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THE NO- SURRENDER REBELS !

A VIVID LONG COMPLETE YARN, FEATURING THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S.

New Series No. 87.

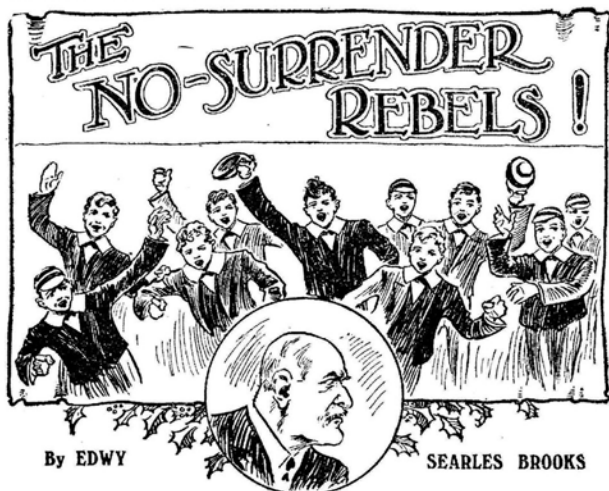
OUT ON WEDNESDAY

December 31st, 1927.



Little suspecting that underneath the bridge was a party of rebels in punts, General Carfax gave orders for the cases and packages of foodstuffs to be hurled over the parapet into the river below. They came down in a continuous stream and, as they did so, so the rebels retrieved them and put them into their punts.

HERE'S A SCHOOL YARN WITH A PUNCH, BOYS!



By EDWY

SEARLES BROOKS

Traitors in the camp! And as a result the rebels of St. Frank's find themselves without any catable grub, their stocks having been tampered with! General Carfax, of course, thinks he has gained the upper hand, but he receives a great shock—two shocks, in fact! What they are you'll discover when you read this splendid story!

CHAPTER 1.

A Visitor of No Account!

"PENNY for them, Archie, old man!" Archibald Winston Derek Glen-therne, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, started slightly as Nipper's voice broke in upon his dreamy meditations. Archie was at one of the upper windows of the Modern House, with the snow-covered Triangle in full view.

"Eh? I mean to say, what?" he ejaculated. "Oh, rather! I see what you mean, old scream! A penny for the good old thoughts, as it were?"

"You were looking awfully serious, Archie," said Nipper, with a smile.

The Genial Ass of the Remove nodded.

"Absolutely!" he agreed, in a sombre voice. "As a matter of fact, old thing, I was thinking of this, and thinking of that, and so on, and so forth. I mean, what?"

"That's just about as clear as mud," chuckled Nipper.

"Oh, rather! Eh?" said Archie, with a start. "Mud? Oh, you mean— Well, laddie, perhaps you're right! To be absolutely precise, the good old mind was dwelling lightly upon the thought of Phipps."

"Beginning to miss him, eh?" asked Nipper sympathetically.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "That is to say, odds fiddlesticks and rubbish! Beginning, what? My dear old cheese, I've missed Phipps ever since this giddy rebellion started."

"Yes, I suppose you have."

"Not," said Archie stoutly, "that I am grumbling, dear old C.O. Absolutely not! In fact, absolutely not, with reversible levers! No. We're all in this dashed barring-out together, and we'll dashed well see it through. Victory, what? 'No surrender' goes forth the cry! Count on the Pride of the Glenthornes to rally round!"

"Good old Archie!" grinned Edward Oswald Handforth, the celebrated leader of Study D, as he strolled up with Church and McClure, his faithful chums. "That's the spirit, old man! Never say die!"

"Oh, rather!"

"What do we care about Christmas?" went on Handforth lightly. "Here we are, right in the middle of the Christmas vacation—with the New Year only a day or two away. And we're still at St. Frank's—barricaded into the Modern House, holding out against the enemy like—like Lord Roberts held out against the Boers at Mafeking!"

Church shook his head sadly.

"And Handy's a Boy Scout, too," he said, in sorrow.

"Eh?" frowned Handforth. "What the dickens—"

"You must have been thinking about Baden-Powell, old man," said Nipper gently. "Not that we'll go into any argument about it. In a way, we're besieged, and we're holding out against General Carfax. Well, we're quite ready to go on—and to keep on going on until we've gained the day!"

"We're never going to admit defeat, anyhow," declared Handforth stubbornly. "General Carfax may be a Governor of the school, and he may have come here specially to put a stop to this rebellion, but he'll never beat us. It's about time the general got up to some more of his tricks, my sons. Nothing's happened for two or three days—ever since Christmas, in fact. I'm getting tired of this inactivity. Why doesn't the general start something exciting?"

"Give him time," grinned Nipper. "I expect he's thinking out some more of his celebrated strategy. Anyhow, we've got the school quite to ourselves, except for the general and his two or three servants, over in the Ancient House."

"And we're a pretty strong force here, too," mused Handforth, as he looked out of the window. "The entire Remove, Fourth and Third. In fact, everybody in the Lower School. If we can't defy the enemy, we shall deserve to be whacked!"

"Somehow, I don't think the general has done with us yet," said Nipper thoughtfully. "He's been very quiet during these last two or three days, but that doesn't mean any thing. He may be planning a new campaign

—or he may not. We can only wait and see what happens. In the meantime, we're keeping everything going—with look-outs and guards and everything. All the windows and doors are barricaded, and we've got a plentiful supply of food."

"Absolutely!" said Archie brightly. "Food, what? In other words, tea, laddies! I trust that Fatty Little is getting busy with the stuff that cheers and invigorates?"

"We ought to hear the gong at any minute now," said Church, in a hopeful voice.

"So that's why you were thinking about Phipps, eh?" smiled Nipper, looking at Archie.

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, yes," admitted Archie. "Well, I mean to say, Phipps was such a dashed fine lad when it came to rallying round with the priceless brew. A ripe sort of chappie, Phipps! Always on the good old spot, always dashing about and doing things, don't you know!"

In normal times Phipps was Archie's valet, and none of the juniors quite realised how much Archie missed him.

"The new term will soon be here, Archie," said Nipper encouragingly. "And this rebellion is bound to be over before then. So cheer up! Before you know where you are you'll be in Study E again, and Phipps will be gliding in with the tea-tray!"

Archie gave a sigh of contentment.

"That sort of thing seems too dashed good to be true," he said. "I mean, here we are, bottled up, so to speak, without any sign of an armistice, and—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Handforth, as he looked out of the window. "Who's this?"

"Somebody coming?" asked Nipper.

"No—somebody's here!" replied Handforth. "By George! I can see who he is, too! That beastly cad, Wallace!"

"Wallace?" repeated McClure interrogatively.

"You know—that fellow, Gordon Wallace, of the River House School!" replied Handforth. "He was at St. Frank's for a bit last term, and he caused a lot of trouble over that Castleton affair. After that he buzzed back to the River House, thank goodness. I wonder what he wants here—in the middle of the Christmas holidays, too?"

They all looked out at the solitary figure in the Triangle, and Archie Glenthorne frowned.

"I trust there will be no fraternising with this foul blighter!" he said severely. "I must remark, old dears, that I regard Wallace as a particularly poisonous chunk of nastiness!"

At that moment the "poisonous chunk of nastiness" waved his hand, having caught sight of the juniors at the upper window. And, although he smiled, he only got cold stares in reply. The coming of Gordon Wallace was not regarded by the St. Frank's rebels as a good omen.



CHAPTER 2.

Up to His Old Tricks!

QUITE a few of the juniors had seen the visitor by this time, and many of the upper windows of the

Modern House were filled with Removites, Fourth-Formers, and fags. They were all looking out at the solitary figure in the snow-covered Triangle.

Gordon Wallace stood there, a rather supercilious smile on his features. He was well wrapped up, with a muffler round his neck, and he had the utter nerve to be smoking a cigarette.

"Well, well!" he remarked, after he had absorbed the scene. "So here you are, eh? All barricaded up, with nowhere to go! Poor beggars! I'm sorry for you!"

Handforth leaned out of his window, and his expression was fierce.

"We don't want any sympathy from you, Wallace!" he said bluntly. "You can go and eat coke!"

"Thanks all the same, but I'm on a diet," replied Wallace. "How goes it, Handforth? Still punching the fellows' heads? Still blundering about as usual? Well, upon my word! So you fellows are holding a great barring-out, are you? What a life!"

There was a mocking note in his voice—an amused air of thinly-veiled contempt in his manner. During his brief period at St. Frank's, Gordon Wallace had been very unpopular among all the decent fellows, and they were by no means pleased to see him here now.

"I should like to know who asked you to come here?" demanded Reggie Pitt, of the West House, as he leaned out of one of the other windows. "I suppose you know this is private property, Wallace?"

"Oh, come off it!" said the visitor, with a grin. "I thought I'd just stroll in to see how you were getting on. I suppose you know you're the talk of the neighbourhood, don't you? In fact, some of the London newspapers have been getting hold of the story. I thought I'd just run along, to see how the great battle was progressing. I seem to have arrived during a lull."

"It won't be a very long lull unless you clear off!" said Handforth aggressively. "It'll only take us about two seconds to start activities! We don't want any of your rotten sneers, Wallace!"

"Clear off, you River House rotter!" "Scout!"

There were many angry shouts, but Wallace stood there, impervious to the chorus.

"If you don't want me here, come out and show me off the premises," he said calmly. "Oh, but I forgot! You're barricaded in, aren't you? You daren't move out! Poor blighters! You're having a ripping sort of Christmas—I don't think!"

"If it comes to that, what are you doing here?" asked Buster Boots. "Aren't you getting any Christmas holidays at the River House School this year?"

Gordon Wallace chuckled.

"Oh, my people are abroad," he replied. "I'm spending Christmas at school, and I don't mind admitting that I'm having a high old time. There are only about four of us there, and we can do practically as we like. No restrictions—no rules and regulations. There are one or two fellows staying on at the Bannington Grammar School, too, and we meet every day, and enjoy ourselves."

"Playing billiards at the Wheatsheaf, I suppose?" asked Handforth sarcastically.

"Precisely!" nodded Wallace. "Playing billiards at the Wheatsheaf—to say nothing of an occasional game of bridge, or nap. We're out every night, and having a regular royal time. Christmas at school isn't at all bad, when you know one or two sportsmen in the district. Of course, it's different when you're all hemmed in like this—bottled up like so many convicts in a jail! You don't know how sorry I am for you!"

"Is that all you came to tell us?" asked Nipper grimly.

"Well, no," replied Wallace, as he tossed his cigarette away. "As a matter of fact, I came here with a definite object. Out of the kindness of my heart, I thought that one or two of you fellows might like a bit of a spree this evening. We're going to hold a big party at the Wheatsheaf to-night—starting at half-past nine. Something special, you know—with a touch of spice in it. Anybody like to come?"

"You rotter!" roared Handforth. "Do you think we want to go to your beastly parties?"

"Well, I wasn't thinking of you, exactly," said Wallace. "But there might be one or two others who are getting fed up with this imprisonment. If you pop along to the Wheatsheaf to-night, you'll have a regular welcome. But it'll be no good coming unless you have some money."

"We're not interested," said Nipper coldly. "In any case, Wallace, we know jolly well that you're only trying to amuse yourself. I would like to point out that the atmosphere out in the lane is much more healthy. Quite a number of fellows are getting ready to pelt you, and I'm giving you fair warning."

Gordon Wallace shrugged his shoulders.

"A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse," he replied coolly. "Then it's no go? Nobody wants to take advantage of my invite? Well, I thought as much!"

He turned on his heel, and as he did so he gave a quick, almost imperceptible nod to two juniors who were at one of the lower windows, just visible behind the barricade.

They were Gulliver and Bell, of Study A in the Ancient House—Wallace's former chums. And Gulliver and Bell had been waiting for some sort of sign from their old leader.

"He's telling us to go round to the back!" muttered Gulliver, with a quick glance at his

companion. "Did you see that nod of his? He's only been spoofing these other fellows. He came here to have a private word with us—and now he has spotted us. Let's buzz round to the back, in any case."

"Yes, rather!" said Bell eagerly.

It seemed that they had fathomed Wallace's little game, for the River House cad, after ostentatiously making his way out of the main gates, dodged behind the wall for a hundred yards or so, and then climbed over, half hidden by the trees. Now he quickly scampered across the back to the East Square, and came to a halt behind one of the rear windows of the Modern House. None of the look-outs had seen him, for they had not yet got back to their posts, after the little diversion.

Wallace had only been there for a couple of minutes before one of the windows was cautiously pushed open a little way. Within, the barricades were moved, and two faces appeared in the slit.

"Good men!" murmured Wallace, with a grin. "I thought you'd understand!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Pressing Invitation!



GULLIVER and Bell were very pleased to see their old leader. Since his departure, they had been very

much at a loose end. For, without somebody to lead them, they were more or less harmless. They possessed no initiative of their own, although their instincts were wholly on the questionable side.

"Jolly glad to see you, Wallace!" murmured Bell, his eyes gleaming. "By gad! We've been having a rotten time since you left, you know!"

"I can imagine it!" agreed Wallace. "You chaps are pretty helpless by yourselves, aren't you? Promising enough, but lacking in originality. Well, what about to-night?"

"What do you mean?" said Gulliver.

"Can't you manage to come out?" asked Wallace. "Can't you get one or two of the lads together, and buzz along to the Wheat-sheaf?"

"You mean——"

"Oh, come off it!" said Wallace. "I spouted all that stuff just now—in the front of the building—in case I couldn't get a word with you in private. It doesn't matter about all the others knowing. I don't care a hang! But I wanted you to hear, so that you could slip out to-night, and join the merry throng. It's all the better to have a special word with you, of course——"

"But we can't do it!" interrupted Gulliver, with a startled expression in his eyes. "We can't leave the fortress, Wallace."

"Can't leave the what?"

"Our stronghold—the school!" said Gulliver. "We can't get out!"

"Why not?"

"Because—because—— Well, we're holding a barring-out, aren't we?" said Gulliver argumentatively. "You know jolly well that we can't get out, Wallace!"

"I don't know anything of the sort," said the River House rascal. "You're supposed to go to bed, aren't you? Well, what's to prevent you slipping out, when everything's quiet? Hang it, you may be holding a barring-out, but you're not like prisoners! I rather thought I was doing you a good turn——"

"Yes, we understand that, of course," said Bell. "But Gully is right, you know. We couldn't possibly risk slipping out. If Nipper or Handforth or some of the other fellows got to know——"

"Why, are you afraid of them?" sneered Wallace. "By gad! What an admission! Afraid to come out and enjoy yourselves during Christmas week! I'm rather sorry I took the trouble to come here!"

There was such contempt in his tone that Gulliver and Bell winced.

"Oh, cheese it!" muttered Gulliver. "Be reasonable, Wallace! You know jolly well how difficult it would be. We'd come like a shot if—if——"

"If you weren't funks!" said Wallace.

"Oh, hang it——"

"This party is something very special," went on Gordon Wallace. "A regular Yuletide affair, of course—but with the addition of a sporting element. It doesn't matter if you don't get there until eleven o'clock—or even midnight. The party will go on until five or six in the morning. You'll still be able to join in the main spree. You've got some money, I suppose?"

"Plenty!" said Gulliver. "I've got over five quid—presents from my pater, and one or two uncles, you know. Bell is pretty flush, too. We can't spend any money here, you see. We're all hemmed in, and——"

"Exactly!" nodded Wallace. "That's just what I thought. Well, here's a chance for you to have some real fun. And what about the other fellows? Aren't there a few who would join in, to make a little party of it? What about Castleton?"

Gulliver shook his head.

"No good asking Castleton!" he said gruffly. "He was a sportsman when he first came to St. Frank's, but after his beastly twin brother came here——"

"Don't talk about him!" interrupted Wallace sourly.

He had no cause to love Arthur Castleton, the boy who had come to St. Frank's, and who had shown Alan Castleton the error of his ways.

"Castleton's here, I suppose?" asked Wallace curiously.

"Alan, you mean?" said Bell. "Yes, he's here—but he's an out-and-out goody-goody."

"Well, there must be some others," argued Wallace. "What about that chap Merrell? And what about Marriott——"

"Merrell and Marriott are away from the school," said Gulliver. "In fact, this whole barring-out was caused by those two chaps. Not that we care a hang about the barring-out," he added, almost savagely. "We were forced into it by all the other chaps. We didn't want to join in this rot!"

"Then why keep up the pretence?" said Wallace. "Forget everything for a few hours to-night, and come along to this party at the Wheatsheaf. If you don't turn up, then I shall know that you are a couple of beastly funks!"

The voice of the tempter was eloquent, and Gulliver and Bell were torn. They badly wanted to go to that party—and yet, at the same time, they were afraid. They knew what would happen to them if Nipper or Handforth discovered their absence—and the reason for their absence. There would be a very painful fifteen minutes on the morrow.

"Well, I'll leave it to you," went on Wallace, before either of the Ancient House cads could speak. "I'd better not stop here any longer—somebody might spot me. But don't forget—nine-thirty, or any time afterwards. And it's something very special!"

"Well, look here, we'll come if we can," said Gulliver. "I don't promise, because we may not be able to slip away."

"Where there's a will, there's a way," said Wallace sourly.

"Well, you clear off, and expect us when you see us," said Gulliver. "But it's ten to one that you'll be seen as you dodge away. There are look-outs at the upper windows, and—"

"Oh, I'll manage all right," broke in Wallace. "In any case, it doesn't matter if they do see me. They're not to know I've been talking to you, are they? They'll think I've just been having a look round."

Bell nodded hurriedly.

As a matter of fact, both he and Gulliver were nervous. If they were discovered talking to Wallace like this, they would be severely ragged by the others; they wanted the interview to cease as quickly as possible.

So they hurried off to the front of the building, while Gordon Wallace cautiously slipped away at the rear. None of the rebels knew that he had had that private chat with his former pals—or so he thought!

CHAPTER. 4

The Conspirators!



TEDDY LONG, of the Remove, indulged in a knowing wink as Gulliver and Bell passed him in one of

the lower passages. There was a sly quality in that wink, too.

"What's that for?" demanded Gulliver, coming to a sudden halt, and seizing Teddy Long by the shoulder.

"You know," said Teddy boldly.

"I don't know anything of the sort!" snapped Gulliver. "And I don't want your confounded winks, either, Long! I suppose you think you know something?"

"I know a lot!" replied Teddy Long coolly. "You can't spoof me, you chaps! I know what your little game is!"

