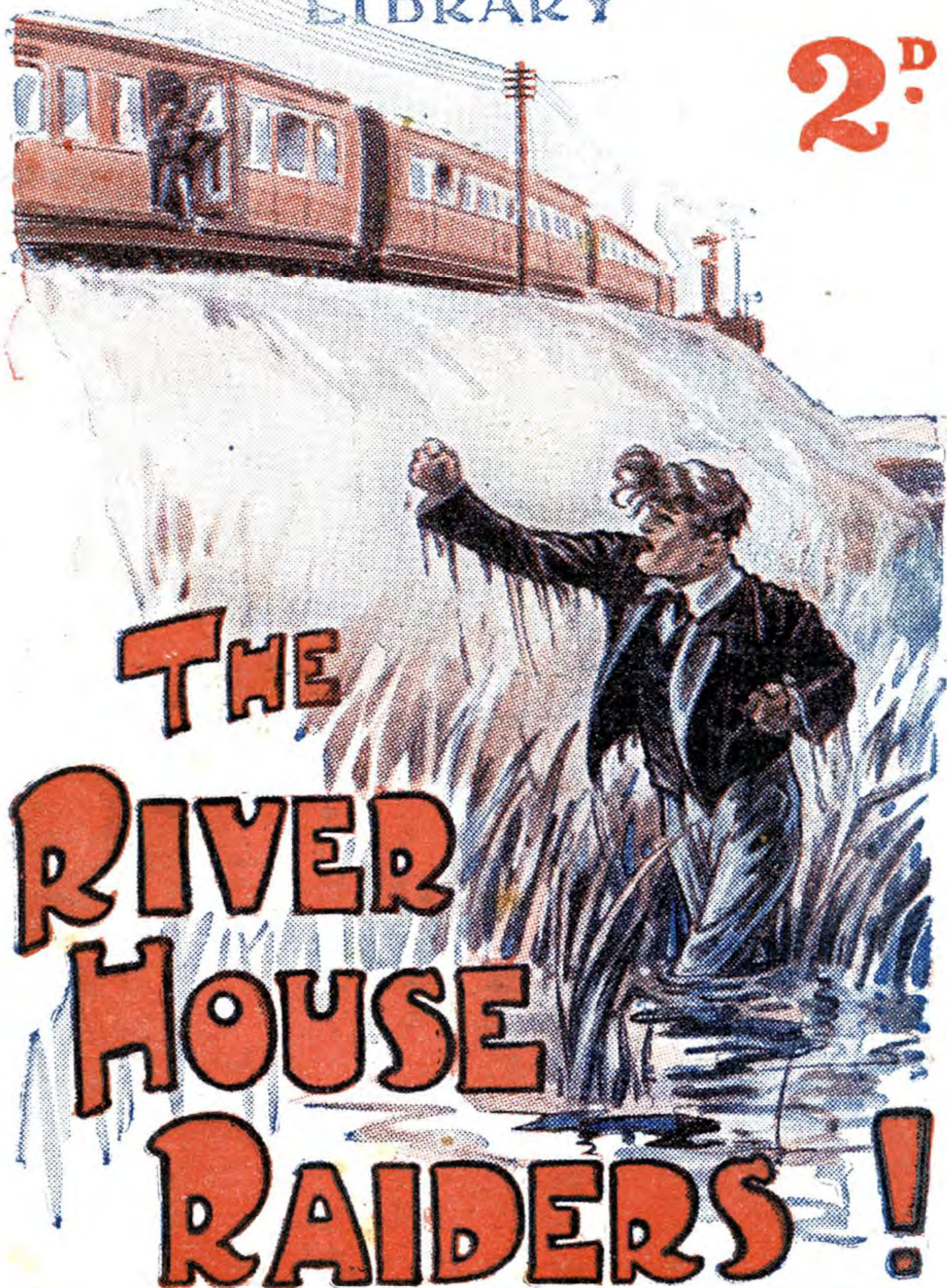


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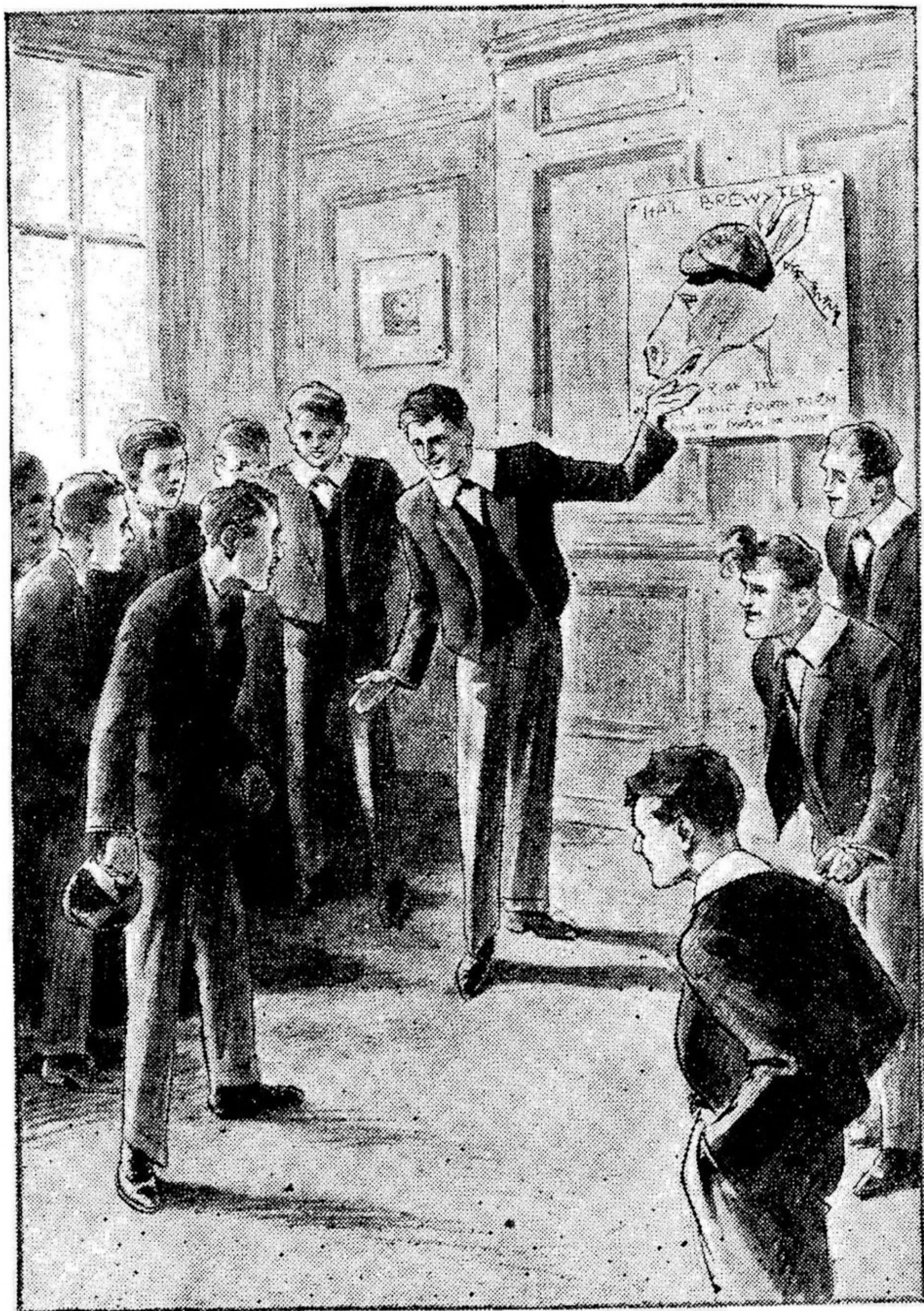


An amusing long complete yarn featuring the Chums
of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 124.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September, 15th, 1928.



"There's your oap," said Nipper, pointing. Brewster looked. He saw that the cap was adorning a drawing of a donkey's head, and he realised that the head was meant to be a caricature of himself. The River House fellow knew he was in the lions' den, however, and so he smiled feebly.

"You chaps will have your fun, won't you?" he said.

St. Frank's v. River House School.

Schoolboy Fun and Adventure.

THE RIVER HOUSE RAIDERS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

Rivalry between Hal Brewster and Co., of the River House School, and Nipper and Co., of the St. Frank's Remove, has always been keen; this term it flames out with greater intensity than ever. You'll all enjoy this topping school-life yarn, written in Edwy Searles Brooks' liveliest style—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Back to St. Frank's!

"**A**LAS, Brother Horace, our wily scheme appears to have sprung a leak!" William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's, made that remark in a sad voice as he and Horace Stevens passed through the barrier at Victoria Station and strolled leisurely on to the departure platform.

"It's not my scheme, old man, it's yours!" said Stevens pointedly.

