" WHEN COMMUNICATING
WITH ADVERTISERS.**

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd.,
The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices, The Fleetway
House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine
post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/- per annum; 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents
for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand:
Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Co. (Canada), Limited.
No. 558. D/R

February 13, 1926.