"Go to the dickens!" said Gulliver sourly. He pushed on, and dragged Bell with him. For a moment Teddy Long hesitated, and then he allowed a cunning gleam to come into his little eyes. He shrugged his shoulders, and watched the cads of Study A as they turned the corner.

"Never mind!" muttered Teddy. "Plenty of time!"

Long was the sneak of the Ancient House—and, indeed, the most thoroughly contemptible little rotter in the whole Lower School. He was podgy, and he was unpleasant, and he had an uncanny habit of discovering things which were never intended for his ears.

"Plenty of time for what?" asked a voice.

Long spun round, and found Fullerton, of the Third, near him. He looked relieved. Fullerton was of the same breed as himself—old enough to be in the Remove, and rascally enough to have been expelled from St. Frank's long since. Not that Fullerton had many chances of indulging in his rascality. For Willy Handforth, the volcanic leader of the Third, always kept a special eye on Fullerton.

"Plenty of time for what?" repeated the cad of the Third.

"Promise to keep it secret?" said Teddy mysteriously.

"It all depends."

"Then I shan't tell you!" said Long.

"All right—I promise!"

"Well, it's something about Gulliver and Bell!" said Teddy, lowering his voice. "You know when Wallace came here, not long ago? Well, I happened to be at the back of the building, and I noticed that Gulliver and Bell buzzed to one of the rear windows."

"You mean you followed them there?" asked Fullerton.

"Eh? Of course I didn't!" said Long indignantly. "I—I just happened to be near—"

"That's all right!" grinned the Third Former. "I know all about it. Well?"

"Well, I don't know for certain, but I believe that Gulliver and Bell are planning to sneak out to-night," said Teddy Long. "They're going to that party at the Wheatsheaf, in Bannington, I believe. Anyhow, they had a pretty long jaw with Wallace, through that back window."

"You seem to have overheard a lot—by accident!" said Fullerton, with a grin. "So you were listening round a corner, eh? By jingo, I'm not blaming you, though! It's like the nerve of those two chaps to talk about sneaking off on their own! Where are they?"

"They just went down the passage," said Teddy. "I tried to speak to them but they wouldn't listen—"

"Let's go and tackle them," said Fullerton. "Why shouldn't we be in this? If there's a ripping party on to-night, we might as well be in it."

Teddy Long opened his eyes wide.

"But—but you wouldn't dare!" he gasped. "We can't get out of here, you ass! If Nipper or Handforth or Loots or any of the other chaps discovered us—"

"There's no reason why we should be discovered," interrupted Fullerton. "All the same, it's up to us to be cautious. If'n! Perhaps, on second thoughts, we'd better leave it for a bit. Some of these rotters might be suspicious. Let's wait until this evening."

And so they allowed the matter to remain in abeyance until long after darkness had fallen.

In the meantime, life in the rebel stronghold had been going on as usual—peacefully and quietly, and with the majority of the boys becoming more and more impatient at this inactivity. They were getting very tired of being imprisoned in this fortress of theirs.

But their determination to hold out was as strong as ever. Never would they admit defeat! The cry of "No Surrender" had gone forth, and the rebels were staunch.

It was Handforth who had started the rebellion. He had been wrongfully accused of assaulting Mr. Pycraft, the master of the Fourth. Merrell and Marriott, two cads of the East House, were really responsible, but they had deliberately arranged it so that Handforth was made to appear guilty.

The headmaster had sentenced Handy to a flogging, and Handy, in his usual impulsive way, had refused to take that flogging. Instead, he had barricaded himself in his study, together with Church and McClure.

Later, the Remove had supported him, to be followed by the Fourth and the Third, and now they were in complete possession of the Modern House.

The fact that Merrell and Marriott were away on special leave, and would not be back until after the New Year—if they came back at all—had rather complicated matters. If they had been at the school the rebels would have been able to make them confess to the headmaster, but as it was the rebels' only course was to continue this barring-out in the hope that the two cads would return.

There was still no sign of activity from General Carfax. After his attempt to drive the boys out on Christmas Day, he had retired into his shell. Nothing had happened since—he had not even been seen.

Most of the fellows believed that he had given them up as a bad job. But Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Handforth and the other rebel "officers" were of the opinion that General Carfax was merely biding his time. Sooner or later he would act—and when he did act, his move would probably be a drastic one.

The opportunity for Teddy Long and Fullerton to tackle the cads of Study A came at about eight o'clock in the evening—when it was the turn of Gulliver and Bell to keep watch. All the juniors had to perform this duty in rotation, but Nipper took good care that such fellows as Gulliver and Bell—who were more or less unreliable—should take their "trick" during the ordinary hours. Only specially selected juniors kept watch during the night.

Gulliver and Bell were at one of the upper windows, keeping their eye on a section of the East Square. There was hardly any chance that the enemy would approach from that quarter, and that was why Gulliver and Bell had been chosen for this watch. Teddy Long and Fullerton came up to them casually, after making sure that none of the other juniors were within earshot.

"Oh, here you are!" said Fullerton boldly.

"What about it?" asked Gulliver, turning and staring at him.

"We wanted a private word with you chaps," went on Fullerton, who was a much bolder spirit than Teddy Long. "What about to-night?"

"What do you mean—to-night?"

"We know all about it!" grinned Fullerton. "We know that you've arranged with Wallace to slip out to-night—so that you can join that party at the Wheatsheaf!"

"By gad!" muttered Bell, giving himself away by his very expression. "Who—who told you?"

"Long happened to overhear your little chat with Wallace!" chuckled Fullerton. "Wonderful ears Long's got, hasn't he?"

"You little worm!" panted Gulliver, turning fiercely upon Long. "Spying again, eh? I'll shake the life out of you—"

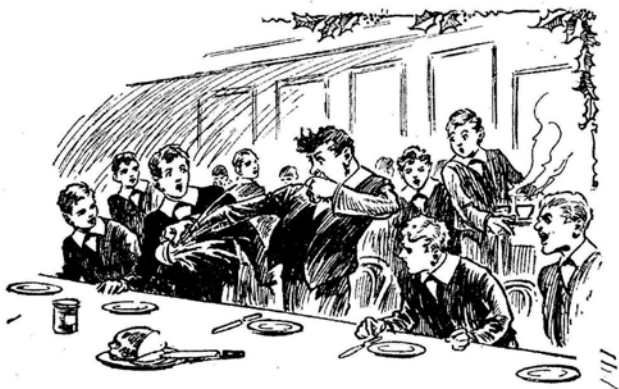
"Cheese it!" interrupted Fullerton. "What's the matter? Can't we join the party, too? Don't be greedy—don't be selfish! If two of you can slip out, so can four! Why shouldn't we all go? There's safety in numbers, you know!"

Gulliver and Bell cooled down. After all, Teddy Long and Fullerton were fellows after their own heart, and there was certainly some truth in Fullerton's assertion. It would be much better if four of them went.

Gulliver grunted.

"Well, since you know all about it, perhaps we might come to some arrangement," he said grudgingly. "Bell and I have decided to slip out at about ten o'clock. We shall have to walk to Bannington, of course—"

"That's all right," interrupted Fullerton. "It's a fine night, and it won't take us an hour. I'm fed up with this rotten barring-out anyhow, and I'm looking forward to a real good spree!"



Handforth sipped his coffee. Next moment there was an incoherent splutter, followed by a terrific roar of indignant anguish. "Fah!" he gulped. "This coffee's as bitter as gall!"



CHAPTER 5.

An Unexpected Shock!

THE four conspirators made a great deal of mystery over their projected adventure. But, really, it was a simple enough plan.

Nipper and Handforth and all the other fellows had long since forgotten Wallace's visit; they never gave the fellow a thought. And, certainly, the movements of such fellows as Gulliver and Bell did not interest them in the least. It was taken for granted that the cads of the Lower School would stick to the stronghold—since they were not credited with enough pluck to venture out.

But it wasn't a question of pluck, for the young rascals did not believe, for one moment, that there would be any danger. What could be simpler than slipping out in the darkness, and hurrying off to Bannington?

None of these four juniors would be called upon for guard duty until daylight came. They all occupied the same bed-room, so, when they went upstairs to bed, it would be assumed that they had retired for the night. There was no reason for anybody to enter their dormitory until morning. That gave them six or seven clear hours, and they reckoned that they could easily pop to Bannington, spend an enjoyable two or three hours

there, and then return. They could make up their sleep on the morrow, since the rebels were having a free and easy time.

Handforth went about that evening with a fed-up expression on his rugged face. To tell the truth, Edward Oswald was growing tired of all this waiting. He wanted something to happen—something exciting. He didn't know it, but the cads were going the right way to work to provide a whole lot of action!

It was nearly ten o'clock when Gulliver & Co., fully dressed, prepared to sneak out of their little dormitory. The rebel fortress was now quiet for the night, with all the guards in their positions, and with Nipper and Handforth making a final round of the various outposts.

"They'll be coming past our door in a minute or two," murmured Gulliver. "We'd better be ready to hop into bed, in case they come nosing in. If they don't come in, we'll buzz off as soon as they've passed."

"That's the idea!" nodded Fullerton. "They generally go right on, down the corridor, and round the bend into the end passage. We can easily nip out while they're in that part of the House."

"Shush!" warned Teddy Long nervously. "I can hear footsteps!"

With one accord, they leapt into their beds, and pulled the clothes over them. But this precautionary measure was unnecessary, for the footsteps passed right by their door. For a second or two, they heard the voices of Nipper and Handforth—the latter indignantly

declaring that it was time that something happened.

"Now's our chance!" said Bell eagerly.

All sounds died away, and a moment later Gulliver cautiously opened the bed-room door. The corridor was illuminated by a single light, and nobody was in sight. A faint murmur could be heard from some of the other dormitories, but all the fellows were now settling down for the night. There was not much chance of the rascally quartette being stopped and questioned.

As a matter of fact, they got out with singular ease.

It was only the work of a moment for them to dodge out of their bed-room, and to nip down the corridor. They reached the stairs, and passed down noiselessly. Then they sped along to a lower window at the end of the building.

Gulliver & Co. had already prepared this window—moving the barricades in such a way that, while they looked intact, they were ready to be slipped aside.

Gulliver and Bell were comparatively cool, for they were accustomed to this business of breaking bounds after lights-out. It could not be accurately said that they were breaking bounds now, for the holidays were on, and the rebels were more or less their own masters. But it amounted to the same thing.

Teddy Long and Fullerton were thrilled—they felt strangely stirred up within them. It was a novel experience for these two, since they seldom had enough courage to break bounds during the ordinary school term. If it came to that, neither Gulliver nor Bell would have broken bounds had it not been for the leadership of some bolder spirit.

"Well, we're out!" whispered Gulliver triumphantly, as they stood outside under the twinkling stars.

"Easy!" grinned Bell.

"Rather!" said Fullerton. "And we've put the barricade back in place, so that nobody will notice anything if they happen to pass round. When we come back again, at three or four o'clock in the morning, it'll be as easy as pie to get in, and sneak to our dormy."

Teddy Long was looking round with a rather fearful gaze.

"I hope none of the look-outs spotted us!" he muttered. "There'll be an awful row if we're collared, and dragged in—"

"Shut up, you young ass!" frowned Gulliver. "It's as black as pitch, and nobody will see us. If you don't want to come, you can go back!"

But Teddy Long did not accept this invitation. He kept very close to the other three as they made off towards the wall. Teddy, to tell the truth, was nervous—nervous of the darkness.

"Good egg!" breathed Gulliver, as they all dropped down beyond the school wall. "Now we're in the lane—and everything is plain sailing!"

"Rather!" said Bell, with a note of relief in his voice. "And we got out without

attracting any attention, or anything. It's only two and a half miles to Bannington, and if we go at the double, we ought to do it in half an hour."

"Rats! What's the hurry? If we're there by eleven o'clock, we shall do fine."

They set off, highly pleased with themselves.

"After all, why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves?" argued Gulliver. "Blow the barring-out! Rats to it! We never wanted to join in—only we were forced to! It wouldn't be a bad idea if we cleared off altogether!"

"Go home, you mean?" asked Bell. "Yes, but what about afterwards? What about next term? We should be ragged—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Teddy Long abruptly. "What—what's that?"

His voice was so full of alarm and fear that the other three juniors came to a sudden halt. Teddy was standing rigid, staring into the darkness.

"Nothing, you young fathead!" said Gulliver sharply. "If you're beginning to get scared—"

"There's something there!" panted Teddy Long. "Look! Figures! Four or five of them! And they're coming towards us—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Fullerton. "So they are!"

Taken utterly by surprise, the four young rascals were too startled to even run. And those figures out of the gloom came onwards—menacingly!



CHAPTER 8.

Caught!

BEFORE the four young rascals could recover from the shock of their surprise, the mysterious figures

were upon them.

"Sharp's the word!" came a grimly muttered command. "Grab them!"

"It's easy!" said another voice.

Gulliver & Co., too frightened to put up any resistance, were grabbed. Not until it was too late did they realise the appalling nature of this catastrophe. There appeared to be five men in the party, and the St. Frank's eads had utterly no chance of breaking away.

"Here!" gasped Gulliver, at last. "What the dickens—"

"Don't take it quietly, young gent!" said one of the mysterious men. "It's a fair cop, and you won't do yourselves any good by strugglin'. Straight before the general you're goin'—all of you!"

"The general!" babbled Teddy Long, in terror. "You—you mean—"

"Great Scott!" panted Fullerton. "They're General Frank's men!"

"You've hit it first time, young 'un!" agreed the spokesman of the enemy party.

"We're not quite so sleepy as you seem to think. You youngsters may be keeping a sharp watch from your fortress, as you call it, but we're keepin' a pretty sharp watch, too. There's nothin' much we don't see. Thought you was goin' to get away quietly, didn't you?"

"But—but—"

"It won't do no good talkin' to us," went on the man. "Our orders is to seize every young gent as we see, an' to take him before the general. So you're comin' along with us."

Gulliver suddenly found his voice.

"Hi! Help!" he howled. "Remove, ahoy! Rescue—"

"That's about enough, young shaver!" said one of the men roughly.

As it happened, Gulliver's voice had been cracked with fright—and its penetrating power had been valueless. It was extremely doubtful if any of the rebels had heard that anguished cry. The prisoners were out in the lane, quite a little distance from the Modern House, and they had no further opportunity of warning the stronghold. For rough hands were clapped over their mouths, and their strugglings were ruthlessly dealt with.

"We don't like doing this, young gents—but orders is orders!" said the spokesman. "You don't need to be afraid. We ain't goin' to hurt you. But it's a fair cop, as I said before, an' you're comin' along to have a nice heart to heart chat with the general!"

Gulliver & Co. were utterly flabbergasted. Indeed, they were terrified to the last degree. Captured! In the hands of the enemy! And now they were to be taken before General Christopher Carfax himself! The prospect was so awful that the four juniors nearly swooned with fright.

At the best of times they were not particularly courageous. But now, finding themselves cut off from their companions, and in the hands of the general's men, they were frantic.

And only a short while before they had been congratulating themselves on their cleverness!

It had seemed so easy to sneak out, and to start off on their little jaunt to Bannington. For days there had been no sign of activity from General Carfax, and it was generally believed, among the rank and file of the rebels, that the old soldier had given up the fight. Nobody had taken much notice of Nipper when he had declared that it would be fatal to relax their vigilance.

But how true Nipper's word of warning had been!

For here were these men—the general's men—waiting in the darkness—waiting to pounce upon any incautious juniors who stole forth from the fortress!

From the general's point of view, this capture was not particularly valuable one, but his men were not to know that Gulliver & Co. were hardly worth the capturing.

The general's men were far from being hooligans. In fact they were quite respectable. They were all ex-Service men—recruited from Bannington, mostly—and the general

was paying them liberally to keep a constant watch on the rebels. Their work was legitimate and honest, and they were merely doing their duty by seizing these juniors and taking them to their employer. In a way of speaking, Gulliver & Co. were now prisoners of war.

They were soon being marched towards the Ancient House, and now their mufflers had been transferred from their necks, and were bound tightly over their mouths. The general's men had no intention of letting these prisoners give any outcry. For they knew well enough that the main rebel force might venture out, and rescue the unfortunates.

Even the watchful look-outs knew nothing of the affair. It was very dark that night, and the scuffle in the lane had not been witnessed by anybody. The voices had carried only a few yards, and had been inaudible in the Modern House.

The general's men took the precaution of going right round to the very rear of the Ancient House, on the far side of the Triangle. The building was entered by the back door, so that none of the rebels could possibly see what was going on.

Shivering in almost every limb, Gulliver & Co. were led down the familiar passages, and then into the study which was usually occupied by Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House. It was now, apparently, General Christopher Carfax's headquarters.

Straight into the room the boys were taken, and they found the general sitting in front of a blazing fire. The electric lights were gleaming, and the room was cosy and warm.

"Four prisoners, sir!" announced the leader of the men smartly.

"Good, sergeant—good!" said General Carfax, rising to his feet and glaring triumphantly at the prisoners. "By gad! You're right. Four of those infernal young puppies, eh? Splendid—splendid! Action at last!"

"I—I say, sir!" babbled Gulliver. "We—we—we—"

"Silence!" thundered the general.

"Yes, sir, but—"

"By gad, boy, did you hear me?" roared the general. "Silence, I say, and silence I mean. Not another word. You're expelled. All four of you!"

He turned and waved his hand to the men.

"Sergeant, you and the others can go!" he said curtly. "Take up your positions, and keep watch again. Perhaps you'll be able to capture some more of these young scamps."

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, who was a burly, good-humoured-looking individual. "Now then, men, smart's the word!"

And off they went, leaving Gulliver & Co. shivering and trembling in the presence of the general.



CHAPTER 7.

On the Carpet!

HERE was no excitement in General Carfax's attitude as he stood on the hearth-rug with his hands clasped behind his back, eyeing the prisoners. On the contrary, he was deadly cool and absolutely grim.

"A pity!" he rapped out at last. "Yes, by crackey! An infernal pity! I don't seem to know any of you, and I am confoundedly certain that you're not representative of the main body of rebels. A shivering, cowering, trembling, pale-faced set of weaklings. Who are you, eh? Names!" he added fiercely. "Come along—names!"

Freshly terrified by the general's manner, the cads could hardly pronounce their own names as they gave them. The old soldier listened without enthusiasm.

"Never heard 'em!" he granted. "A nuisance. I thought perhaps I'd got hold of that young rascal Handforth, or one of the other leaders. What were you doing outside? Where were you off to?"