"I am not denying that it was I who evolved the masterly plan," agreed Browne gracefully. "However, the situation is not so murky as I had at first feared. We may yet travel down to St. Frank's in that dignified exclusiveness to which we are accustomed."

"Not a chance of it!" said Stevens. "The platform is swarming with juniors."

This was an exaggeration. There were only about half a dozen St. Frank's juniors in sight. They were Handforth and Church and McClure, of Study D, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson and Reggie Pitt.

"Let me point out, Brother Horace, that the redoubtable Handforth is included in this unhappy picture," said Browne. "And Handforth, let me remind you, is the equivalent, when it comes to a matter of noise, of at least a dozen ordinary Removites."

"Well, let's go and say 'How do!' to the young beggars, anyhow," said Stevens good-naturedly.

"An excellent suggestion, brother," agreed Browne. "In fact, as I was about to make precisely the same proposal, we may well call it a brainy suggestion."

Browne and Stevens had deliberately missed the earlier train for St. Frank's, for that train was generally packed to suffocation with noisy, shouting juniors. They had waited until later, hoping that they would be able to make the journey in peace and comfort. But here, on the platform, were a few stragglers, such as themselves.

It was the first day of term, and there was no actual law as to which train the fellows should go down by. The majority took the early train, but there were generally a few who preferred to come later on.

Tregellis-West and Watson were standing at the door of a third-class compartment,

looking rather anxious. Reggie Pitt was with them, and further along the train the redoubtable Edward Oswald Handforth was having a heated argument with his two long-suffering chums.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie suddenly. "It's Browne of the Fifth—it is, really! Awfully pleased to see you, Browne, dear old boy."

"Yes, rather!" said Tommy Watson heartily.

William Napoleon Browne beamed.

"While the gratification is understandable, I am nevertheless impressed by the eloquence of your greeting, brothers," he said smoothly. "I am pleased to observe that you are apparently wearing the same size in caps."

"Why should we wear bigger ones?" asked Reggie Pitt, grinning.

"For several weeks past, your illustrious names have been appearing in the newspapers," replied Browne. "On certain occasions, various alleged photographs have also been foisted upon the long-suffering public. Alas! Throughout the length and breadth of the country, people are saying that St. Frank's is evidently the home of the ugly and the misshapen!"

Handforth glanced round.

"What's that?" he said, staring. "Hallo, Browne! Pleased to see you again! But what's that you were saying about somebody being ugly and misshapen?"

"Do not misunderstand me, Brother Handforth!" replied Browne calmly. "I was merely referring to the pictures which have been recently appearing in the pictorial Press. In your own case, I will grant, the fault was not so much with the printers as with yourself. We cannot help our little defects. Even the best of us are far from perfect——"

"Cheese it, Browne!" grinned Pitt. "And don't remind us of the photographs that have been recently appearing, and the columns of sensational journalism. We're just ordinary schoolboys, and we're going back to St. Frank's, as usual."

"All the same, my lads, you've been in the public eye for two or three weeks," said Stevens. "You had some pretty exciting adventures out in India, and it seems to me that you're lucky to be alive!"

Stevens was not far wrong in this statement. The party of St. Frank's juniors that had gone out to India had had many lucky escapes. But all that was now practically forgotten. As Pitt had said, they were just ordinary schoolboys once more.

"We're waiting for Nipper," said Watson, as he anxiously glanced at the station clock. "He promised to meet us for this train, and he hasn't turned up yet."

"Oh, he'll come!" said Handforth. "We're all pretty anxious to see him, as a matter of fact. He was nearly killed out in India, and if Mr. Lee hadn't performed a jolly clever operation he would have pegged out!"

"Here he comes!" said Church eagerly.

A well-known figure had just passed through the barrier, and he now came

striding briskly up, a cheery smile on his face. Nipper, the skipper of the St. Frank's Remove, was looking very much his old self.

"Good man!" said Tommy Watson gladly. "Feeling fit?"

"Ready for anything, old man!" said Nipper cheerily. "Only the guv'nor says I mustn't start any fighting for a week or two. My chest is still a bit wonky on the star-board side."

Nipper had been hit by a fragment of shrapnel out in India, and it was really rather remarkable that he was now fit enough to return to St. Frank's at the beginning of term. But he had made a remarkably swift recovery, and if he continued to "go easy," he would certainly be as fit as a fiddle again before the term was many weeks old.

"Well, we'd better be taking our places," said Pitt, as he looked round. "I was rather expecting Jack Grey, but he must have gone by the earlier train, the bounder."

They piled into the compartment, and it was noticed that Browne and Stevens had already taken their places within. Browne, in particular, had a partiality for junior society. In spite of his talk about wishing to travel in dignified comfort, he preferred noise and bustle.

"Come on, Handy!" said Church. "The guard's getting his flag ready."

"Blow the guard!" said Handforth, as he eyed the compartment with disfavour. "I rather think I'll get into another carriage. When I travel, I like to travel in comfort."

"You silly ass!" said McClure in exasperation. "You're as bad as that spoofer, Browne! You know jolly well that you don't want to travel alone!"

"I'm a spoofer, am I?" said Handforth, glaring. "I'm fed up with all these arguments, and you chaps can go and eat coke! I'm going to find a compartment for myself!"

"But the train doesn't stop until we get to Bannington!" protested Church. "It's a non-stop, and——"

"All the better!" interrupted Handforth. "I shall have some peace!"

At this moment, Jack Grey and Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts arrived on the scene. They came bustling up, cheery and smiling.

"Well, well!" said Travers. "We're the last, after all, dear old fellows! How goes it, everybody?"

"Come on in, Travers!" said Pitt. "The more the merrier!"

"Good for you, Jack, old man!" said Reggie Pitt. "Thought you'd gone by the other train."

"Not likely!" said Jack. "I promised to meet you here, didn't I?"

They all went bundling in, and Handforth looked more obstinate than ever.

"Look out, Handy!" said McClure. "The guard's just unfolding his flag."

"Fine!" said Handforth, as he strode off up the train. "I told you that I was going to travel alone—and I meant it!"

He opened the door of an empty compartment, walked in, and triumphantly slammed the door.



CHAPTER 2.

Taking Him at His Word!

Of course, Handforth was bluffing.

He had a fancy for treating his chums like this; it pleased

him to have them begging of him to reconsider his decision. But this time he made a little blunder. He was taken at his word.

There was a sudden rush of juniors, and Handforth could see that Reggie Pitt and Nipper and Travers were now supporting Church and McClure.

"What's the trouble here?" asked Nipper briskly.

"No trouble!" replied Handforth.