"We—we—I—I mean, I—I—" began Gulliver with a gulp. "We—we—"

"Out with it, boy!" thundered the general. "Yes, sir!" gulped Gulliver. "The—fact is, we—we— We were scouting, sir," he added desperately. "The other chaps sent us out to—to do some scouting."

The general uttered a contemptuous snort. "Boy, you're lying!" he snapped. "By crackey! By what I've seen of Master Hamilton—yes, and Master Handforth, too—they wouldn't send out such ninnies as you. Not that it matters whether you're lying or not. You'll serve my purpose."

He ceased speaking, paced up and down once or twice, and then halted again in front of the shivering wretches.

"Hostages!" he snapped. "That's what you are, my lads! Hostages of war!"

"Please, sir, I haven't done anything!" wailed Teddy Long, pale to the lips with fear. "I didn't want to be a rebel, sir. I—I—"

"Silence!" boomed General Carfax. "Boy! How dare you talk! Do you know what I'm going to do with you?" he went on, projecting his head forward. "You don't, eh? Very well, I'll tell you. I'm going to use you as a means to make the entire rebel force surrender unconditionally into my hands."

Vaguely the prisoners wondered how this miracle was to be brought about.

"Yes, surrender!" continued the general triumphantly. "I'm going out there now—and I'm going to leave you in the hands of some of my men. I'm going to tell all the rebels that unless they surrender within the hour, you four will be expelled in disgrace

from the school. That'll make them surrender."

Gulliver made a curious sound in his throat, and it was noticed by the general that the other rebels were looking utterly startled, too.

"But—but they won't surrender, sir!" gasped Gulliver frantically. "Threatening to expel us won't make any difference!"

"They'll let us go without a murmur, sir," said Bell, in terror. "They won't care a snap!"

This, as a matter of fact, was perfectly true. The main body of rebels were not likely to surrender unconditionally because of these four rascals. The Junior School would be only too glad to get rid of them. Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Handforth, and one or two of the other responsible leaders, perhaps, might feel unwilling to let these cads suffer because of the rebellion, but the rank and file would whole-heartedly vote for their instant expulsion.

"It isn't fair, sir!" gabbled Fullerton, made bold by reason of his desperation. "It isn't fair to expel us. We—we're not the leaders. We didn't want this rebellion—never did. We were forced into it, against our wills!"

"Yes, sir—forced into it!" said Bell frantically. "We all wanted to go home for the Christmas holidays, but they wouldn't let us!"

"Handforth ought to have been expelled long ago, sir!" said Gulliver savagely. "He's the chap who started all this, and Nipper and Pitt and Boots and the others supported him. They forced all the juniors to go into the barring-out, too. But we didn't want it. Lots of chaps didn't want it, but they couldn't help themselves!"

"We're all against the rebellion, sir," said Teddy Long, in a wailing voice. "We'd love to get out of it. But it's not fair to expel us for something we haven't done, sir. We're not rebels, really; we couldn't help ourselves!"

General Carfax granted and paced up and down again. It wasn't necessary for him to be a good judge of character to tell that these boys were not representative of the line type that the rebel force mainly consisted of. They were shifty-eyed, they were cowardly, they were treacherous.

Suddenly General Carfax's eyes narrowed. He looked at these juniors with a new light in his eyes; with a sudden gleam that altered his whole expression.

"Wait!" he said curtly. "Yes, by crackey, wait!"

He marched up and down again, thinking deeply, and the four prisoners watched him with fear and apprehension. They jumped nearly a foot into the air as he suddenly stopped in front of them, and pointed a gnarled finger at them.

"You have no sympathy with this rebellion, eh?" he rapped out. "Is that it? You

don't agree with this—this ridiculous barring-out?"

"No, sir!" gasped the quartette, in one trembling voice.

"In that case, you'd be glad to see the rebellion over?" went on the general.

"You'd like to go home for the remainder of the holidays, with the whole thing settled?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Gulliver. "We all would!"

"Yes, sir!" echoed the others, machine-like.

"Then you've got to help me!" said the general crisply.

"Help you, sir?" faltered Gulliver.

"Yes, help me!" said General Carfax.

"Now then, are you sincere or not? If you want to see this rebellion over, if you want to see this farce ended, you'll agree. Will you help me, or shall I pack you off home, disgraced and—"

"We—we'll help, sir!" said Fullerton

desperately. "By Jove, that's a wonderful idea, sir. We'd love to see the rebellion over, and Handforth sacked. We'll help like a shot, sir!"

"Rather, sir!" said Gulliver, catching the trend. "You mean you want us to act as spies, or something?"

General Carfax frowned. He didn't like that word.

"Sit down, boys!" he said gruffly. "Sit down, and listen!"

One glance had told him that these rascals were sincere in their desire to play the traitor, and General Carfax, who looked upon this warfare as a genuine campaign, did not hesitate to use the ordinary methods of battle. Here were four members of the enemy force, ready and willing to act as traitors.

Well, here was a chance to employ some strategy!

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CHAPTER 8.

The Traitors!

GENERAL CHRISTOPHER CARFAX rose to his feet, and Gulliver & Co. took four deep breaths. For

nearly twenty minutes they had been listening to the general as he had talked rapidly, and now they were allowed to give vent to their relief and admiration.

"It's a marvellous idea, sir!" said Gulliver tensely. "And it's bound to work, too!"

"We'll do it, sir—we'll help all along the line!" declared Fullerton. "By Jove, anything against Handforth and Nipper and those other rotters! They'll be done; they'll be dish'd completely!"

"Oh, crumbs!" grinned Teddy Long. "What a lark!"

General Carfax frowned. Somewhere deep within him, perhaps, he did not quite relish this method of warfare. But he put the thought aside; he thrust it away from him. This barring-out had been going on for so long that he decided that he was justified in adopting any means in order to bring it to an end.

"Well, boys, I'm trusting you!" he said gruffly. "I'm going to let you return to your stronghold, and I shall rely upon you to carry out my orders. If you fail—"

"We won't fail, sir," promised Gulliver.

"If you fail, then expulsion will be absolutely certain for you!" said the old soldier. "You're a set of infernal young rascals, at the best!" he added, with a glare. "But no matter! You'll serve my purpose! Scamps—ragamuffins! That's what you are, but you'll either do as I say, or you'll be sorry for it!"

"We'll carry out your orders, sir, to the letter!" said Gulliver. "Why, dash it, sir, we want to! We're as keen as mustard on it! We'd love to see Handforth expelled, and he's bound to be sacked after you've beaten the rebels. And we shan't get any punishment at all, shall we, sir? That's the compact, isn't it?"

Again the general frowned.

"Yes, that's the compact," he admitted. "Whatever happens to the other rebels, you boys will receive no punishment. In reward for your help, you'll get off scot-free. That's as it should be."

He turned aside, breathing hard. Again the general told himself that he was justified in taking this course. He was pleased to call it strategy. Once more he silenced that voice within him—that voice which told him that this method was questionable. He was determined to quash the rebellion, and here was an easy way of achieving his end.

He kept these cads there for another half-hour, repeating his instructions, and dinnin

into them the vital points. After that they left, and the general felt relieved.

"Pah!" he grunted. "Young scamps! Young good-for-nothings! Traitors to their own force—ready to betray them! Well, I mustn't be too squeamish—I mustn't be soft! No, by crackey!"

In the meantime, Gulliver and his three companions safely got back into the stronghold. Luck was with them, and nobody saw them enter, nobody saw them creep back to their dormitory. Even Nipper did not suspect that the camp now harboured some traitors.

Still less did Nipper suspect that grim activities had been afoot in the lower regions of the Modern House for many hours during that night. Even when he noted, the next morning, that Gulliver and Bell were looking heavy-eyed, he hardly gave them a second glance. For he knew their little habits, and imagined that they had sat up late, card-playing.

Teddy Long of the Remove, and Fullerton of the Third, were equally washed-out that morning. But for some reason all four of the cads appeared to have a slightly bloated look about them, as though they had been indulging in a heavy meal in the privacy of their own dormitory.

Indeed, there were a few tell-tale crumbs on Teddy Long's waistcoat as he passed down the upper corridor, and Gulliver pulled the culprit up with a jerk.

"You young fool!" he said savagely. "Can't you be more careful?"

"Here, I say—" began Teddy indignantly.

"Look at your waistcoat!" went on Gulliver, lowering his voice. "Nothing but crumbs! Confound you, Long, do you want to give the game away?"

"Shut up, you ass!" muttered Bell, with an uneasy glance round him.

Teddy Long hastily brushed the crumbs from his person, and only just in time, too, for Handforth & Co. came swinging round a bend, and Handforth paused as he caught sight of the four cads.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "What's the matter with you chaps?"

"Nothing!" said Gulliver, glaring.

"You look as though you've been out all night!" went on Handforth, eyeing them narrowly. "Baggy eyelids—pasty complexions—"

"Mind your own business!" interrupted Gulliver sourly.

He and the others walked on, and it was noted that they went at quite a good pace. Handforth had a habit of running after a fellow, swinging him round by the shoulder, and "dotting" him one on the nose.

"Leave them alone, Handy!" said Church, as his leader showed some signs of these symptoms. "They're not worth hitting!"

"You're right!" agreed Handforth. "Blow them!"

Gulliver & Co. went downstairs, and there were curiously expectant looks on all their faces. But the rebel fortress seemed to be

in its usual condition. Fellows were bustling about everywhere, and an appetising sneel came from the domestic quarters. Breakfast was nearly ready.

"They don't seem to have discovered anything yet!" whispered Bell. "My hat! There'll be a row when they discover—"

"Keep quiet, you idiot!" hissed Gulliver. "We'd better not talk about it at all—not even a syllable! Don't forget that walls have ears!"

"Don't worry!" said Fullerton, with a grin. "The only spy in the Lower School is with us."

"Here, I say—" protested Teddy Long. "Oh, keep your mouth shut!" interrupted Gulliver. "Let's go into the dining-hall—and pretend that everything is just the same as usual. And don't forget that we've got to be just as surprised as everybody else when the shock comes—and just as indignant, too!"

As they passed into the dining-hall, so the gong sounded, announcing that breakfast was ready for the first relay of rebels. Fellows came crowding in, hungry and animated.

Little did they guess what awaited them!



CHAPTER 9.

A Bitter Shock!

FATTY LITTLE, surrounded by his attendants, presided at a large side-table, which had recently

been added to the furniture of the dining-hall. This table contained numbers of hot dishes of crisply-fried bacon, great plates of piled-up bread, and a weird and wonderful assortment of jugs—these latter filled to the brim with ready-made coffee.

"Buck up with the grub, waiter!" sang out Handforth impatiently. "I've been sitting here for three solid minutes!"

"Who are you calling waiter?" demanded Tonny Watson, who happened to be one of that day's meal orderlies.

"Well, I meant you, but I can see that I was making a mistake," retorted Handforth with heavy sarcasm. "I'm the waiter! Anyhow, I've been sitting here for nearly twenty minutes—"

"Here you are, then!" said Watson, grinning. "Perhaps this'll keep your mouth occupied for a bit!"

He planked down a plate of sizzling bacon, and performed the unwaiterly action of throwing a hunk of bread at Handforth's chest. It rebounded, and fell on the table. At the same moment, another orderly brought a cup of coffee.

"Odds relief and satisfaction!" beamed Archie Glenthorne, who was sitting near to Handforth. "The good old priceless brew! Not exactly tea, but the next dashed best thing! Absolutely!"

"My dear fathead, if you think this coffee is yours, you'd better think again!" said Handforth, deftly annexing the brew. "This is mine."

"Yours?" repeated Archie sadiy. "Oh, I see what you mean! Yours, what? That is to say, I absolutely don't elick this time? Frightfully rough luck, but I fear that an argument with you, old scream, might lead to the coffee being divided between us—on our dashed persons!"

"Well, we're in for another day of inactivity, by the look of it," said Handforth, as he sipped his coffee. "I'm jiggered if— What the— Oh, my only hat! What the—"

Handforth broke off with an utterly incoherent splutter, followed by such a terrific roar of indignant anguish that everybody in the dining-hall started round and stared at him. Incidentally, Handforth was the only fellow who had sampled any of the breakfast. It was customary to serve him first, in order to save trouble.

"Shouldn't be so greedy!" said Willy, from the other side of the table. "I suppose you've burnt your mouth, Ted?"

Handforth was on his feet, and he was staring at his cup of coffee in a dazed kind of way. His face was screwed up into such an expression of disgust that its usual rugged ugliness was greatly intensified.

"Pah!" he gulped. "Phoo! Oh, my goodness! What—what the dickens have you done to this coffee, Fatty? It's as bitter as gall!"

"Bitter?" shouted Fatty Little, with fine indignation. "Great pancakes! Are you grumbling about my coffee, Handforth? I take a pride—"

"It's not coffee at all!" hooted Handforth wildly. "It's—it's poison! I—I've never tasted such horrible stuff—"

He broke off, and rammed a piece of bread into his mouth. The next moment he let out a louder yell than ever, although this time it was mercifully muffled. A fine spray of breadcrumbs flew from Edward Oswald like steam from an exhaust.

"Help!" he gurgled. "This—this bread's worse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Everybody in the room roared with laughter. Handforth received no sympathy, for it was naturally assumed that he was, as usual, making a lot of fuss over nothing.

But at that moment Gulliver sampled his own coffee, and he leapt to his feet, and upset the entire contents of his cup over the table. His fellow conspirators of the night knew that that action had been deliberate.

"Ooooh!" screamed Gulliver. "Handy's right! It's poison!"

Fatty Little gave a fresh shout of protestation.

"You're dotty!" he yelled. "I made this coffee myself, and I jolly well know it's good! It's all fresh coffee, with full-cream condensed milk, and freshly boiled water! Let's have a taste, anyhow!"

He seized a cup, and took a big, hearty gulp. He wasn't going to have people telling him that his coffee wasn't good! He, the champion cook of the Lower School!

But Fatty suddenly leapt about two feet into the air—a startling performance, considering his bulk. He thudded down, and the whole table shook ominously. Everybody watched with great interest, for it seemed that Fatty was in the opening throes of a fit.

"This isn't any too promising!" murmured Reggie Pitt, shaking his head.

"Oh, ginger!" moaned Fatty, recovering his voice. "Oh, pepper! Great gorgonzola cheese! Pah! It's—it's ghastly!"

"There you are!" snorted Handforth. "What did I tell you? And the bread's worse!"

The dining-hall was now in an uproar, for once the spark had been fired, it spread rapidly. Everybody was sampling the coffee and the bread. Nipper thought it advisable to taste the fried bacon. One taste was enough. It was as bitter as gall.

It was even worse. Never in his life had Nipper tasted such a revoltingly nauseous flavour. It was indescribable—and so utterly awful that it gave one a horrid feeling in the pit of one's stomach. And that bitterness lasted indefinitely in the mouth, clinging to the gums and the tongue like something foul.

"Steady, you chaps—steady!" shouted Nipper, swallowing hard. "Don't get so excited!"

"But everything's poisoned!" yelled Armstrong, in alarm.

"Everything's uneatable, anyhow!" said Nipper grimly. "But there's no need for you chaps to look so frightened. You're not going to die. Somebody's been monkeying with our food."

"Monkeying with it!"

"Good gad!"

"But—but who—I mean, how on earth—Monkeying with it?" said Handforth dazedly. "By George! What about the rest of the stuff?" he added, with a sudden jump. "What about all our stocks in the kitchen?"

There was one frantic rush for the kitchen!

Practically everybody had sampled one thing or the other—the coffee, the bacon, the bread, the biscuits, the jam, the marmalade, the cakes. And everything on the menu had been in the same condition. Bitter—unutterably, incredibly bitter! Uneatable and revolting!

Small wonder, then, that there was a frantic rush for the kitchen and the store cupboards. Fatty Little, in spite of his cumbersome size, was the first to arrive. In vain he tried to stem the tide of invasion.

"Clear out of here!" he shouted desperately. "This is my kitchen, and I don't want all you fatheads to blunder in here—"

"We want to examine the food!" shouted somebody.

"There's nothing wrong with it!" belittled Fatty. "It's been under my care all the time, and everything's pure. Why, I made that great batch of bread only yesterday, and—"

But he was ruthlessly swept aside by the flood, and the kitchen was overrun by eager and anxious investigators.

"Keep your hair on, Fatty!" said Nipper. "We can't keep these chaps out until we discover the worst—or the best. Let's have a look at all the food supplies. Everything—flour, biscuits, tea, coffee—and even the tinned stuff. We've got to make a complete investigation."

"I say, look here!" shouted Handforth, from the other side of the kitchen. "Look at this sack of flour! It's all mixed with soot and earth and cinders!"

"What!"

"And this tea is like everything else—horribly bitter!" said Reggie Pitt, who had just plunged his hand into an opened tea-chest.

And so the examination went on, with results that were more and more alarming as every fresh fact came to light.

Practically all the stuff was mysteriously bitter. It was so extraordinary—so inexplicable. What was the cause of this strange, nauseous bitterness?

The other foodstuffs were rendered uneatable in various ways. Even the tins of corned beef, salmon and sardines, peaches and pears had been pierced and impregnated with that awful bitterness. Flour sacks were tampered with in other ways, the flour being mixed with earth and soot.

As a net result of the investigation, the rebels found that there was no food left! Their entire supply, which would ordinarily have lasted for a clear fortnight, was uneatable!

Indignation swept up and down the stronghold like a raging forest fire. Everybody shouted at once, and for some time chaos held sway. It was impossible for Nipper and the other leaders to restore order.

For the rank and file of the rebels were startled and horrified. What prospect was there now? Without food, they were a spent

CHAPTER 10.

The Awful Truth!



MONSTER NATION reigned supreme in the rebel stronghold.

Enemy attacks might develop, floods

might menace the fortress, and the rebels would remain calm and ready. But when their food supply was in jeopardy, it was time to get excited.

That breakfast fiasco had filled every junior with dread.



force. And they were certainly without food now—for every atom of the stuff they possessed was unfit for consumption.

And here they were, ravenously hungry in this cold Christmas weather!

"All this special grub, too!" wailed

Fatty Little, in a voice of mournful tragedy. "All that wonderful stuff that Handy's pater sent us! Oh, bloaters! What a shame—what a horrible cata-trophe!"

"But who's done it?" demanded Handforth fiercely. "That's what I want to know—who's done it? And why?"

"I think those two questions are pretty easy to answer, old man," said Nipper, with a dangerous calmness. "In the first place, there are either traitors in the camp, or some of the general's men managed to get in during the night!"