"Why aren't you joining us?"

"Because Churchy and Mac are there!" replied Handforth coldly. "I've been talking to them about the football, and they seem to think that I'm no good as a centre-forward."

"But you're goalie, old man," said Nipper gently.

"Are you going to take up the same stand as those two fatheads?" demanded Handforth. "I know I'm goalie! But this term I'm going to lead the forwards——"

"Well, we won't argue!" said Nipper. "The train's just going——"

"You're crooked!" went on Handforth. "That's rough luck for you, of course. But it stands to reason that you won't be able to lead the forwards, as usual. So, until you're robust again, I intend to——"

"We didn't come here to discuss footer, old man!" said Pitt. "Do you want to travel alone, or are you coming with us?"

"I'll travel alone, thanks!" replied Handforth tartly.

"Good!" said Nipper, producing a railway key. "You're quite sure of it, Handy, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Then we're all satisfied," said Nipper sweetly.

He inserted the key into the lock of the carriage door, and turned it. This particular carriage was not one of the modern type—it was not a corridor. Handforth, realising this, gave an ejaculation of dismay.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Unlock this door, you fatheads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're going to travel alone, Handy!" grinned Church, with rare enjoyment.

"And if you want to argue, you can argue with yourself!" said McClure blandly.

Handforth was rather flabbergasted.

"You—you funny rotters!" he shouted. "I—I was only spoofing! Of course, I'd rather travel down with you chaps. I don't

want to be in a compartment all to myself——"

"Too late now, old chap!" said Nipper. "There goes the guard's whistle! So long!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They went off, yelling, and Handforth leaned out of the window, staring after them in high indignation. He saw them pile into another carriage, further down the train.

"Take your seats, please!"

The officials were shouting, and the guard gave his whistle a preliminary blow.

"Here! Let me out!" roared Handforth violently.

A portly inspector, who was just passing, gave the burly junior a cold look.

"Now then, sir—now then!" he protested. "There's no time——"

"If you don't let me out, I'll get through the window!" yelled Handforth.

He commenced scrambling out head first, but the portly inspector, without hesitation, pushed him back.

"If you want to get out, young man, you'll open the door in the proper way!" he said severely.

"I can't!" howled Handforth. "It's locked!"

At that moment there was a big commotion at the barrier, and a number of laughing shouts were heard. There was a sound of running feet, too, and Travers, who was looking out of the carriage window further up the train, gave a chuckle.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "Our old friends of the River House School!"

There were six of the new arrivals—Brewster and Glynn and Ascott, of Study No. 1, and Kingswood, Norton and Robinson, of Study No. 2, of the River House School. The St. Frank's rivals had evidently been delayed, for they were catching the train by the skin of their teeth.

"Here you are, my lads!" said the portly inspector briskly.

The guard's whistle sounded very imperiously now, and the train was on the point of moving. Brewster & Co., seeking seats, made a rush for the inspector. The latter, whisking out a key, unlocked the door of Handforth's compartment.

"Young rascals!" grunted the portly inspector. "You're lucky not to be left behind!"

Handforth attempted to get out, but he collided violently with Hal Brewster, who was just dashing in. Handforth went reeling over backwards, to sit down hurriedly on the floor at the other side of the compartment.

The River House juniors piled in, and the door slammed. The train commenced to glide out of the station.

"Well, that's that!" panted Brewster cheerfully. "We've done it, my sons!"

The six Commoners were much out of breath, but they were satisfied. As yet, they did not know who their travelling companion was.

The first day of term at the River House School coincided with the first day of term at St. Frank's. Brewster & Co. were the recognised leaders of that faction of the River House Juniors known as the Commoners. They were, in fact, the leading lights of the decent set. The Honourables were snobs and rotters.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Dave Ascott suddenly. "Look who's here!"

"Handy!" shouted the others.

Handforth was sitting on the floor, and he had just managed to extricate his head from under one of the seats.

"Well, that's funny!" said Brewster, in astonishment. "I thought I biffed into something as I came in, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How goes it, Handy, old man?" asked Robinson genially.

Handforth got to his feet, and he glared at the River House juniors, and then he glared at the view outside the train.

"We're moving!" he said thickly.

"Go hon!"

"The train's started!" roared Handforth.

"We wouldn't dream of contradicting you," said Brewster, nodding. "It's a funny thing, but the train has actually started. I wonder why the train started, you fellows?"

"I daresay, because the engine-driver opened the throttle," said Norton solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was exasperated, but he was helpless. Instead of travelling alone, he now found himself in the company of six River House rivals. And the train was not due to stop until it arrived at Bannington.

"You silly fatheads!" he said wrathfully. "I'm not going to travel down in your company! I'm going to join the other St. Frank's chaps!"

"Can't be done, old son," said Brewster, shaking his head. "At least, not unless you indulge in a sort of film stunt, and walk along the running-board while the train's going. You'd better make the best of a bad job."

"What about us?" asked Ascott tartly. "We're the ones who'll have to make the best of a bad job. Are we going to stand any rot from Handforth, you chaps?"

"We are *not*!" answered the other chaps, in one firm, solid voice.

"Yes!" said Reggie Pitt thoughtfully. "Those River House fellows will shove him under the seat, and keep him there, if he gives them any of his rot."

"Oh, let's forget him!" said Travers. "How's the good old chest, Nipper? Still going strong?"

In the meantime, Handforth was filled with wrath and indignation further along the train. Mainly owing to his own stubbornness, he was now doomed to travel with these six River House juniors—and there was no method of escape.

"Well, it can't be helped, I suppose!" he said gruffly. "And as long as you chaps behave yourselves, I shan't mind so much."

"And supposing we don't behave ourselves?" asked Brewster, with interest.

"Then I shall be compelled to biff you!" replied Handforth coolly.

"You silly ass!" said Kingswood. "We're six to one against you!"

"Six River House fatheads against one St. Frank's chap!" nod ' ' Handforth. "That just about makes it equal!"

There was an immediate roar, but Hal Brewster grinned, and held up his hand.

"Oh, let him have his delusions," he said kindly. "Life's too short, my sons! Besides, it's the first day of term, and we don't want to start any scrapping—yet."

The companions cooled down.

"All the same, there's going to be plenty of scrapping later on in the term!" said Robinson grimly. "We're not going to let these St. Frank's wasters have everything their own way."

"These St. Frank's what?" demanded Handforth.

"Wasters!" said Robinson.

"Why, you—you—"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "This—this idiot called me a waster!"

"No, I didn't!" said Robinson. "It's only a general term, embracing all you St. Frank's chumps. And we're going to make you sit up this term, too! We're going to beat you at sports, at japes, and at everything else!"

"At least," said Brewster modestly, "that's what we're going to try for."

For a moment it seemed that Handforth was going to hurl himself at his rivals; then he changed his mind. He was a reckless junior, and he seldom counted the odds. But there was something about the expressions of Brewster & Co. that made him pause. After all, it was rather like the case of Daniel in the lions' den—only these lions were not quite so harmless.

"I don't see why I should enter into a rotten brawl with you River House rotters!" he said indifferently. "Let's talk about football."

"Better not!" advised Brewster. "It'll only lead to an argument—and then to a

CHAPTER 3.

The Tale of a Cap!



"POOR old Handy!" grinned Nipper.

"It serves him jolly well right!" said Church, with

satisfaction. "He shouldn't be so jolly obstinate! He asked for trouble—and now he'll probably get some!"

scrap. Everybody knows that we can play footer better than the St. Frank's teamis—"

"What!" roared Handforth.

"There you are!" said Brewster, shaking his head. "I knew it would lead to an argument!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth seemed to realise that he was being spoofed.

"All right—wait until we're on even terms," he said darkly. "Wait until there are six of us against you six."

"You just said that one St. Frank's fellow equalled six of us," remarked Norton, with a grin. "But we won't press the point, Handy. We want to ask you about your trip to India. You've been having a pretty hot time of it out there, haven't you?"

"Never mind India!" said Handforth, whose gaze was fixed on Hal Brewster. "What's that dotty cap you're wearing?" he demanded pointedly.

"Dotty cap?" repeated Brewster, removing his headgear. "You mean this?"

"Yes!"

"That's my new skipper's cap," replied Brewster, not without a touch of pride.

"Your new which?"

"Skipper's cap."

"Never heard of such a thing!" said Handforth, with disdain. "We don't have them at St. Frank's."

"Of course not!" agreed Brewster sweetly. "St. Frank's is behind the times. It needs an up-to-date school like the River House to adopt these new—"

"Are you saying that St. Frank's isn't up-to-date?" broke in Handforth hotly.

"Easy, old man—easy!" grinned Brewster. "The fact is, I'm the skipper of the Fourth Form at the River House School."

"I know that, ass!"

"Well, this is my captain's cap," said Brewster. "It's not a sports cap, in the ordinary way. It's simply a symbol of office, as it were."

"A which of what?"

"It's a special cap," explained Brewster patiently. "Nobody else in the Form can wear it except the skipper. It's a new idea, you know—and it only came into force this term."

Hal Brewster seemed rather proud of that cap. It was brilliant orange in hue, and the badge was worked in glittering gold. All the other River House fellows were wearing the ordinary blue and red caps of the school.

"It's a pretty good wheeze, you know," said Kingswood. "If any stranger comes to the school he can spot the skipper in a minute by his cap. No need to go about asking questions. And, of course, it's a big honour to wear that orange cap."

"And what if you lose it?" asked Handforth.

"I shan't lose it," replied Brewster. "It's the only one in the school like it. The other Form skippers have whole-colour caps, just the same, but they're pea-green or purple or

blue. You see, each Form has its own distinctive colour."

"H'm!" grunted Handforth. "It's not so bad, I suppose. I'll bet you prize that cap."

"I should think I do!" said Brewster enthusiastically. "You see, if I lose it, I shan't get another until next term. I shall have to go about wearing the ordinary school cap. The Head made the announcement before the holidays, and he made it quite clear that there wasn't to be any fooling about."

"But if a chap loses a cap he's given another," said Handforth. "At least, his people have to buy it for him."

"Yes, but it's different with the skippers' caps," said Brewster. "This is looked upon as an exclusive honour. And if any captain hasn't got enough sense to look after his symbol of office, then he isn't fit to be skipper. So he doesn't get another cap. In a way, it would be next door to saying good-bye to the captaincy if I was careless enough to lose this cap."