"Traitors!" repeated Handforth, aghast. "But—but there isn't anybody here who would betray the rest of us! It's—it's unthinkable!"

"We're all true blue!" said Armstrong angrily.

"Well, let's hope we are," said Nipper. "For the sake of argument, we'll assume that one or more of the general's men got into the place. They must have worked for hours and hours during the night, ruining all our grub. And as for why it's been done—well, that's easy. The general wants to drive us out, doesn't he? And we shan't be able to last long without food."

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth huskily.

"It's a rotten shame!" said Gulliver, his face red with indignation. "You're fine leaders, aren't you? Why couldn't you keep a better watch? You promised us that everything would be all right, Nipper—"

"Dry up, you rotter!" roared Handforth, turning on him. "It isn't Nipper's fault—or anybody else's fault, either! How can we suspect that a man like General Carfax—a Governor of the school—would play a dirty trick like this? It's—it's almost unbelievable!"

But although Gulliver & Co. pretended to be as indignant as the rest, they were secretly congratulating themselves upon the complete success of their efforts.

For they, of all the rebels, knew the truth!

Hadn't they spent hours in the night "doctoring" the food stores? Hadn't they pierced the tinned goods? Hadn't they mixed soot and rubbish with the flour? Hadn't they powdered the coffee and the tea, the bread and the biscuits, the sugar and the bacon?

They vividly remembered their hard work. It was the general who had provided them with that special powder, and with the liquid which they had syringed into the tinned stuffs and the jams.

Gulliver & Co. had been rather frightened about it all, notwithstanding the fact that General Carfax had assured them, most emphatically, that the powder and the liquid were perfectly harmless. Indeed, they were a tonic, rather than a poison. Although so fearfully bitter, the stuff was harmless. All those boys who tasted of it would, if anything, benefit in health. But they would certainly not taste of it again! Once was enough!

"By gad! I never dreamed it would work like this!" whispered Bell, as he found himself alone with Gulliver for a moment. "It's—it's uncanny! Jolly lucky for us that we grabbed a stock of good stuff, and hid it in our dormitory."

"Be quiet, you idiot!"

"There's nobody near us!" grinned Bell. "As for the grub, we shall be all right until the rebellion snuffs out. We took enough stuff to last us a couple of days, and nobody will ever find it under that floorboard. The general's an artful old

codger, if you like."

"There's another artful codger," growled Gulliver. "He's not old, either! I'm thinking about that young blighter, Long! I wish he hadn't been with us in this game! Even if he doesn't blab—which I wouldn't guarantee—he might give the game away by going to our grub-house while some of the other chaps are about!"

"Oh, he daren't!" said Bell, not without a twinge of uneasiness. "Besides, he's afraid of us. He knows what to expect if he—"

"Shush!" whispered Gulliver quickly.

A group of indignant rebels were approaching, and Gulliver and Bell raised their voices in loud lamentations.

With the aid of a catapult Gulliver shot a brief note, wrapped round a stone, far across the Triangle where General Carfax, who had been expecting it, picked it up. That note would tell the general all about the rebels' plans!





CHAPTER 11.

The Council of War!

NIPPER acted with decision. "We've got to hold a consultation," he declared grimly. "It's no good beating about the bush in a matter of this kind. It's no good wasting a lot of time in useless talk. Something has got to be done."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Handforth promptly. "But what?"

"We must hold a council of war at once," said Nipper. "Handy, buzz round and tell the chaps, will you? And you help, Reggie! We want all the responsible fellows in the Senior Day Room."

Before many minutes had elapsed the word had gone round.

Such stalwarts as Fullwood, Buster Boots, De Valerie, Archie Glenthorne, Christine, Tregellis-West, Castleton and Russell were in that gathering. Handforth & Co. and the other "generals" were there as a matter of course.

The other rebels waited about the stronghold anxiously. Some of them were on duty, watching, but their heart was not in their work. They wanted to know the result of that council of war.

"Well, you fellows, we've got to make a move, and it's got to be something drastic," said Nipper firmly as he faced the council. "Without food, the chaps will soon become fed up. They'll get listless and weak."

"And that means that they'll soon be ready to give in!" nodded Buster Boots.

"Exactly," said Nipper. "There's no reason why we should think out a lot of far-fetched, impossible schemes. As far as I can see, there's only one thing to be done. Directly after it's dark, a party of us will have to go into Bannington and get a fresh supply of grub."

"By Jove, that's what I call a brainy suggestion," said Fullwood enthusiastically. "It's simple—and it'll be direct. How many of us ought to go, do you think?"

"Not more than a dozen," replied Nipper. "We mustn't weaken the ordinary defences more than necessary. It might even be a good idea for only one or two of us to go."

"How about bringing the stuff back?" asked Castleton.

"Naturally, we can't bring it ourselves," said Nipper. "We shall have to have a small vanload. Still, I think a bodyguard of a dozen would be better. We can buy all the stuff for cash."

"That's the wheeze!" said Singleton. "I've got a good deal of money—"

"Absolutely!" broke in Archie. "What ho! Same here, old thing! The good old wallet is bulging with fivers which need a new home! The good old cash question is

simple. But I'm not so dashed sure that bringing home the spoils will be!"

"There's another thing," said Fullwood. "What about to-day? The idea is to go and fetch this grub after dark, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Nipper. "But it gets dark soon after four o'clock."

"And in the meantime, everybody goes without grub!" said Buster Boots dubiously. "My hat! There'll be a fuss! The chaps haven't had any breakfast, remember."

"It can't be helped," replied Nipper, frowning. "It would be sheer idiocy to venture out in daylight—especially after the general has shown us so clearly that he's on the war-path."

The others were struck by this remark.

"Yes, by George!" said Handforth. "That's another point! How in the name of all that's mysterious did the general's men get into our quarters last night? How did they manage to do all that damage?"

"There's no proof that the general's men did get in," said Nipper significantly. "As I mentioned at first, it looks more like the work of traitors!"

Handforth gave a start.

"Gulliver and Bell!" he ejaculated breathlessly. "Yes, and that young beast Fullerton, of the Third! Haven't you noticed how washed-out they look this morning? We'll grab them, and cross-examine—"

"My dear chap, you mustn't accuse fellows in that way, without any evidence," interrupted Nipper. "I quite agree that Gulliver and Bell are likely culprits—but it's just as likely that their washed-out appearance is only due to card playing. Perhaps they were sitting up half the night, having a spree, as they call it?"

"Well, we could question them, couldn't we?"

"No good," declared Nipper. "Besides, it wouldn't be fair to question them, any more than it would be to question the others. We must have some sort of evidence before we can make a definite move like that. Perhaps something will crop up during the day."

The meeting broke up soon afterwards, the council of war having decided that a dozen picked juniors should venture forth immediately after dark. In the meantime, perhaps enough of the "doctored" food could be salvaged to make one square meal.

Fatty was set at this task, and he went about it with his usual industry. But for once even Fatty was pessimistic.

CHAPTER 12.

The Raiders!



HE meal, when it was finally conjured up, proved that Fatty Little's pessimism had not been unfounded.

The most that could be said for it was that it was wholesome. But it was bitter, un-

palatable, and scanty. This latter quality was not of much importance, since nobody wanted a second helping.

Quite a few of the rebels, too, were very doubtful as to the food's wholesomeness. Only Gulliver & Co. knew that the bitterness was innocuous. Many of the others complained of sharp pains afterwards, and such is the force of the imagination that they really did feel pains. But as nobody became really ill, the anxiety gradually died down.

Then commenced the long wait until the evening.

Nipper, of course, instituted a very thorough investigation. But nothing came of it. There were no traces in the kitchen or the store-rooms, and although one of the barricades at the rear of the House seemed to have been tampered with, nobody could definitely say that it *had* been.

The night workers, in fact, had been so excessively careful that they had left no clues behind them.

The suspicion was growing that there were traitors in the camp, and this sort of feeling was by no means conducive to peace and goodwill, as the season demanded. Fellows began to get suspicious of one another. Groups of rebels talked together in odd corners of the building, whispering and hinting.

In a word, that previously staunch garrison had now become a hotbed of mistrust. The very suggestion that traitors were in their midst had caused everybody to lose faith. Hitherto, the rebels had been united, but now they were doubtful.

Nipper was mightily glad when dusk began to fall. Action of some kind would put an end to this nerve-trying situation, and although only a dozen would venture forth, the rest would be kept on the *qui vive* until the return of the food hunters.

As for General Carfax, no sign had come from him during the day.

He had not been seen, neither had any of his men. It was not even known that the general really had any men. Only Gulliver & Co. were convinced of that fact.

Once, a tradesman from the village had trudged through the Triangle, and had presented himself at the door of the Ancient House. He had looked curiously at the rebel stronghold, but he had not even spoken to the crowds of boys who stood at the upper windows. The postman came, too, but except for these two innocent diversions the day passed draggingly.

All thoughts of Yuletide jollities had now vanished. The rebels had planned quite a programme of festivities for that evening, for they were determined to enjoy their Christmas, in spite of their strange situation. But without any food in the place there was no time or inclination for jollifications.

The raiding party was selected after much discussion. Nipper, of course, was at the head of it, and Handforth insisted upon being his lieutenant. It was urged that he would be wanted in the stronghold in case of

a surprise attack. But Handforth wouldn't listen.

"I'm going!" he declared stoutly. "And so are Church and McClure! We're not going to be left out of this stunt!"

So Handforth had his way, and the others included were Archie Glenthorne, the Hon. Douglas Singleton, Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and four more. Reggie Pitt was placed in charge of the fortress until Nipper's return, and Reggie was supported by Buster Boots and all the strong men of the Fourth.

"We shall be all right," declared Reggie. "If the general gets sporty while you're away, Nipper, you can count on us to keep the flag flying. And we shall count on you to come back with the washing!"

"With luck, we ought to be away for only a couple of hours," said Nipper. "We shall go at the double after we've got through Bellton, and I expect we shall ride back with the van."

"Let's hope there'll be a van," said Reggie, indicating his hunger by revealing the slackness of his waistcoat. "As soon as we hear the sound of a motor we'll have a bodyguard out in the Triangle."

There was little more to be settled, and as darkness had now fully descended the raiding force prepared to leave. Throughout the entire stronghold there was a feeling of intense excitement and anticipation. Everything depended upon the success of this venture.

If only it could be accomplished, the general's strategic move—the general's shabby trick, as most of the rebels called it—would be circumvented. But if the Trusty Twelve returned without any food, then the general would indeed have scored a deadly blow at the rebels!

It was a cold, crisp evening. There were traces of fog, too, and overhead the sky was dull, with no stars showing. Indeed, for the business in hand the weather was ideal. The rebels would be able to slip out unseen in that dense gloom.

They were entirely successful.

One by one the twelve food-hunters left the Modern House, going by way of a cellar grating, and crawling with excessive caution to an agreed upon spot far beyond the school wall—each junior taking a different course.

If the general had any of his men about, which was doubtful so early in the evening, they saw nothing. The rebels were an intact force when they joined company at the meeting-place.

"Good egg!" said Handforth breathlessly. "We're all here, eh?"

"Absolutely!" breathed Archie. "Tallyho, and so forth! I mean, now for the good old hunt, what? Good gad! It'll be a frightful temptation, dear chappies, once we get into Bannington."

"What will be a temptation?" whispered Church.

"Keeping away from the good old grub," replied Archie. "I mean, we absolutely can't

touch a morsel until we get back. It wouldn't be quite the thing, what?"

"We shan't have any time for feeding, Archie," said Nipper. "We shall have all our work cut out to hire a van and get it filled with bread and bacon, tea, sugar and all the other things."

"We mustn't be too particular about the quality of the grub," said Singleton. "Any old stuff will do, as long as it's good. We shall be jolly lucky to get a vanload of biscuits, if it comes to that!"

Discussing nothing but the one great question, the juniors proceeded down Bell-ton Lane, and branched off just before getting to the village. By taking a footpath and then a narrow by-lane, they finally struck the Bannington Road without having passed through the village.

"All the better if we can get there without being spotted," said Nipper. "We don't want the general to ambush us on the way back."

"He'll have a fat chance!" grinned Handforth derisively. "How the dickens can he ambush a van? If any of his beastly men try to stop us we'll simply drive straight on, and scatter 'em."

By now they were well on the way, with the main road stretching ahead of them, clear and deserted. They went at the double, and all seemed well until they reached the foot of a little dip, where the road gave a sharp turn. Then, out of the gloom, came a sudden whisper, followed by a stealthy movement. Next moment, with a rush, a number of forms bore down upon the rebels!



CHAPTER 13.

Proof!

"LOOK out!" yelled Nipper.

"By George, the general's men!" shouted Handforth.

"How the dickens did they know?"

It was the first thought that had come to him, and Nipper was puzzled also. Not that there was any time to think. Fully half-a-score of burly figures swept down upon the rebels, and there was something grimly menacing in their very silence.

Undoubtedly they were the general's men—paid to stop these boys from getting into Bannington. They were respectable enough—and honest enough. Perhaps they regarded the whole thing as a joke. But to the rebels it was a serious enough matter.

"Stick it, you chaps!" yelled Handforth desperately. "If we're captured it'll be all up! Now then, you rotter, take that!"

Crash!

Handforth's fist lunged out and thudded into one of the forms that loomed near.

"Hi!" howled Church. "Mind what you're doing!"

"Fathead!" snorted Handforth. "I thought you were one of the enemy! Why can't you keep out of the way?"

The unfortunate Church, who had received a blow which was almost a knock-out, reeled dizzily away. Meanwhile, the fight was developing with unexpected ferocity. At least, it was unexpected on the part of the enemy.

The general had glibly told them that they would merely have to stop a handful of schoolboys—and from the way the general had spoken these good men had believed that they were in for a walk-over. They would simply grab these youngsters by the scruff of their necks, and haul them off to the general's headquarters. Nothing easier!

Unhappily, the reality was quite different.

For these rebels, strangely enough, did not allow themselves to be seized by the scruff of their necks. They were fighting like the dickens, and the strength behind their punches was enormous. Man after man staggered away, both surprised and hurt.

Thereafter, the fight became more deadly.

For the general's men allowed a certain amount of animosity to creep into their manner. Not that they could actually be blamed. Any man, no matter how peacefully inclined, is liable to get a bit peevish when a mere schoolboy punches him in the middle of the face with a blow like that of a sledge-hammer.

"Keep it up!" panted Nipper. "We're winning, you chaps."

This was no idle boast. The rebels were winning. By dint of desperate fighting and persistent effort they were weakening these attacks. And as Nipper fought, so his thoughts raced.

Here was proof—proof conclusive—that there were traitors in the camp!

Otherwise, how could this ambush have been prepared? For the general must have known, hours since, that these boys would be on their way to Bannington at this particular time of the evening!

Even if they had been seen emerging from the stronghold, there had been no time for the enemy to get into position. For the Trusty Twelve had proceeded at the double, and had not lost a single minute. Moreover, the careful nature of this ambush—the cunningly selected spot—all indicated that the men had been warned some hours ago.

Somebody, then, must have got word across to General Carfax!

Nipper was fiercely angry as he came to this conclusion, and he vowed, then and there, that when he got to St. Frank's he would hold a very searching inquiry. He would discover the identity of the traitors who were supplying information to the enemy!

It may as well be stated at once that Gulliver had supplied General Carfax with the facts. During the afternoon it had been Gulliver's pleasure to stroll on the flat roof,

and, seizing a favourable opportunity, he had used his catapult. A stone, with a brief note wrapped round it, had been sent far across the Triangle into the West Square, and the shrewd old soldier, who had arranged for this method of communication, had had plenty of time to make his plans in detail.

Nipper, as the responsible leader of the rebellion, and Handforth, as the irresponsible leader of the rebellion, fought harder than any of the others. Their example was valuable, and gradually the astonished men were forced to the conclusion that the general had told them a fairy-tale.

They had been paid to drag a few school-boys to St. Frank's for punishment, but they had not been paid to fight like amateur Tunneys on the public highway!

And so, one by one, they lost their enthusiasm; and when, finally, a kind of panic seized them, the battle was won. The rebels made a desperate onslaught, and the road was cleared. The enemy were strewn to left and to right.

"Come on!" panted Nipper. "The way's clear now, and we don't want to waste time! All here? Good!"

Battered and bruised, but still intact, the Trusty Twelve proceeded on their mission!



CHAPTER 14.

Boycotted!

BANNINGTON at last!

It was only just five-thirty, and all the shops were open, their windows ablaze with

light. Bannington was a go-ahead town in some ways, and sleepy in others, but in justice to the shopkeepers it must be said that they knew the value of window lighting.

Those gleaming shop windows were a welcome sight to the hard-pressed rebels as they entered the High Street at the double. Further along, the cinema was a veritable palace of dazzling electric lights, and the Bannington holiday-makers were already rolling in for their evening's amusement.

"Well, here we are, anyhow!" said Nipper, as he paused. "Everything quiet, too, and we don't look too battered. I vote we go straight across the road, and buy all the stuff at the National Stores."

"Good idea!" said Singleton. "They've got two or three vans, and they're bound to be available now. Come on! The sooner the quicker!"

The National Stores was a popular establishment in Bannington. It was one of the big multiple shops, with branches throughout the kingdom. They were wholesale grocers and provision merchants, and the Bannington establishment was an unusually elaborate one, with a wholesale depot at the rear. They were bound to have heavy stocks.

"Four of us will go in, and the others will remain outside on the watch," said Nipper

briskly. "Don't forget that we're in danger all the time. All hands are turned against us just at present. The town people are pretty indignant about this rebellion, and they think we're a lot of young rascals. We don't want any trouble with the locals either, so keep careful watch!"

Nipper, Handforth, Archie Glenhorne, and Tregellis-West strode into the great stores briskly. There was something singularly significant about the quick movement of the manager as he came forward to meet them. It almost seemed that he had been expecting them—that he had been on the watch for such unusual customers.

"Yes, young gentlemen?" he asked, with a decidedly uneasy note in his voice.

"Are you the manager?" asked Nipper.

"I am."

"Good!" said Nipper. "Then you're the man we want. We've come here to buy a van-load of provisions. Bread—if you haven't got it, you can wangle a supply, I suppose?—biscuits, cheese, coffee, tea, butter, sugar—"

"I am sorry, sir," said the manager gruffly. "I cannot possibly—"

"Come off it!" said Handforth. "This isn't a rag! We want the stuff, and we're willing to pay for it—cash down. Does that make any difference?"

"None whatever, sir," said the manager unhappily.

"Good gad!" protested Archie. "That is to say, odds rot and piffle! In fact, and with emphasis, odds piffle and rot! My dear old can of beans, we've jolly well brought the Open Sesame!"

And Archie displayed a dazzling sheaf of fivers. But still the manager of the National Stores shook his head.

"I am very sorry, young gentlemen," he said, "but I cannot supply you."

"Why not?" demanded Nipper. "You're open for business, aren't you?"

"Yes, but we reserve the right to refuse to serve any—"

"But why should you refuse?" broke in Handforth excitedly. "Our money's as good as anybody else's! We'll pay cash down, and we'll pay for the van, too—the hire of it, I mean. Hang it, you can't fool about like this!"

But the manager, unfortunately, continued to fool about. He definitely and positively refused to supply the St. Frank's fellows with even a modest pennyworth of biscuits.

"All right, we won't argue," said Nipper, curtly. "And in future, when normal times come, we shall know where not to bring our custom."

The manager looked exceedingly distressed, and the four juniors noted, too, that all the assistants in the big shop—and many customers, too—were regarding them with open curiosity.

"Well?" asked the other rebels, in one voice, as the quartette emerged.

"Nothing doing!" said Nipper. "They won't serve us."



As the motor-van which contained the rebels' food supplies was still a number of men, led by General Carvajal, appeared from behind the helices which bordered both sides of the road. In a few moments the rebels were fighting desperately in an attempt to prevent their supplies from being captured.

"Miserable rotters!" shouted Handforth. "Refusing good money! Prejudice, that's what it is! We'll go somewhere else!"

They did—to receive further shocks.

For they rapidly discovered that the National Stores was not an isolated case. Every shop they went into had the same story. Every manager, or proprietor, shook his head. The rebels, with money burning in their pockets, could get nobody to supply them!

"But what does it mean?" panted Handforth, in desperation. "Why won't you serve us? It's the same everywhere—we're boycotted!"

"I am very much afraid that you have hit upon the right word, young man," said the particular shopkeeper whom Handforth had addressed. "As a matter of fact, the whole town has blacklisted you!"

"Odds injustices and persecutions!" ejaculated Archie.

"But why?" asked Nipper fiercely.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't know the truth," said the shopkeeper. "In a way, I'm very sorry that I must refuse you, because I hate turning away good custom. But it happens that General Carfax has warned everybody in the town not to serve you."

"Everybody in the town!" echoed Nipper, taking a deep breath. "By Jove, why didn't I think of that before? So that's the explanation!"

"General Carfax made a personal tour of every shop in the whole district to-day," went on the merchant, shaking his head. "I'm very much afraid, young gentlemen, that you won't obtain any foodstuffs—"

"I say, dash it, you know! The general isn't your boss, is he?" asked Archie mildly. "I mean, he can't order you to do this or that, or that or this, can he?"

The shopkeeper hesitated, and Nipper supplied the solution of the riddle.

"My dear chaps, it's as plain as daylight," he said. "All these shops compete with one another for the school contracts. If they serve us, they'll kill every chance they ever had. And a little profit to-day on our order will be jolly bad business, if they lose the school contracts through it. They can't afford to ignore the general's instructions."

The rebels wandered out, consternation written plainly on their faces.

"Then—then we're absolutely done?" asked Church blankly.

"Looks like it, I'm afraid," said Nipper.

"What about Caistowe?"

"The general's probably been there, too," said Nipper. "This is a snag we never expected, and it's a nasty one. Here we are, with the money in our hands and with dozens of shops bulging with food, and we can't buy so much as a biscuit!"

The situation was grave indeed!



As the motor-van which contained the rebels' food supplies came to a standstill, a number of men, led by General Carfax, appeared from behind the hedges which bordered both sides of the road. In a few moments the rebels were fighting desperately in an attempt to prevent their supplies from being captured.



CHAPTER 15.

A Friend in Need!

IT was Archie Glen-thorne who aroused a spark of hope.

"Good gad and dash it!" he said sud-

denly. "Old Tingle!"

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Old Tingle? What the——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie stoutly. "Old Timothy Tingle! My dear old soul, he's absolutely the man! The first grocer in Bannington—the oldest established business in the blessed town! I mean to say, old Tingle is just the priceless chappie to save the jolly

thorne larders and store-cupboards for generations. The old blighter is a sort of family tradition!"

"Oh!" said Nipper slowly. "Your pater is one of his best customers, eh?"

"Not one, but *the* best customer," corrected Archie firmly. "At various periods of history the pater has become slightly fed up with Tingle, and has insisted upon starting accounts at the big London stores. But the pater has always brought down the jolly old foot. Tingle remains the one and only grocer."

"And he's a big wholesale grocer, too," mused Nipper.

"We'd almost overlooked him—mainly because he's further up the street, in the exclusive section. But I expect he's had a visit from the general, too."

"Of course he has!" growled Handforth.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie promptly. "Oh, absolutely! But, all the same, old Tingle doesn't care a dash about the school—but he'd be pretty badly pipped if he lost the Glenthorne contract. Laddies, we'll dash along and stagger into the old boy's presence. Leave this to me!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'll tackle him."

"No!" murmured Nipper. "Leave it to Archie. It's our only chance."

With fresh hope the Trusty Twelve hurried along to the refined, dignified establishment of Mr. Timothy Tingle. His shop was old-fashioned and quaint, but none the less attractive because of that. With Mr. Tingle it was a point of honour for him to remain old-fashioned, in contrast to the glaring modernity of the multiple stores.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Tingle unhappily, as he observed the juniors crowding into his exclusive shop. "Dear, dear, dear! I was afraid of it, Judkins—I was afraid of it! What did I tell you?"

Mr. Judkins, a lean individual who presided over the provision department, nodded gloomily. The shutters were almost up, and most of the assistants had gone. Mr.

Tingle made a point of closing at least one hour earlier than anybody else.

He was a kindly-looking old gentleman, and he managed to beam graciously upon Archie as the latter advanced up to him.

"What ho, what ho, what ho!" said Archie, by way of greeting. "Absolutely, Mr. Tingle! A dashed Merry Christmas, old cocoanut!"

"The same to you, Master Archie, I'm sure!" said Mr. Tingle heartily.



old situation. He's been here ages, don't you know—a regular family institution!"

Handforth felt exasperated, and he looked it.

"What difference does that make?" he demanded. "What's it matter how long this giddy Methuselah has been established?"

"Well, not much," admitted Archie. "Not absolutely much. But, you see, dear old Tingle is the priceless chappie who supplies the Manor. I mean, he's stocked the Glen-

"Eh? Oh, I see what you mean!" said Archie. "But about the good old provisions. We've trickled in to buy about two vanloads of nosebag material. In other words, the fodder. That is to say, grub in all shapes and sizes, laddie! Grub in every variety and assortment! A shipping order, so to speak."

"Now, Master Archie, I think you know well enough that I can't do it," said Mr. Tingle, shaking his head. "I knew that you were in the town, and General Carfax has expressly forbidden—"

"Oh, but come!" protested Archie. "I mean, Mr. Tingle, come! I should absolutely hate to indulge in any hints, but I must be allowed to say that the pater will be frightfully rabid if you refuse—"

"I was afraid of this!" muttered Mr. Tingle anxiously. "Really, Master Archie, you mustn't say that!" he went on. "Surely this matter is not any concern of your father's?"

"It will be, dash it, if you refuse—"

"But I am negotiating, even now for the school contract," said Mr. Tingle unhappily. "Indeed, having obtained the contract for the Bannington Grammar School, I was hopeful of supplying St. Frank's, too. Even at this minute there is a van, fully loaded with groceries for the Grammar School, in my garage at the rear."

All the rebels gave instantaneous starts.

"A van?" said Handforth, in a strange voice. "Loaded with groceries?"

"In my garage at this very minute!" said Mr. Tingle. "It is the first consignment of my big order for the Grammar School, and the goods are to be delivered to-morrow. They should have gone this afternoon, only— Well, the van was delayed. It was my hope that I should obtain the St. Frank's contract, as I have said, but I shall have no chance if I offend General Carfax."

Nipper looked at Mr. Tingle closely, and he did not fail to note the twinkle in the old merchant's eyes. Truth to tell, Mr. Tingle had thought deeply on this subject. If he openly supplied the boys, he would lose all chance of the St. Frank's contract. If he refused to supply them, he would lose the Glenhorne Manor contract.

"A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse!" breathed Nipper into Handforth's ear. "Good old Tingle! Can't you see that he's just given us the tip?"

"Straight out of the horse's mouth!" breathed Handforth.

"But I mean," began Archie. "I don't quite see—"

"It's no good, Archie—we can't put Mr. Tingle into a difficulty like this," said Nipper.

"Let's be going. Good-night, Mr. Tingle—and thanks all the same. We quite understand."

Old Mr. Tingle nodded.

"I rather think you do!" he said dryly.



CHAPTER 16.

The Raid!

N the face of it, the juniors had failed again. Yet they were very optimistic as they walked away

from the front of the big shop, and sought a means of finding the garage at the rear.

"Just a minute!" said McClure, in a puzzled voice. "I can't quite get the hang of this, Handy!"

"Then you must be jolly dense," said Handforth witheringly. "It's as plain as a pikestaff! Old Tingle daren't upset Archie—and that means he daren't upset us—because he's afraid that Archie's pater might get wild, and refuse to do any more business with him. And, in just the same way, he's afraid to upset the old general."

"Yes, but—"

"So he casually told us that there's a van-load of stuff at the back," grinned Handforth. "He jolly well knew that we should catch on. We're going to raid that van and pinch it. And what's more, old Tingle knows that we're going to pinch it, and he'll pretend to be jolly indignant after we've gone."

"But what about paying?" asked Tommy Watson.

"That's a detail," said Nipper. "He knows he can trust Archie. Anyhow, we've got the right-of-way, and we're not going to ignore this opportunity. But look here, you fellows!" he added earnestly. "Old Tingle's such a sportsman that we don't want to make it a palpable case of collusion."

"How do you mean?" asked Handforth.

"Well, it'll be pretty fishy if we calmly walk into the old boy's garage and toddle off with that van-load of stuff," said Nipper. "It wouldn't deceive anybody. No, we've got to make a fake raid, with lots of noise and plenty of commotion. Then the whole town will be talking about our escapade, and old Tingle's chances for the St. Frank's contract won't be jeopardised."

"Come on, then," said Handforth briskly. "Let's get it over."

They swept down a side turning, and, sure enough, a light was gleaming over a gateway a little way down. Arriving, the rebels found that there was a big yard, with a covered garage at the end of it. In the yard there stood a covered van, with a man busily polishing the radiator. His very presence was significant—and the grin with which he greeted the juniors was still more significant. He had evidently had his orders.

But the boys carried the thing out thoroughly.

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"By George!" roared Handforth at the top of his voice. "Here it is! Here's the van-load of stuff that old Tingle was talking about. Let's pinch it!"

"Hurrah!"

"A raid—a raid!"

"Now then—all together!"

They raced in noisily, and started to work. They jumped on the van, and continued to shout in the loudest tones.

"Are you the driver of this van?" asked Nipper, rushing up to the man and giving him a quick wink.

"Why, yes, young gent—"

"That's enough!" roared Nipper. "Grab him!"

The surprised driver was grabbed, but he soon found that it was only spoof. He was forced into the driver's seat, and several of the juniors crowded after him. It was noticed that a number of gaping sightseers had now gathered round the open gateway, attracted by the din.

"Understand, we'll have no nonsense!" roared Nipper. "Either you drive this van where we tell you, or we'll roll you in the mud! What's it going to be? Quick!"

The driver looked quite frightened.

"I'll drive, young gents!" he faltered. "But I'll have the police on you as soon as I get the chance! Forcin' a man like this 'ere! I don't know what you kids are comin' to nowadays! Crikey! What a lark!" he added, in a whisper.

Just at that minute Mr. Tingle himself came rushing round, with one or two of his assistants bustling near him nervously.

"What's this?" demanded Mr. Tingle, pushing through the populace. "Good heavens! What are you boys doing in here? How dare you?"

"Yah!" roared the rebels. "You wouldn't supply us with groceries, so we're seizing this van-load! St. Frank's for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

"Start her up, driver—and no nonsense!"

The next moment the van lurched forward, and Mr. Tingle shouted in vain. The joke of the whole thing was, he knew perfectly well what had been about to happen, and the little piece of mummery was destined to be one of his stock jokes in exclusive circles for years.

But it certainly looked real enough.

Mr. Tingle's sympathies were entirely with the rebels, and, at heart, he was delighted to serve them. He knew his money was sound enough—and, moreover, he had taken a violent dislike to General Christopher Carfax. The latter gentleman's blustering, domineering manner had nearly caused Mr. Tingle to forego all hope of the school contract.

With the rebels cheering loudly, and the whole High Street attracted by the noise, the laden van gathered speed, and rolled away. In spite of all the general's scheming, the food supplies had been obtained!



CHAPTER 17.

The General's New Move!

As the van vanished down the High Street, a man emerged from a shadowy doorway and stared after it. If the rebels had known of that man's presence, and his mission, they might have stopped behind for ten minutes or so, in order to deal with him.

But knowing nothing of him, they went serenely on, in the fond belief that their troubles were now over, and that the day was theirs.

The man shot across the road like a rabbit, and he dodged into the concrete public call-box which stood outside the post-office. He slammed the door, then lifted the telephone receiver from its hook and asked for a number.

A minute of anxiety, and then a familiar voice came over the wire.

"Well?" it said sharply. "Who is it? Eh? Who is it?"

"Bradley, sir!" said the man. "I thought I'd better ring up—"

"Ah, Bradley, what's the report?" interrupted General Carfax. "Those infernal boys got past my men, after all. You've been watching them, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I—"

"And I'll warrant they didn't get any satisfaction in Bannington," said the general boisterously. "Not after my orders to-day! No, by crackey! It's more than those confounded shopkeepers dare do—"

"But they've got the food, sir!" shouted Bradley.

For a brief spell there was a stunned silence. Then the general's voice came over the wire like the explosion of a bomb.

"WHAT?" he boomed. "What's that, Bradley? Did you say that they've got the food?"

"Yes, sir—they're on the way to the school now. A van-load of it—and—"

"Where from?" shouted the general's voice. "By gad, Bradley, you'd better tell me—"

"From Mr. Tingle, sir," said Bradley in desperation. "But—"

"Tingle!" bellowed the general. "Has that wizened old idiot dared to defy me, then? Good heavens! And he's the man who's put in a tender for the school contract! Of all the infernal impudence! Of all the outrageous effrontery!"

"Just a minute, sir!" gasped Bradley. "It wasn't Mr. Tingle's fault. The boys raided Mr. Tingle's garage, and took the van by force. They might have done the same with any of the other tradesmen. You can't blame Mr. Tingle, sir—he tried his best to stop them!"

"Oh! I see! So that's what you mean!" came the general's voice, now subdued. "That's different! So they took the van by force, did they? Young ragamuffins! Gad, but they've got pluck, though!" he added grudgingly. "Hanged if they haven't! Yes, pluck and resource! Of all the rascally young imps! All right, Bradley—all right! I'll attend to this!"

"I thought I'd better ring up, sir, and—"

But the general had cut off, and now he was pacing up and down his study in the Ancient House like a caged animal. His heavy frame was hunched, his face was flushed, and his bushy eyebrows were fierce. With a sudden movement, he jabbed at a bell, and waited.

A short pause, and the door opened. A nervous-looking man stood there, military of bearing, but wearing the uniform of a butler.

"What's the matter with you, Crisp?" roared the general. "What are you so slow about? Tell those men to come in here at once—all of them! Where are they, eh? Where are they?"

"In the kitchen, sir, having a bite of tea—"

"Confound the tea!" boomed General Carfax. "And confound them for their im-

pertinence. What do they think this is—a hotel?"

"But you told me to serve them——"

"I don't want any back answers from you, Crisp!" snapped the general. "Tell those men to come here! Do you hear me, you idiot? Don't stand there, looking like a dead codfish!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the unfortunate butler.

"I mean, no, sir!"

He vanished, and a minute later the door re-opened, and the survivors of the recent battle in the Bannington road filed in. Two of those warriors had gone home, disgusted with the whole business, and very disfigured. But the others were ready for more action. At least, they hadn't had the nerve to disobey the general's orders.

"All here!" growled the old soldier. "Huh! A fine-looking lot, aren't you, eh? Well, this is no time to talk! Come with me! We've got to get down to the village, and there's no time to lose. Sharp, now! And you, Crisp, run over to those other men beyond the Modern House, and tell them to join us in the lane."

Crisp, who had been hovering outside the door, muttered a feeble "Yessir!" and vanished again. It was becoming more and more obvious that General Carfax was indeed

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ready for action. He wasn't so deeply asleep as many of the rebels believed! And all those who served him were in mortal fear of him.

A minute later, he and his warriors were marching outside. They made no attempt to conceal their movements, and there were many shouts from the rebel stronghold, on the other side of the Triangle.

But except for the one action of shaking his fist at the juniors, the general took no notice. He strode on, and out in the lane he and the others were joined by half a dozen more men. There was now a considerable force, and things were looking none too healthy for the Trusty Twelve.

"Good!" panted the general, as he turned a bend in the lane. "By crackey, we've done it! We're in time!"

"In time for what, sir?" ventured one of his men.

"You'll see—you'll see!" said the old soldier. "That last ambush failed—but this one won't! I am in command now! See these trestles?" he went on, pointing. "See these red lights?"

The men failed to understand. Just at this point some road repairs were in progress—or had been before Christmas. For the present, the traffic was confined to one half of the lane, the other half being divided off by scaffold poles, on trestles, with red lamps to warn wayfarers. There was a big hole in the road here, too—a kind of trench.

"Quickly, now!" said the general. "Take one of those scaffold poles, and put it right across the road! Yes, and the lamps, too! These young beggars think they'll drive right past us, do they? Well, this will put a stop to that game!"

A moment later, the barrier was in position. The lane was blocked, from bank to bank, and only just in time, too. The roar of a motor sounded in the air, and there were cheering voices to be heard, too.

General Carfax waited—his eyes gleaming with triumph!

CHAPTER 18.

Drastic Action!



"AN EARLY home now!" said Nipper happily.

"Yes, rather—and the general is whacked!" grinned

Handforth. "By George, we've had a lot of trouble, but it's been worth it! I say, let's yell like the dickens as we get near the school, so as to warn the others."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie.