He replaced it on his head firmly, and with an air of satisfaction.

"You'd better give the idea to your House-master, Handy," said Ascott. "Perhaps he'll talk to the Head about it—"

"No fear!" interrupted Handforth. "At St. Frank's we don't use borrowed ideas, my son! Blow you and your silly caps!"

But this, as the River House fellows were aware, was only "talk." Secretly, Handforth thought that the scheme was decidedly brainy.

The journey progressed quite uneventfully for a time, and the River House fellows discussed cricket, the coming football season, and various other subjects of a similar nature. Handforth felt rather "out of it." This was mainly because he was invariably told to dry up if he ever chipped into the conversation.

As he had chipped in once every two or three minutes, he was rapidly becoming fed up with the whole thing.

"I've heard enough about your silly cricket!" he said at length. "I'm not interested in your sports at the River House. I'm a St. Frank's fellow—"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"Don't interrupt!"

"Dry up, or we'll shove you under the seat!"

Handforth bristled.

"You'll shove me under the seat, will you?" he said darkly. "By George! Try and do it!"

"Do you think we couldn't?" asked Brewster ominously.

"I don't think anything about it!" retorted Handforth. "I know you couldn't do it!"

But he knew differently about eleven seconds later. For the River House juniors fell upon him with one accord, swept him to the floor, and shoved him unceremoniously under the seat. Then they sat in a row and held him imprisoned.



CHAPTER 4.

A Spot of Trouble!

NOW, football—” began Brewster.
 “Hi!”
 “Football,” said Brewster, “is going to be the big thing this term—”

“Hi, you rotters!”

“Oh, rather!” said Kingswood. “Cricket’s all right in its way—a jolly fine game—but if you want plenty of briskness and excitement, give me soccer!”

“Hear, hear!”

“Naturally, we shall wipe St. Frank’s up every time we play them,” said Glynn, with a wink at his companions. “Everybody knows that the St. Frank’s Junior Eleven is weak and feeble!”

“By George!” came from under the seat.

“Well, you can’t expect anything else,” remarked Norton. “Just look who they’ve got for a goalie!”

“Well, yes,” said Brewster thoughtfully. “That’s where they’re so unlucky. You’re talking about that big, ugly chap Handforth?”

“That’s him!” said Norton. “Goalie, eh? Ye gods and little fishes! And that big ape believes that he can play footer!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the other River House fellows.

Handforth, beneath the seat, writhed. They were carrying on their conversation just as though he didn’t exist. However, they didn’t carry on for long, for Handforth gave one or two hefty punches, and there were several startled ejaculations.

“Here, steady, you dangerous ass!” said Norton hotly, as he jumped up. “Keep your fists away from my ankles!”

“Let me get out, then!” panted Handforth.

“Shall we let him get out?” asked Norton.

“Not unless he promises to be a good boy!” replied Brewster gravely. “Do you promise to be a good boy, Handforth?”

“You—you—you—”

“That’s not an intelligible answer!”

“You can go and eat coke!” roared Handforth thickly. “I refuse to be a good boy—I mean—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“As soon as I get out of here I’m going to black all your eyes!” hooted Handforth.

“Then I’m afraid we won’t let you get out!” said Brewster judicially. “We don’t care for the idea of arriving at the River House School with black eyes!”

Handforth suddenly became cool. With characteristic speed he changed completely. When he spoke again his voice was icy and bitter.

“All right—you’ve got the better of me!” he said, breathing hard. “If you let me get out, I’ll promise to keep my fists to myself.”

“Good enough!” said Brewster briskly.

Handforth was allowed to stand upright. He was smothered in dust, and he was red with exertion. His collar had come unbuttoned, and it was considerably crumpled.

“You rotters!” he said ominously.

“Remember your promise, old man!” remarked Robinson, waving a finger at him.

“I promised that I’d keep my hands to myself!” said Handforth. “But that’s all! I’ve still got a tongue, and I can jolly well tell you chaps that you’re a lot of ugly monkeys! If you went to the Zoo they’d put you in a cage before you could say ‘Knife’!”

“Look here, you St. Frank’s idiot—”

“And before the day’s out you’ll be sorry for shoving me under that seat!” continued Handforth grimly. “By George! Wait until I tell the other chaps! The whole Remove will come over in a body, and the River House School will be wiped off the map! We won’t leave a trace of it!”

Brewster & Co. began to regret their decision.

“Better shove him under the seat again,” said Robinson briefly.

“Hear, hear!”

“You stand back!” roared Handforth, edging across the compartment until his back was to the window. “The first chap who tries to grab me will get my fist—”

“Well?” grinned Brewster.

“Crumbs! I’d forgotten!” said Handforth blankly. “I promised not to hit you, didn’t I?”

“You did,” said Brewster kindly. “And in another minute you’ll promise to hold your tongue.”

“Why not make him do it literally?” asked Ascott, with a chuckle. “Let’s sit him here in front of us and make him hold his tongue between his finger and thumb. That’ll keep him quiet, won’t it?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Good idea!”