The van now nearing the bridge at the end of the village, was just entering upon the last lap of the trip. The rebels were in high good humour. There had been no incident on the road, and they feared no attack now. It was one thing to assail a party of

boys on foot, and quite another thing to attempt to stop a rapidly moving van.

But the rebels were yet to learn of the general's strategy.

"Ullo! What's this!" ejaculated the driver, with a sudden release of the throttle. "This road ain't closed, is it?"

"Those red lights?" said Handforth, as he looked ahead. "It's all right—they're only on one side. If you keep well on the near side, you'll get past—"

"Don't look like it, young gent." said the driver, reaching for his brake. "These lights are right across. The road's stopped! I thought you told me it was clear?"

The rebels were surprised—and Nipper, at least, was highly suspicious. It sprang into his mind instantly that some trickery was afoot. The road had been open when they had started out, and it was inconceivable that the roadmenders could have been at work in the meantime.

"It's another ambush!" yelled Nipper suddenly. "Keep to the near side, driver, and go straight through! It's only a trick!"

But by this time the van had come to a standstill—within a yard of the barrier. It was too late to tell the driver to carry on; it is doubtful if he would have done so, in any case—for his employer had given him no instructions to jeopardise the van.

"Look out!" shouted Nipper. "Be careful, you chaps! There's something fishy about this! We'd better get ready—"

But at that moment General Carfax's men burst out of the hedges on either side, and they rushed at the van with deadly purpose. Before the juniors could quite appreciate the nature of the position, they were fighting desperately.

The general's voice boomed above all the racket, and Nipper & Co. could tell, with sinking hearts, that this force was far larger than the one they had previously encountered.

Just when they had been within sight of complete success, too!

It was an overpowering shock—a sickening disappointment. Indeed, so great was the reaction that half the heart was taken out of the rebels. They fought desperately, but they instinctively felt that it was a losing battle.

Handforth, perhaps, was the only one who entered into the scrap with real enthusiasm. And his ramheadedness nearly led to disaster. For he found himself seized by two of the general's strongest men, and all his struggles were of no avail.

"Hold him, by crackey—hold him!" shouted the general, as he caught sight of Handforth's face in the gleam of one of the headlamps. "It's Handforth—the ringleader of this rabble! I'll expel him—I'll send him home, the young reprobate! That'll bring the others to their senses!"

"Rescue!" yelled Nipper. "They've grabbed Handy—and they mean to hold him! Come on—all together!"

"Absolutely!" panted Archie. "Rally round, laddies!"

One combined rush did the trick. Handforth and his captors were literally swept off their feet, and all was confusion for a moment. Nipper stifled his chagrin, and came to the only possible decision. It was futile to fight all these men. More, it was dangerous. For if any of them were captured it might spell defeat for the entire force.

"Back!" shouted Nipper. "It's no good, you chaps! We can't do it! They've beaten us this time—they've got us whacked! Back, everybody!"

In another moment the rebels, sick at heart, were in full retreat. To hold the van against this force was impossible. The very odds of battle were against them. It would be madness to continue.

Even as it was, the rebels only just escaped by luck—or, perhaps, by reason of Nipper's quick-wittedness. If they had kept on with the battle, they would have been captured. As it was, they stumbled away into the darkness, and eluded their pursuers.

"Done!" groaned Tommy Watson miserably. "Beaten at the post! Oh, crumbs, what a rotten bit of luck!"

"Let's go and fight 'em!" said Handforth aggressively. "You fathead, Nipper, we'll never have another chance—"

"Keep cool, old man, we were wise to retreat," said Nipper. "The general's won the trick—but only because of his so-called strategy. In my opinion it was a pretty mean dodge to shift those red lamps like that."

"Listen!" said Church.

The Trusty Twelve had paused just on the other side of the bridge. For they had fled towards the village, this being their only route. The van itself had been stopped just beyond the bridge, almost at the point where the brickwork ended.

The general's voice was plainly audible, and it was noisy with triumph.

"Now then, men, get to work!" he ordered. "As for you, you'd better not try to interfere!" he added, evidently addressing the startled driver. "All hands, forward! Unload this van and fling everything over the bridge into the river!"

"Here, I say—" began the driver, in alarm.

"You'll say nothing!" boomed the general. "This van is loaded with enemy stores, and they're going to be destroyed!"

"You don't mean it, sir!" protested one of his own men.

"I do mean it, by crackey!" said the general grimly. "We can't be too careful with those wretched boys! In ten minutes they'll be down here in scores! And we don't want them to get hold of this food again!"

There was, indeed, a great deal of truth in the general's argument. For Nipper, at that very moment, was considering the possibility of rushing to the school, gathering a big force, and rescuing the stores.

But the general's drastic order made this plan useless. By the time the reinforcements arrived, the food would all be in the river.

"The—the destructive old rascal!" panted

Handforth, aghast. "What a beastly waste! Chucking everything into the river! Why, it's—it's criminal!"

"The general is playing for safety," growled Nipper. "He's been in many campaigns, and he regards this affair of ours as genuine warfare. And it's always a good move to destroy the enemy's supplies."

It was a deadly blow to the rebels. The general's ruthless plan certainly seemed justified, too—for if he didn't do something drastic like this, there was a possibility that those food supplies might have been recaptured.



CHAPTER 19.

Salvage!

IN a disconsolate group, the twelve rebels stood in the darkness, looking across the bridge at the van.

There was a kind of halo round it, on account of the reflection from the headlights.

The figures of General Carfax's men flitted about like so many gnomes of the night. They were at the rear of the van now, unfastening the doors, and preparing to haul out the load.

"It's—it's more than I can bear!" said Handforth fiercely. "I'm going to have another shot at those rotters!"

"Cheese it, Handy—" began Church, in alarm.

"I'm going!" hissed Handforth. "By George! Do you think I can stand here, and see all that good food destroyed?"

"We shall have to pay for it, too!" said McClure mournfully. "It wouldn't be fair to let old Tingle suffer the loss."

"Oh, rather not!" agreed Archie. "A point of honour, laddies! We shall absolutely have to square up the account with the dear old sportsman."

"And see our money's worth dumped into the river!" said Handforth, nearly choking. "Why, it's—it's horrible! Are you going to stand there, Nipper, and look on?"

"No!" said Nipper, with strange emphasis.

"Eh?" Handforth stared at him. "Why, what are you thinking about? The only thing is to make another rush—"

"No, old man, we mustn't do that," said Nipper. "It would be fatal. We shouldn't stand an earthly. But there's something else—"

"What?" asked half a dozen eager voices.

"We're near the river, and we can slip down under the bridge in a couple of jiffies," replied Nipper tensely. "Remember those punts which are moored just near the bridge?"

"Punts?"

"They're on this bank, too," went on Nipper. "If we nip over this hedge, and creep down towards the rushes, we shall locate those punts in no time. They must have been left there by Providence!"



Archie pulled out his pocket wallet and displayed a dazzling sheaf of fivers. But still the manager of the stores shook his head. "I am very sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but I cannot supply you with any provisions."

"Rats! They were left there by one of these village boat-owners," said Handforth.

"Then these gentlemen were the instruments of Providence," murmured Nipper. "The punts are there—and that's what matters."

"But I don't see—" began Watson.

"In two minutes, they'll start throwing the stuff over the bridge," said Nipper. "Why shouldn't we sneak into those punts, and lurk just under the bridge? With luck, we shall be able to salvage a good proportion of the stuff. We can pole it up the river after everything's quiet, and then it won't take long for a gang of us to carry it across the meadow to the school. Any how, it's our only chance."

Handforth took a deep, deep breath.

"I'll admit it!" he said dreamily. "The chaps have always said that you were a brainy chap, Nipper, and now I'll admit it! By George! What a wheeze! What a brain-wave!"

"Rather!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Don't congratulate me yet," said Nipper briskly. "The whole thing may fizzle out. All we can do is to try."

The next moment they were creeping like shadows along the other side of the hedge.

General Carfax had forgotten all about

the rebels by now. His whole attention was concentrated upon the task in hand. If he had given the boys a thought, he had assumed that they had bolted for the school. It certainly did not occur to him that they might be lurking near.

Actually, they were almost underneath him, cunningly distributed. Three fellows stood in each punt, right beneath the bridge, concealed in the all-enshrouding darkness. Three others stood on one bank, and three opposite. So there was every chance that the waylaid van's cargo might be salvaged.

"Good egg!" breathed Nipper, who was in one of the punts. "We're in time! They haven't started chucking the goods over yet! Steady, Handy! Don't let the punt nose its way out beyond the bridge! We don't want a case of condensed milk to crash through the floor!"

It was tricky work, the main thing being to keep clear of any possible object that came hurtling down. Very soon the stores were splashing into the river in a continuous succession. The sound was music to the general's ears.

The fact that good food was being destroyed did not worry him. He looked at it from a totally different point of view. This move would compel the rebels to surrender. And so it was good strategy.

Unfortunately, the general knew only half of what was going on!



CHAPTER 20.

The Clue!

WORKING feverishly, the undaunted rebels remained at their posts. There was plenty for all to do. For those cases and tins and bags were coming over the parapet of the bridge in a continuous succession. Most of the stuff was contained in wooden cases, and they were easy to handle.

The river was comparatively narrow here, and the current was slow. So, as the cases hit the water with mighty splashes, they were salvaged. One after another, they were edged towards the banks, or towards the waiting punts.

A certain percentage of the stuff sank at once, and and was irretrievably lost. Other portions of the load received damage by the water, but so quickly were the packages pulled out that the damage was comparatively slight.

Such articles as sides of bacon were in no way harmed. Before long the rebels were perspiring from every pore, in spite of the frost and fog. For a considerable mist was enshrouding the river now, and this was all to the good.

Nipper's one constant fear was that General Carfax would jump to the truth. If one of those men spotted the rebels, then it would mean swift flight—and it was doubtful if the boys would be able to get away.

The punts were low in the water now, filled beyond their safe capacity. One after another, the juniors scrambled out, some plunging knee-deep into the water near the bank. But they didn't care. The removal of their weight meant that more stuff could be loaded on.

That experience was nerve-trying.

It seemed to the juniors that the van must contain enough food for a siege. Still it kept coming. But at last a roar from the general announced the welcome fact that the ordeal was over.

"Splendid—splendid!" came his thunderous voice. "Well, done, men! That's the lot, eh?"

"Yes, sir, that's the lot."

"Good!" chuckled the general. "Now you can take this van, and go back to your employer, and give him my compliments!" he continued, evidently transferring his remarks to the driver. "I'm not blaming you, my man, so don't look so disheartened!"

"It's a bit thick, sir—all that good stuff—"

—began the driver.

"Nonsense!" broke in the general. "Had to be done! Destroying the enemy's supplies! Quite customary! Here's a pound for you—and be off! I'll telephone to Mr. Tingle and explain the matter! But, by cracky, those boys'll have to pay for this food!" he added gloatingly. "They seized it, and

they'll have to suffer! Fortunes of war!"

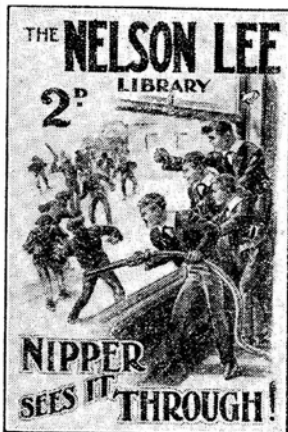
"Yes, sir," said the driver.

The juniors, down below the bridge, noted the difference in the driver's tone. That liberal tip had made all the difference, and, anyhow, the man was a mere onlooker. This wasn't his quarrel, and it really didn't matter to him which side gained the ultimate victory.

"You other men can get back to your posts," continued General Carfax. "Keep well in the darkness, and watch constantly. Be ready to act at the first sign of movement from the rebels."

"Perhaps we'll catch some more of the young beggars, sir," said one of the men.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Nipper pricked up his ears.

"Yes, no doubt—no doubt," said the general. "If so, bring them straight to me. Infernal young rats!" he went on gruffly. "Still, they've been useful, all the same. Treacherous young dogs, though! I've nothing but contempt for them!"

The rebels heard these remarks with mingled feelings. So their suspicions had been justified! There were traitors in the camp.

"Listen!" whispered Nipper. "Perhaps we can get a clue—"

"If you capture any more of the scamps, tell them at once that if they join Gulliver and the other three, they'll get off scot-free when the surrender comes," said the general.

"We ought to have these rascallions out of the school by to-morrow. Defy me, would they? We'll see—we'll see!"

"Gulliver!" panted Handforth. "Did you hear, you chaps? The—the treacherous—"

"Steady, old man!" breathed Nipper, in alarm. "Not so loud! In any case, we'd better be moving now—and there's something else, too. Somebody has got to buzz home at top speed."

"Why?" asked Watson.

"So as to get there before these men get into their positions," said the Remove captain. "Don't you see? We shall need a strong force over by the boathouse, to act as a bodyguard for this consignment—"

"NIPPER SEES IT THROUGH!"

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~~~~~ ORDER IN ADVANCE! ~~~~~

"Just a tick!" interrupted Church. "They're saying—"

"Hush!"

"Very well—very well!" came the general's loud voice. "Perhaps you deserve it. Supper, then, and you can take up your posts afterwards. These rebels are beaten, anyhow."

Nipper heard these words with infinite relief. So the guards would not return to their posts until after they had partaken of supper. The rebels would have a clear hour, roughly, in which to get the food into the stronghold.

After that the work was harder than ever.

Forty minutes elapsed—forty packed minutes—and by then the river and the meadows were quiet. And near the St.

Frank's boathouse a number of forlorn and empty punts floated. Their work was over!



CHAPTER 21.

Not So Good!

NIPPER mopped his

brow.

"By Jove, it was warm work, but we've done the

trick," he said contentedly. "Everything is indoors, and even Fatty's satisfied."

"Satisfied!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Why, the chap is in the seventh heaven! He's down in the kitchen, gloating over the stuff like a miser gloats over his gold! I almost expected to see him rubbing his hands together, and uttering greedy chuckles."

"He thinks it's pretty sound, then?" asked Nipper.

"Well, according to the stuff that's already been examined, most of it is hardly damaged at all," replied Reggie. "I say, you chaps, you did wonders! Why, there's enough to last us over a week!"

"Roughly, we've salvaged about seventy per cent of the entire cargo," said Nipper comfortably. "Yes, on the whole, I think we deserve a few medals. But there's some grim business to be attended to, Reggie," he added, with a stern light coming into his eyes. "Those traitors!"

Reggie pursed his lips.

"I've heard a few whispers," he said in a low voice. "Is it true? Did the general mention Gulliver's name?"

"As clearly as you mentioned it just now," said Nipper. "And I don't think there's much doubt as to the identity of the other three. Bell—Long—Fullerton. Those four occupy the same dormitory and they've been as thick as thieves all day. Fellows have seen them whispering together, and they haven't made any complaint about their hunger, either."

"Yes, it looks fishy," agreed Reggie.

"What are you going to do?"

"We'll hold another council of war," said Nipper. "We'll have those four on the carpet, and cross-examine them."

"I say," roared Handforth, barging in, "the general's out in the Triangle, and he wants a word with us! Come on, Nipper!"

The entire rebel encampment was excited. Standing in the Triangle was General Christopher Carfax, and two of his men were nearby, holding brilliant petrol lanterns. The Triangle was ablaze.

"Want to speak to me, sir?" sang out Nipper, from an upper window.

"Yes, Hamilton—I do!" replied the general curtly. "When you are ready to surrender, you'd better send down a messenger—"

"But we're not ready, sir—and we shan't be ready, either, sir," said Nipper smoothly.

"In fact, we've no intention of surrendering."

"Still stubborn, eh?" boomed the general. "Infernal young cubs! Don't you know when you're beaten? Be sensible! You're no fool, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter swept over the Modern House like a rolling clap of thunder, increasing and echoing. The rebels fairly yelled.

"Sorry to give you a shock, sir, but there's plenty of food in our store-rooms," said Nipper blandly. "It was a good idea of yours to dump our food into the river, but why didn't you see where it went to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The general leapt into the air.

"What!" he thundered. "You don't mean—"

By gad, boy—"

"Rather good, isn't it, sir?" chuckled Nipper. "We saved nearly all that food, and got it safely in while your men were at supper. You're not the only one, General Carfax, who can employ strategy!"

"Ha, ha ha!"

"No surrender!"

"Hurrah for the rebellion!"

General Christopher Carfax, as he heard those shouts and cheers, knew that he was beaten again. And if he was relying on those traitors, he would rely in vain—as he would soon discover for himself!



CHAPTER 22.

Exit the Traitors!

LBERT GULLIVER started violently.

"I—I'm wanted!" he repeated, with a gasp.

"Yes, my lad—you're wanted!" said Handforth grimly. "In the Senior Day Room—at once! Will you walk there, or shall I knock you cold, and drag you there?"

"But—but I don't know what you mean!" panted Gulliver, in desperation. "I—I've done nothing—"

But his protestations were ignored, and he was forced into the Senior Day Room, where the council of war was in session. Gulliver's heart sank when he saw that Bell and Long and Fullerton were lined up, pale-faced and shaky, in the middle of the room.

"Now, Gulliver, I believe you're the ring-leader of this crew!" said Nipper sternly. "We're going to give you a chance to confess."

"Confess?" stammered Gulliver. "But—but I don't understand—"

"There are traitors in this camp, and we mean to find out who they are," said Nipper. "Somebody ruined our food last night, and somebody let the general know that we were planning to go to Bannington to get a fresh supply. I suggest that you are the main culprit!"

"It's a lie!" roared Gulliver desperately.

"I should think it is!" babbled Teddy Long. "We—we don't know anything! It's a dirty trick to drag us here like this—"

"Just a minute!" interrupted Handforth. "We heard the general talking about you fellows—about the traitors, anyhow. And he mentioned one name."

The four traitors looked utterly dumb-founded—as well they might.

"That name belongs to one of you fellows," went on Handforth, with grim calmness. "Now what have you got to say?"

It was pure chance that led Handforth to glare with all his power at Teddy Long as he made this statement. There was something paralysing in Handforth's stare (except when it was used against Church and McClure—who were used to it). Teddy Long crumpled up completely under that ordeal, and he blurted out the truth before he had time to think.

It was characteristic of him. Incidentally, it was characteristic of Handforth to bestow his celebrated glare at random. It bore the most unexpected fruit. For the frightened Teddy jumped to the totally erroneous conclusion that it was *his* name that the general had mentioned.

"I—I didn't want to be in it!" he panted. "It was Gulliver's doing, all the time! Wallace came here, and suggested—"

"Shut up!" gasped Gulliver desperately.

"Too late!" murmured Pitt. "The fat's in the fire now, my lad!"

And Gulliver knew it. He and Bell and Fullerton might have denied their treachery, and they might have demanded proofs. They had enough audacity and barefaced effrontery for that. But the weak-kneed Teddy Long had "spilled the beans."

"I won't shut up!" he panted. "It was your doing, Gulliver—you know it was! You dragged us into it, and then we were collared by the general's men, and—"

"Go on!" said Nipper, as Teddy paused.

Teddy went on. The whole story came out, and although the other traitors attempted to deny it all, their case was too thin. They were exposed. Their very expressions gave them away, quite apart from everything else.

"You—your miserable worms!" said Handforth witheringly. "By George! I never realised that anybody could be so utterly despicable! You rotten spies—you cads!"

"Rats!" said Gulliver defensively. "What else could we do? Old Carfax was going to expel us, and that would have meant everlasting disgrace! It's not our rebellion! We didn't want to join it—"

"It's just as much yours as everybody else's," put in Nipper.

"Well, anyhow, the general gave us a chance," growled Gulliver. "If we helped him he'd let us off scot-free. That was the plan."

"And you nearly brought disaster on the lot of us!" said Buster Boots contemptuously. "Personally, I don't feel inclined to bump these fellows," he added, turning to the rest. "I don't want to soil my hands!"

"They're going!" said Nipper briefly.

"Gug-going!" bleated Bell.

"Out on your necks!" said Nipper. "We've done with you, you cads! The rebel force can get along better without you. And when this trouble is over we shall remember."

"But we couldn't help it!" shouted Gulliver savagely.

"We're going to kick you out, and you can go to the general, and take him our compliments!" continued Nipper. "By Jove! I've got an idea, though!" he added, grinning. "Handy, grab these chaps, and see that they don't escape."

"I've grabbed 'em already!" retorted Handforth.

Several other fellows helped him, and in the meantime Nipper hurried out with Reggie Pitt. They were absent for about twenty minutes; when they returned they brought ropes, and four big cardboard placards.

"What the dickens—" began Handforth.

"A few messages for the general!" explained Nipper. "First of all we'll sentence the prisoners, and administer the punishment. As president of the council of war, I suggest that these four traitors should be sentenced to running the gauntlet down the long passage."

"Hear, hear!"

The unhappy quartette wailed in vain. They could not escape their well-deserved punishment, and before long the rebels were ready for them.

The long passage, which ran almost from one end of the Modern House to the other, was packed with juniors, and everyone held a knotted handkerchief.

And Gulliver & Co. ran the gauntlet.

Down they went, between those lines of shouting, hissing rebels. The air was filled with the tones of contempt and scorn and anger. The ordeal was far more injurious to the spirit than to the person. Gulliver & Co. were made to feel their arrant despicability.

Sobbing, panting, they arrived at the end of the double line, then, before they could even recover their breath, they were seized

and roped. They were tied together in such a way that they all stood back to back. Only their legs were left free. Finally, on the chest of each traitor, was fixed a cardboard placard.

"Out with them!" said Nipper curtly.

The barricades were flung aside, the doors opened; and then Gulliver & Co. were lifted bodily out, and dumped into the centre of the Triangle. In a minute, the rebels were back, and the barricades were once more in position.

And there stood Gulliver & Co., unable to move, unless they courted the danger of falling headlong. From one of the topmost windows of the Modern House a miniature searchlight threw a beam of brilliant white light on them. It was really a motor headlamp that Nipper had rigged up.

Out in the Triangle there was commotion. The general's men came—and the general himself came. A storm of derision and scorn swept from one end of the Modern House to the other—a roar of contemptuous voices.

And there stood Gulliver & Co., deserving all the scorn of their fellows.

"RUBBISH—NOT WANTED!" ran one of the placards. "TREACHERY DOESN'T PAY!" said another. "RETURNED—WITHOUT THANKS!" declared a third. "CARRIAGE FORWARD—TO THE REPTILE HOUSE!" said the final placard.

The feelings of General Christopher Carfax, as he beheld his treacherous agents, were evidently very deep. He hardly said a word. He merely muttered something to his men, and without a look at the rebel stronghold he strode back into his own quarters. Perhaps he felt that he deserved this rebuff.

Gulliver & Co. were unroped by the general's men, and led into the Ancient House. They were crestfallen and subdued. They had turned traitors against their own force; now they were paying the penalty.

The next morning they slunk away from the school—en route for home. As far as they were concerned, the rebellion was over. Their ears burned, and their faces were drawn, as they heard the hoots and groans which followed them as they took their departure.

And so the St. Frank's rebels continued triumphantly, a staunch force once again—and with their determination stronger than ever!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S YARN—

is a real stunner. The St. Frank's rebels, determined never to admit defeat until Handforth is pardoned, find themselves engaged in the toughest fight encountered yet. But

"NIPPER SEES IT THROUGH!"

and it is due mainly to him that the rebels come through with flying colours. Nevertheless, there are many anxious periods when everything seems lost, and you cannot fail to be thrilled by this exciting story.

—LOOK OUT FOR IT!

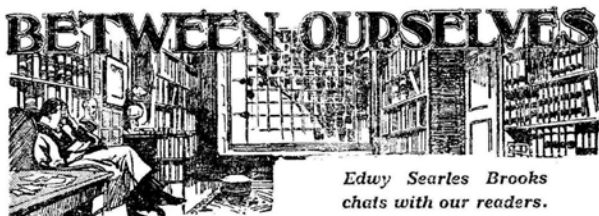
THE WORLD'S BEST ANNUAL



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CONTAINS STORIES TO SUIT EVERY TASTE !



**Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with our readers.**

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star (*) against the reader's name. My photo exchange offer is still open; my autographed photo for yours—but yours first, please.—E.S.B.

George R. Pearce (Nottingham), "A Regular Reader" (Queensbury, Bradford), R. A. Atkinson (Beverley), H. Frith (Portsmouth), W. Stanley Hughes (Stoke-on-Trent), A. F. Philibert (Upper Norwood), Reginald G. Elliott (Berkhamsted), Cicely Timmens (Bournville), Norman Cochrane (Newcastle-on-Tyne), Gordon H. Sewell* (Southampton), Norman Ingram* (St. Thomas, Ont.), "M. C."* (Cobh), Terence Sullivan* (Tufnell Park), James J. Hoser-Cook (Dover), Stan. Rixon (Manor Park), "Nipper & Co."* (Leicester), "A Reader for Ever"* (Clapton Common), Maurice Bourne* (Okehampton), "J. W. S." (Hawwell), A. Horton, Jr. (Manchester).

Norman Cochrane, of 44, Walbrook Terrace, St. Peters, Newcastle-on-Tyne, gives me permission to quote, under his name and address, his opinion of Our Paper. He says that he was introduced to it by a friend. Then: "I read it and was absolutely astonished, because I used to scorn the NELSON LEE, but now I simply can't wait for Wednesday morning. My theory of your stories is that they are the cleanest, the healthiest, and the best stories that either man or boy could read and wish for." Thanks, Norman, old man.

Here's another quotation from among the letters acknowledged above. In this case, I'm not mentioning names, as no definite permission has been given. But the quotation is from the foot of a delightful four-page letter from an enthusiastic girl reader. "Dear Mr. Brooks,—I quite agree with my daughter's views concerning the 'N. L. L.' I am not yet too old that I do not enjoy your splendid stories. As a reader of long standing, I wish you every success. Yours sincerely —" My best thanks to you both, father and daughter, for your sincere and encouraging words.

Thanks also to you, "M. C.," for your further two photos, and for the four fine views of Cobh.

Your letter gave me some good laughs, Micky Sullivan, but the only answer called for is about Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn. He's still in the Modern House, sharing Study N with the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

I have no doubts, James J. Hoser-Cook, that a description of how the Old Paper is made—from the time the story leaves my hands till it reaches the purchaser—would be interesting to many readers. But I think the Editor is the chap to apply to for that.

Many thanks, Maurice Bourne, of 11, Arcade, Okehampton, Devon, for your kind offer, but I always use a safety razor. As you give me permission, I am quoting a few of your remarks, under your name and address: "As regards readers in about their seventeenth year, who think they are getting too old to read the NELSON LEE, just tell them from me (who am in my twenty-first year) not to give up reading the best school yarns ever, but to buy them, and not to be afraid to show them to older people. And I will guarantee that within twelve months they will be just as eager and delighted when Wednesday comes round as they were before they left school. I am, anyway, and am proud to say so." Well, Maurice, you've got the courage of your convictions, anyway.

No, "J. W. S.," Our Paper hasn't an Annual yet. But if you or any other readers would like to have one I can only advise you to write the Editor about it.

D. R. Rogers (Plymouth), Dennis Drogden Mawson* (Shrewsbury), Gladys E. Bircher (Braintree), H. Neild (Birmingham), Isabel H. Rintoul (Glasgow),

"Frenchie" (Battersea), C. E. Jevons (Birmingham), "Doh Rover" (Birmingham), Edward Magnani (Cap d'Ail, France), M. Koji Mohamed* (Singapore), "T. B. X." (Darnall), Ralph Sewell* (St. Ives), George D. Edwards (Exeter), Harry McMahon (West Broken Hill, Aus.), M. Dahl (Wahroonga, N.S.W.), "K. L. G." (Sydney, N.S.W.), T. G. Rigby (North Brighton, Melbourne), "Betty" (Melbourne), Andrew Johnston (Stirling), Richard Haslewood (Blamsgate).

All right, "Frenchie," I'll see what I can do about featuring Ernest Lawrence again soon—especially if there are other indications that it would be popular.

Your English is very good indeed, M. Koji Mohamed, and I'm sorry your fear of blundering kept you so long from writing to me—especially as you write so interestingly. Now, you readers all over the world, don't make the same mistake as our Singapore friend, but just write—and keep on writing.

The Housemaster of the East House, "K. L. G.," is Mr. Barnaby Goole. The game in which Handy shines most is football—as goalie.

Many thanks for the souvenir florin, "Betty," which you may be very sure I shall treasure. I'm commenting upon your letter in a later issue, as only a part of it—and not the beginning—is in front of me here, in order of receipt. But you're a great correspondent, and I wouldn't like to lose you.

John H. Richmond (Manchester), Margaret E. Cross (Leicester), Norman Cochrane (Newcastle-on-Tyne), Frank Williams* (Birmingham), Cecil A. James (Exeter), C. F. Down (Kidderminster), Geo. F. Alan Whadhorse (Leeds), C. E. Miller (Fulham), Eric Byne (Sheffield), Eric W. Neale (Birmingham), Michael Nolan (Stroud), A. Brueton (Pall Mall), "George & Peter" (West Hampstead), Geo. F. Hodgson* (Scarborough), "Cap" (Upminster), "O.K." (Wolverhampton), Maurice Gooch (Newent), "Fair" (Dalston), Terence Sullivan* (Tufnell Park), Alex. Wilks* (Cheltenham, Vic., Aus.).

You mustn't forget that this is primarily a boys' paper, Margaret E. Cross. So it's hardly likely that a series featuring Nipper and Mary Summers would best please the main crowd.

The things I best like to hear about, Frank Williams, eh? Well, that's rather a poser. But if I say my mistakes, in what way my yarns have failed to please—where I've gone off the rails—I shan't be far from the truth. Of course, I also delight in reading interest-

ing facts about my readers and their surroundings.

Nipper is the best boxer in the Remove, Cecil A. James, and he is also the best all-round athlete in that Form. Irene Manners is Edward Oswald's particular chum among the Moor View girls.

Blondin, the tight-rope walker, Eric Byne, died at Ealing, London, on Feb. 19, 1897, aged nearly 73, having been born on Feb. 23, 1824, at St. Omer, France. His real name was Jean Francois Gravelet. I'm afraid your need of eyeglasses would hamper you in joining the Army.

So you've been a reader for over ten years, Maurice Gooch, and you think that the Moor View girls "put that extra bit of life, vim, and natural touch" into my tales "which has made them, and the St. Frank's League, so popular." Well, that's very nice of you, Maurice.

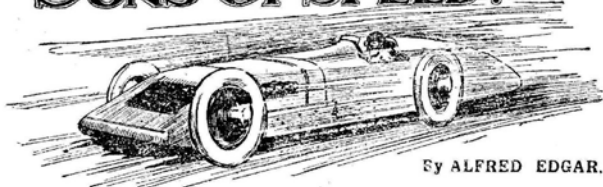
Perhaps I'd better quote another little bit from your letter, especially as you are a member of the St. Frank's League, Maurice Gooch, and therefore talk with a little more than ordinary authority. Besides, this matter of girls, or no girls, in the stories is continually cropping up. But, from all I can gather, it would raise a storm of protest if I pitched them out of the yarns. This is what you say: "Now what would League Clubs do if they couldn't include girl members? Boys might manage to keep the sports and games going for a while by themselves. But in time they would get stale if they had no girls to give them encouragement. Also, when it comes to holding socials and dances, who would look after the refreshments? Not the boys. So I hope you will keep the girls in your tales, and also bring them in a bit more." Well, the girls can't say they haven't a champion in you, Maurice Gooch (St. F. L. F.M.2512), of Crookes, Newent, Glos. (You gave me full permission to print your name and address, you know). And I believe you'll have the majority of the boys with you, too. As to readers, of both sexes and all ages—well, I don't think many of them will slang you for your sentiments.

And now, space having come to an end, I want to take this opportunity of wishing all NELSON LEE LIBRARY readers a happy and prosperous New Year.

Edwin L. Brooks

205 MILES AN HOUR! That's the terrific speed at which Big Bill Barry travels in his special record-breaking racer. But that's not fast enough for Bill. He won't be content until the car does 250 miles an hour!

SONS OF SPEED!



By ALFRED EDGAR.

HOW THE STORY STARTED:

DICK BARRY'S great ambition is to drive racing cars. He is a cheery, iron-nerved boy, and acts as racing mechanic for his brother—

BILL BARRY, who is one of the most daring of British speedmen. He is the star driver for Kent machines, owned by—

"PROFESSOR" KENT, who has also built a wonderful car, called the Kent Flyer, which Bill is to handle in an effort to attain a record-breaking speed of two hundred and fifty miles an hour! Bill's great rival is a driver named—

MARK LYNCH, whose firm has also built a speed monster, which they call the Giant Ince Eight. Lynch takes his giant machine up to Seacombe Sands for test runs; Dick and Bill also go up with the Kent Flyer. Lynch gets out on the sand first, and starts off in front of a big crowd of spectators. The two thousand horse-power blue Ince Giant hurtles over the sand at incredible speed. Almost level with Dick and Bill, the machine suddenly skids and comes at them, spinning in dizzying circles. Flying sand strikes Dick, and he is knocked headlong, with the giant bulk of the runaway car pounding down at him!

(Now read on.)

Failure!

THROUGH the hiss of flying sand and the rush of air, Dick could hear the tearing roar of the runaway Giant Ince as it smashed at him. He had a glimpse of its gigantic bulk, with the tattered tyre flapping on the front wheel, then he rolled himself desperately aside.

The fraction of a second afterwards, and the car was on him. Sand, upturned by the slithering wheels, struck him squarely. The tail of the machine flashed within inches of his head, and then he was spinning over and over, half blinded and half deafened.

He sat up, gouging the sand out of his eyes and mouth and ears. He saw a broad, ploughed-up mark where the monster had skidded, with sand still in the air. He got a glimpse of Big Bill just clear of the mark, staring after the car, which was now sliding to a stop, spectators running wildly from its path.

Bill was smothered with wet sand. It was caked solidly down the front of his overalls, and when Dick stood up he found that he himself was in a similar plight. The stuff

masked his face, and the skin beneath stung from the impact of the tiny grains. He scraped the sand away, and he saw that Bill was grinning across to him.

"Missed us by a foot!" he called. "Lucky thing we jumped!"

They moved forward together, watching the car as it stopped. Ince mechanics raced across with boards; they set them on the sand and then rolled the car back on them, to prevent the wheels sinking. Apparently, no one was hurt. Dick saw Lynch climb out of the car, and stand brushing his shoulders and helmet, apparently getting rid of sand which had been flung over him.

"Gosh, that was a narrow squeak!" Dick exclaimed. "He was moving at a terrific lick!"

"He was making a lot of noise," Bill granted. "But I don't know that he was going so fast!" He remained watching the car, as more mechanics came up, trundling a spare wheel and tools. Presently Bill went on: "I doubt if he was doing more than a hundred and fifty miles an hour when he skidded. It looked faster because of the size of the car and the noise."

"But he'd have gone faster if he hadn't burst a tyre and got into that skid," Dick said.

"He wouldn't," and Bill smiled in his quiet way. "He skidded before he burst the tyre, Dick. There's something wrong with that Giant Ince, young 'un! He'll get into a skid every time he touches three miles a minute! There's no good for records as she stands!"

Dick stared at him, then looked at the car. He didn't question Bill's judgment, because he didn't know enough about the game. But it was amazing to him that this mighty machine could fail to break world's records.

He knew, of course, that the Giant Ince Eight was only being tested now, just as Bill's own Kent Flyer would be tested later in the day. If the cars came up to expectations, then they would make their official runs after the electrical timing apparatus had been set up.

In a little while, a fresh wheel replaced the one with the burst tyre, and once more Lynch took the car away. Bill and Dick got right off the sands, and so did everyone else, as the car came thundering down towards the measured mile.

Once more sand spumed from the blue monster's wheels and rose like a tail behind. Once again the slamming crash of her twin exhausts, the screaming roar of her engine, and the whistle of wind merged to a tearing shriek—and once again the car skidded as it touched three-miles-a-minute speed!

It hurried round in a wide circle, gouging up the sand; spinning round and round on the broad yellow surface in a smother of spray as it slanted towards the sea. Lynch straightened up in time and pulled the car clear.

Mechanics ran up with boards. For fifteen minutes there was a consultation, and then Lynch tried once more. A third time the car got into a mad skid, and it was plain enough that Bill had been right. When his third effort failed, Lynch abandoned the car to mechanics and came striding towards the slipway, on which Dick and Bill were standing.

He tore off the gauntlets with a vicious gesture, and, as he came nearer, Dick could see that his lean features were black with rage, while his thin lips writhed on his gritted teeth. He noticed Bill, and checked.

"I suppose you think you can do better with your red sardine can!" he snarled suddenly.

Bill grinned a little.

"I'll have a darned good shot at it!" he said quickly.