“Now then, Handforth—obey orders!” said Kingswood. “Sit here, and take your tongue firmly between—”

“Rats!” shouted Handforth. “I refuse! I’m not going to—”

The train gave a jolt, and Handforth sat in the laps of Brewster and Ascott. Before he could get to his feet again the train had come to a standstill, and one or two of the juniors were looking out at the window.

“Signal’s against us,” announced Norton. “We’re somewhere between Helmford and Bannington, aren’t we? Oh, well, we shan’t be long now, thank goodness!”

Robinson suddenly turned, his eyes gleaming.

“I say, you chaps!” he said quickly. “We’re all fed up with Handforth, aren’t we?”

“Yes, rather!” chorused the others.

“Well, why not pitch him out?” suggested Robinson brilliantly. “The train’s stopped, and there’s a lovely grassy bank out here.”

Brewster’s eyes twinkled.



Nipper made a grab at the "gentleman's" whiskers, and they came away in his hand. Dave Ascott, of the River House School, stood revealed. "Ascott, my lad," said Nipper, grinning, "you're hopeless!"

"I didn't think you had it in you, Robinson, old man," he said. "By Jove! That's not merely an idea—it's a brainwave! Come on—all together!"

"Hi!" howled Handforth. "Keep your beastly paws off—"

But the River House fellows were quite keen on the wheeze. As Robinson had said, the train was at a standstill, and there could be no danger. The bright sunshine of the September afternoon was streaming into the compartment, and outside the sky was blue.

A little fresh air would probably do Edward Oswald Handforth a world of good.

Norton obligingly opened the door, and Reggie Pitt and Church, from a window further down the train, saw the manoeuvre, and looked harder.

"Now!" said Brewster. "Out with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth shot out through the open doorway like a stone from a catapult. A yell of laughter accompanied his exit. He struck the grassy bank and rolled over.

Slam!

Brewster closed the door and waved a hand.

"Well, that's that!" he grinned. "So long, Handy, old bean!"

Brewster & Co. had believed that Handforth would pick himself up and then climb back into another compartment. But an unexpected development arose.

For Handforth, after rolling, found that he couldn't pull himself up. He gathered speed, and went tumbling over and over,

from the top of the embankment to the bottom.

Splash!

Suddenly, he vanished, much to the astonishment of the River House juniors.

"Great Scott!" gasped Brewster. "He's fallen into a ditch, or something!"

There was a wild commotion at the bottom of the embankment. The grasses and reeds waved about fantastically, and a second later Handforth came into view again, staggering drunkenly.

But his appearance had changed considerably.

He was smothered from head to foot with thick, clinging mud, and the picture he presented was so exasperatingly funny that Brewster & Co. fairly shrieked with merriment.

In all probability, Handforth failed to see the point of the joke.



CHAPTER 5.

The Reprisal!

H

A, ha, ha!"

The yells of laughter from Brewster & Co. came dully to Handforth's ears.

The celebrated leader of Study D was in no way hurt, but he was considerably dirty. And when, at last, he managed to open his

eyes sufficiently to see, he was startled by the spectacle of the train gliding along on its way.

"My only sainted aunt!" he mumbled dizzily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Toodle-oo, Handy, old scout!"

"See you later!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Walking is the best exercise in the world, old son!"

Brewster & Co were apparently quite callous; they regarded the whole thing as a first-class joke. But further along the train, nine Removites of St. Frank's were looking grim and purposeful.

"Are we going to stand it, you fellows?" asked Reggie Pitt, as he turned away from the window.

"We are not!" said Nipper firmly.

"Not likely!" ejaculated Church. "The rotters! Pitching Handy out of the train like that! He might have been injured——"

"Cheese it," said Nipper. "Don't lose your sense of proportion, old son, for goodness' sake! It was only a jape, after all. Brewster & Co. wouldn't injure anybody."

"But—but to chuck him out like that——"

"An insult to the Remove!" said Nipper, nodding. "As for Handy, he's all right. He'll probably walk to the next station and get on a slow train. But I'm jiggered if we're going to see one of our fellows treated like that and do nothing to wipe out the stain!"

"We shall be at Bannington soon!" said Tommy Watson. "Then we'll get busy!"

"It's a question of necessity," agreed Vivian Travers, with a sigh. "Personally, I hate soiling my clobber, and I positively loathe brawling in public. But there are exceptions to every rule, and Brewster & Co. need a sharp lesson. Somehow, I think the platform at Bannington Station will soon resemble a battlefield!"

"Hadn't we better wait until we get to Bellton?" asked Jimmy Potts dubiously.

"Never!" said Nipper. "This isn't a case where we can do any waiting. As soon as this train stops, and as soon as Brewster & Co. pile out of their compartment, we've got to rush them, and wipe them up!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "It's a frightfully good scheme, dear old boy—but you'll have to be the general."

"There'll be no need of generalship," replied Nipper. "It'll just be one rush, and then——"

"There'll be no rush for you, dear old fellow," said Travers, shaking his head. "You can look on, if you like—but you've got to remember that you're an invalid."

"Oh, rats!" said Nipper uncomfortably.

But he had to give his promise to the other fellows. His chest was still tender; the wound had healed, but a violent blow might easily deliver him into the hospital. For another week or two, at least, fighting was barred for him.