"More likely to have a shot at breaking your neck!" Lynch grated. "Old Kent couldn't design a push-bike, let alone a record-breaker!"

"Couldn't he?" Bill's smile died, and he eyed the man with level gaze. "Stop where you are Lynch, and I'll show you what our bus can do. Come on, Dick!"

As he uttered the words, he shot off, dropping down to the sands and running towards the big wooden barn where the red Kent

Flyer was housed. Dick moved with him, glancing back to see that Lynch was staring after them.

They found the professor at the big doorway of the barn.

"They don't seem to be able to hold that Giant Ince," he said mildly, as Bill came up. "I think her stream-lining is wrong. The wind catches her and forces her into a skid. It's a pity that they— What's the trouble, Bill?"

"I'm going to take our bus out!" the big fellow exclaimed. "I just want to show Lynch that you know how to build a car!"

The Warning!

THE Kent Flyer was all ready. At a call from the professor, mechanics came running into the barn. They started up the thousand horse-power engine—half the size of the Giant Ince's—and ran the car on to the sand, then let it stand as Bill made ready for the run.

He pulled on an old crash helmet, and Dick tied string around Bill's arms and the legs of his overalls, to keep the wind from getting into them. Out on the sands, the big crowd grouped anew, straining over to the red, narrow shape of the Flyer.

As he worked with the string, Dick heard the professor saying:

"Now, Bill, don't drive the car at anything above 175 miles an hour. We don't want to strain anything, and I want the chance to see how she sits the sands. If she's satisfactory at that pace, then I'll get the officials up here and we'll go for the record to-morrow or the day after. But don't do anything rash, Bill. Remember that, won't you?"

Bill glanced at the grey-haired designer, and nodded. As the professor walked down to the roaring car, Bill granted to Dick:

"If he'd said two hundred an' seventy-five, that'd have been a bit nearer the mark!"

"Go easy, Bill," Dick said, and his voice was a little nervous. "Don't put your foot down until you know how the Flyer handles!"

He knew that if Bill remembered Lynch was watching, then the big fellow was liable to forget the professor's warning. The chances were that he'd open right out and run the car to its limit, just to show Lynch what he could do.

There was an awful risk if he did that. Each time that Lynch had skidded at three miles a minute, the least thing might have turned the car over and wrecked it. If Bill became reckless before he got the "feel" of the car—well, anything might happen!

Bill moved out to the machine and climbed into the cockpit, wriggling himself down into his seat between the narrow, padded sides of the body-shell. He had to lie almost flat.

The little instrument board before his eyes bore the big dial of a revolution counter, from which he would be able to judge his speed. Because he would probably be unable to read the figures on the dial, it was painted in coloured sections—and if ever he got the

black needle into the red section, then the car would be doing 'two hundred and fifty miles an hour!

He settled down, his eyes just peering through the tiny, wire-meshed wind-screen set on the scuttle. He trod on the accelerator pedal, and the thousand horse-power engine boomed mightily; the exhaust had been built into the low-hung tail of the car, and from the rear of the machine came gouting, blued smoke with lurid flame in the heart of it.

When he was all ready, the professor and mechanics hurried off across the sands, to take up positions at either end of the measured mile, so that they could check Bill's time over the distance. Dick stayed by the car.

"I'll run to the far end and then turn to come back through the mile!" Bill yelled to

the air seemed tense with excitement, because there was no telling what would happen when this slim, red machine got into its stride.

The professor glanced around him, saw that everything was ready, then he lifted and dropped the red flag.

From the car by the old black barn there came a sudden, purposeful snarl, and the machine shot forward over the sand. It slid up and went steadily past, exhaust booming evenly. It became a dwindling red speck, then swung round in the distance, turning for its first test run.

Dick watched it, his fists bunched at his sides. He saw the Flyer come swooping forward, heard its mighty roar as it swept down—and saw Mark Lynch's dour face hard and set as he watched the rival record-breaker picking up speed and tearing on.



Through the hiss of flying sand and the rush of air, Dick could hear the Giant Ince as it skidded towards him madly. He had a glimpse of its gigantic bulk, then he rolled himself desperately aside.

him, above the roaring of the engine. "She feels fine, Dick! I'll show Lynch that the old professor can build. You'd better get over by the slipway, you can watch from there. Off you go—wish me luck!"

He was smiling beneath his goggles as he lifted a gloved hand and wrung Dick's.

"I say, go steady with it, won't you!" Dick exclaimed. "I mean, don't take any—"

"You leave me alone, young 'un!" And any further chance of conversation was drowned as he revved up the engine again.

Dick ran off. In a little while he was on the slipway, not far from where Mark Lynch stood. The Kent mechanics had taken up their positions now, and Dick could see the professor standing with a red flag in his hand.

The yellow Seacombe Sands stretched wide and clear in front of the waiting car. On the dunes, breathless crowds were watching, and

205 m.p.h.!

OVER the yellow sea-shore came the Kent Flyer, steady as a rock, and with upturn sand flying in a cloud behind her. The car's wheels were like solid things, and her flashing red body was the merest streak.

The sound of the car was different from the Giant Ince. It came on with a rising shriek that lifted to crescendo as it slashed into the measured mile.

"Gosh, he's faster than the Ince!" Dick gasped, and he was right.

The car flashed by, sand-flurry whirling behind it. Its triumphant drone stunned on the ear-drums of the watchers. The wheels slashed through a watery patch, so that spray shot high, like a silvery veil out of which the red meteor flicked and slid on.

It was past Dick, clear of the test mile and

vanishing in the distance in the fraction of a second, it seemed. Down on the sands, Professor Kent stood with a stop-watch in his hand, working out the speed of the car. He turned to a Kent man near him, and said something. The mechanic, putting his hands to his mouth, trumpeted clearly to the crowd:

"Two hundred—and—three—miles an hour!"

In the distance, the red Kent Flyer was turning back, picking up speed again for a return run through the mile. Once more the tearing shriek of screaming engine, blaring exhaust, flying sand and whistling wind slashed on the air, and then the Flyer was leaping into the mile from the opposite direction.

Its speed was almost incredible. A thin, leaping red speck—yellow sand whipping back, a spray spitting out from the wheels—and the machine was over the mile in less than fifteen seconds!

Again came the trumpeted voice of the mechanic:

"Two hundred—and five—miles an hour!"

That gave the Kent Flyer an average speed of 204 m.p.h. Unofficially, it had just beaten the record that Major Segrave had set up on the Daytona Beach, in Florida! The record wouldn't count, of course, because it hadn't been properly timed, but it was enough to set the crowd cheering and applauding.

Out on the sand, the professor ran apart

DON'T KEEP A GOOD THING TO YOURSELF—

from the mechanics, and stood waving his red flag vigorously, as a sign to Bill to bring the car in. Dick saw the machine coming back slowly, and then he glanced at Lynch.

The rival speedman was staring out towards the Kent Flyer, his lip twisting contemptuously as he heard the jubilant paudits of the crowd. There was vicious jealousy in his expression, and it was plain that he was upset at the way in which Bill had shown up the performance of the Giant Ince.

Dick grinned a little as he saw Lynch's face, then he went running across the sand to meet the car as it came in. From every side, spectators were doing the same thing, and a huge crowd gathered as the machine stopped.

The top of the smooth, red body was thick with sand. Oil mist had blackened Bill's face, and the sand had clung there. His crash helmet had been blown awry on his head, and the lenses of his goggles were so plugged with yellow grains that it was almost impossible for him to see.

Dick was the first to reach the side of the car, and he dragged Bill's goggles down.

"Hallo, young 'un," and the big fellow smiled at him. "What did I do?"

"Averaged two hundred an' four for both runs!" Dick gasped.

"Ah, I thought I was somewhere near that!" Bill grinned. "And I hadn't got the old bus anything like out! Where's the professor?"

The grey-haired man came up, gripping both Bill's hands in his own. For half a minute they talked technicalities, then Bill said:

"The wind darned nearly tore my crash helmet off—it was terrific! And I'll have to have the engine blanked off; I got half gassed by the fumes. But she's a winner, professor! I didn't have her anything like all out. She'll do two hundred and fifty miles an hour when you're ready for her to go!"

It was only when Bill got out of the car that Dick saw how great the strain of driving must have been. For a few seconds Bill clung to the side of the cockpit until his limbs had steadied. Dick guessed that the strain of the terrific speed had taken its toll of him, and he stood close behind his brother as he stepped from the car.

Dick motioned to half a dozen of the mechanics to form a sort of bodyguard around him, and keep the crowd off. Then, with the spectators cheering, they moved away, men pushing on the wonderful Kent Flyer and rolling her back to the barn.

Fire!

THAT afternoon, the professor telephoned to London to make arrangements for officials to come up and watch the machine make her effort to touch two hundred and fifty miles an

—TELL YOUR PALS ABOUT THIS CORKING YARN!

hour. They agreed to bring their apparatus up on the morrow, while the Saconbe Sands remained in good condition.

Over where the Giant Ince Eight was being garaged, worried mechanics began to dismantle the car, trying to find out why it wouldn't ride the sands at over a hundred and fifty miles an hour—well under the speed which she had been built to attain.

During the afternoon, Dick saw Mark Lynch standing near the Kent Flyer's barn, glowering in at the red car. But he did not attempt to speak to anyone or to enter, and presently he stalked away.

It was certain that the Flyer's test performance would attract a great deal of attention, and it was equally certain that the car would smash Segrave's world's record when it ran officially on the morrow. The giant Sunbeam's performance over the mile stood at just a fraction under 203.3 miles an hour; Bill had touched 204 m.p.h.

That, however, was nearly fifty miles an hour short of the actual speed which the

professor wanted the car to attain. Now that Dick had seen what two hundred miles an hour meant, he began to wonder just what 250 m.p.h. really implied.

Never in his life had he seen anything travelling so fast as Bill had moved. Two hundred and fifty miles an hour—over four miles a minute!—was a speed which baffled the imagination, and it would bring new dangers with it. The car would be subjected to fresh strains and stresses, and all the afternoon and evening Bill worked with the professor on the machine, making little alterations in readiness for the morrow's official run, Dick lending a hand where he could.

If the Kent Flyer did what they hoped the next day, it would completely wash out the Ince Eight's victory in the Italian race. Dick realised that, and when he turned in, it was to dream of the morrow—only with himself at the wheel instead of Bill.

Dick went to bed pretty early, because work had ceased in the barn and the big doors had been barred and padlocked. He wanted a good night's rest, in accordance with his idea of getting himself fit for the terrible Targa Florio race in Sicily, when he would be riding as Bill's mechanic.

He dreamed that he had the Kent Flyer ambling along at a steady four hundred miles an hour, and that he was just thinking of putting his foot down on the accelerator pedal, and showing Mark Lynch what the red machine really could do, when the car caught fire! He couldn't see the flames, but he could smell the smoke. He peered about in the cockpit, looking for the fire; then, as he peered, he caught his head a crack on the back of the bed and woke with a start.

Dick lay there, staring. He could still smell smoke. His room was at the back of the inn, and the window was wide open. He saw that smoke was trickling thinly through the open window into the room, and as he saw it the window-pane was suddenly lit with a bright, reflected glare.

Dick shot out of bed and leaped across the room. He looked out. To the right the inn yard was lit up; he could hear the crackling of wood and the flutter of flames. He stared at the ruddy glow for a few moments, wondering what could be on fire. Then he remembered—the barn!

It stood at that side of the inn. The rolling black smoke could come only from burning tarred walls. The barn was on fire—the barn which housed the Kent Flyer!

Dick grabbed his trousers and jumped into them, kicked on a pair of shoes, and rushed for Bill's room. He flung open the door and went straight to the window, which commanded a view of the barn.

It was on fire at both ends! Flames were leaping to the night sky. Somewhere in the inn Dick could hear a man shouting as he saw what was happening. The boy jumped to his brother's bed and grabbed at the big fellow's shoulder.

"Fire! The barn's on fire!" Dick yelled.

Bill woke with a start, and almost the same instant leaped from his bed and dashed to the window. Without a word, he grabbed some clothing, while Dick ran into the passage and yelled again.

Already the inn was rousing. Apparently others had seen the flames at the same time as Dick. Doors crashed open, mechanics shouted to one another, then Dick was plunging down the stairs with Bill at his heels.

They pulled back the bolts on a side door and plunged into the open air, racing for the barn.

The huge padlocked doors were alight, flames licking and spurning from the tarred wood. There were no other doors to the barn, and through the flames was the only way in. Bill jumped towards a small tool-shed close by, and seized hold of a long-handled axe. Then he rushed towards the doors of the barn.

The fire was licking round the side of the barn, racing over the wood to join the fire at the back, forming a blazing cordon around the wonderful record-breaker locked inside.

Dick realised that it wasn't any good waiting for the professor to come with the padlock key. He ran to the tool-shed, grabbed a heavy sledge-hammer that he saw there, and ten seconds later he was hammering with Bill at the metal bar across the front of the barn doors.

Woodwork flew as smoke rolled into their faces, pungent and acrid. Flames licked out and scorched at Dick's shirt, searing his forearms and sizzling his hair. With all his strength he crashed at the padlock, while Bill chopped away at the wood around the bar with mad, desperate strokes.

Two smashing hits with the sledge-hammer knocked the padlock off, and a third crashed the bar clear of the wood.

"Right!" yelled Bill, and he dropped his axe as he and Dick flung themselves against the burning doors.

The woodwork swung inwards. As the two brothers staggered forward, the inside of the barn became obscured by a gigantic curtain of flame which forced them back. Dick almost fell, steadied, crouched to try and rush through it, and paused as the screen of fire parted for a moment and gave him a view of the inside of the barn.

The Kent Flyer stood in the middle of the floor. Leaping flames were all around, playing about the bodywork and over the narrow cockpit, writhing on the tyres and on the earth around.

The car had been drenched with petrol. She was a flaming mass from her radiator to the tip of her tail!

(What's going to happen now, boys! Will Dick and Bill be able to save the Kent record-breaker, or will it be ruined? And who's responsible for this dastardly piece of work, for obviously it has been done deliberately. Don't miss next week's instalment, it's a corker!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 86.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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 that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE 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 the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

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."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

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 leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. 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, bearing the same number, are needed. 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 that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

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. 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 £d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.



Our Weekly Now=Now!

By THE EDITOR

NOW that the year is almost at an end, I expect many of you chaps are looking back and reviewing the happenings of the past twelve months. That's what I, as Editor of the Old Paper, am doing now, and I'm finding it quite interesting. On the whole, with all due modesty, I am feeling fairly pleased with myself, too. But before going on any further, I want to wish all my readers a very happy and a very prosperous New Year.

Since January 1st, 1927, the NELSON LEE LIBRARY has seen many successes. Greatest of all, most stupendous of all, of course, were the magnificent Free Gifts given away recently. Hundreds of congratulatory letters from delighted readers reached me concerning these, and I can tell you quite frankly I was in imminent danger of getting a swelled head!

Then the St. Frank's League! This has boomed hugely during the last twelve months, and the membership has increased enormously. As Chief Officer, I have often felt like patting myself on the back, for Gough House reports that League Forms roll in day after day without fail. Good! In fact, jolly good! Let's hope they'll roll in hour after hour during 1928!

Resolutions!

Now, last but not least—indeed, most important of all—come the stories. Here again I think I can boast that the stories this year have been of as high a standard as ever, thanks to ever-popular Edwy Searles Brooks. The hundreds of congratulatory letters I receive per week, and the scores of letters Mr. Brooks himself receives, is ample proof of the truth of that statement.

In 1928, however, Mr. Brooks tells me that he intends to attain an even higher standard of excellence. This sounds rather impossible, perhaps—but, knowing Mr. Brooks as I do, I'm pretty sure he will achieve his object.

Like Mr. Brooks, I also have made a New Year's resolution—that I shall endeavour to make the Old Paper even brighter and better than ever. And, lads, you just wait and see how I shall carry out that resolution!

Another Magazine.

Readers living in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, will be pleased to hear that E. Wills, of 18, Baker Street, in that salubrious watering place, is starting a "St. Frank's Magazine"—something rich and rare at Weston-super-Mare. He would like to hear from anybody interested.

At Baker Street, Weston,

They've quite solved the question

Of running a mag. full of gumption and thrills.

There are ten pages of chatter,

And bright yarns that matter,

While the brain bird at top is a fellow named Wills.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Arthur Hilton, 288, Mount Road, Levenshulme, Manchester, wishes to hear from readers, also the O. O. nearest to him.

Reginald Rushworth, Homeland Bungalow, Over-the-Barn, Low Fell, Gateshead, Co. Durham, has written a serial story of adventure in the Southern Seas, entitled "Nippy," with sixteen illustrations, and would be glad to hear from the editor of an amateur magazine about this yarn.

Miss Elsie Nunn, 27, College Street, Hornerton, London, E.9, wishes to hear from girl readers anywhere; back numbers of the "N. L. L." for exchange.

George Shepherd, 444, Edge Lane, Droylsden, Manchester, wishes to hear from an O. O. in Manchester.

H. Stothert, O. O., 9, Steiner Street, Accrington, Lancs, wishes to hear from members in his district.

W. P. White, 45, Norway Street, Waterloo, Liverpool, wishes to hear from readers in the Royal Navy, also from those interested in collecting foreign coins.

THE EDITOR.

(Chief Officer).

BOYS WANTED 14 & 18

Opportunities offered in AUSTRALIA, CANADA, and NEW ZEALAND. The SALVATION ARMY grants generous assistance towards training, outfit, etc., to be repaid when settled overseas. The Army exercises efficient commensurate after-care. Conducted Partly. Work guaranteed. Apply THE MANAGER, 3, Upper Thames St., London, E.C.4; 12, Pembroke Place, Liverpool; 205, Hope St., Glasgow; or 5, Garfield Chambers, 44, Royal Avenue, Belfast.

Stop Stammering! Cure yourself as I did. Free. — FRANK B. HUGHES, 7, Southampton Row, London, W.C.1.

B LUSHING SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS SHYNESS, TIMIDITY

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Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Office: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine post. Subscription Rates: Island 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.

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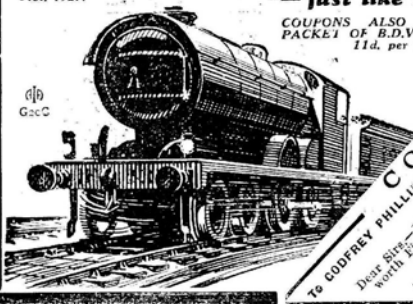
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