In the meantime, Brewster & Co. were chuckling hugely. They were in sublime ignorance of the fact that a crowd of other St. Frank's fellows were on the train. They thought that there might be one or two, perhaps—but certainly not the better part of a dozen.

So, when the train steamed into the station at Bannington, they piled out cheerily on to the platform. It was necessary to change here into the "local" which was already standing by the opposite platform. But the River House sextette never reached it. There was a sudden rush, a scamper of feet, a chorus of yells. Then Brewster & Co. were in the thick of it.

"Down with the River House!"

"Hurrah!"

"Here, steady!" gasped Brewster wildly. "You—you fatheads——"

"We saw what you did to old Handy!" roared Church. "Now we're going to wipe you up! This is a reprisal! St. Frank's for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

The fight was terrific. Porters came running up, with the valiant intention of putting a quick stop to this conflict. But after they had received several jabs in the ribs, and numerous punches in the face, they retired, a baffled and beaten force.

Sedate townspeople of Bannington were scampering away, uttering exclamations of indignant horror. Scraps were more or less common on the first day of term, but it was very seldom that there was such a free fight as this.

"Pax!" gasped Robinson, in the middle of it. "Chuck it, you asses!"

"Pax be blowed!" sang out McClure. "I dare say you got fed up with old Handy, but that was no excuse for you chucking him out of the train!"

"Revenge!" said Travers dramatically.

Crash!

Ascott's fist struck him on the side of the face, and he reeled. But the next moment Ascott went down, adorned with the beginnings of a splendid black eye. Caps were lying all over the platform, to say nothing of sundry books, crumpled collars, and tattered neckties.

"Stop!"

A thunderous voice broke out, and the station-master himself came striding into the very thick of the conflict. He was an important man, and it was rather difficult to ignore his commands.

"Now then, young gentlemen—now then!" he said, with rare diplomacy. "We don't mind a little fun, but this is going too far. Don't you think you've had about enough of it?"

"Yes, just about!" mumbled Norton, as he felt his front teeth.

The St. Frank's crowd made a final rush, and Nipper, who was standing aside, after the fashion of a general, chuckled with glee. The River House force was routed. Brewster & Co. were staggering off down the platform, "beaten to the wide."

"Trophies!" said Nipper briskly. "We'd better pick up these caps and things, you chaps! They're trophies of the victory!"

"Begad! Rather!" said Tregellis-West.

"The spoils of the war!" murmured Vivian Travers, as he secured a couple of caps.

"Hallo! This is a rummy-looking head-gear!" said Nipper, as he secured a bright orange-coloured cap, and dusted it. "Never seen one like it before! Must be something new at the River House!"

"Who does it belong to?" asked Tommy Watson breathlessly.

Nipper glanced inside.

"Brewster, by Jove!" he grinned. "This is rich, you fellows! We've bagged Brewster's cap! This is a trophy, if you like!"

But even Nipper did not quite realise that this particular trophy was, indeed, a prize amongst prizes!



CHAPTER 6.

The Trophy!

WITHIN five minutes, all signs and indications of the fight had vanished.

Nipper & Co. were sitting sedately in a compartment of the local train. Hal Brewster & Co. had conveniently vanished. In all probability they had decided that it would be safer for them to proceed to the River House School on foot from Bannington. It was better than taking the risk of arriving at Bellton, only to find a still further crowd of St. Frank's fellows at the little station. They had had enough scrap-ping for one afternoon.

"Well, we've shown these River House fat-heads that we're not going to stand any nonsense," said Nipper complacently. "The only thing I'm sorry about is that I couldn't take a hand in the scrap."

"You needn't be sorry!" said Reggie Pitt, as he nursed a swollen ear. "Brewster & Co. know how to fight, blow 'em!"

"Yes, but they got the worst of it!" said Jimmy Potts.

"And it'll be a lesson to them for the rest of the term!" added Nipper. "There's nothing like starting right. If these River House fatheads think that they can handle a St. Frank's fellow with impunity, they've made a mistake. We've put them in their place on the first day of the term—and we'll take care to keep them there!"

"Hear, hear!"

By the time Bellton was reached the juniors were all feeling thoroughly satisfied with themselves. They were glad, in a way, that the old rivalry between St. Frank's and the River House had sprung up again; and it was all to the good that Brewster & Co. had received a sharp lesson on the very first day of term. The unfortunate Handforth hardly received a thought.

It wasn't until a good hour after the rest had reached St. Frank's that he turned up. Church and McClure were in the Triangle, talking with Fullwood and Gresham and John Busterfield Boots and Bob Christine, when Edward Oswald arrived in the gateway.

Of course, everybody had heard about the encounter with the River House fellows, and the Junior School was gleeful over the victory. There had been some talk of getting up a search-party to go and look for Handforth, but it had come to nothing.

Now Handforth himself had arrived.

He was caked with mud, and still very grimy. But he had managed to make himself look comparatively presentable.

Church and McClure ran across the Triangle to meet him. They hadn't expected him for another half-hour, at least, for no other train had come in.

"How did you get here, Handy?" panted Church, as they ran up.

"Somebody gave me a lift in his car," replied Handforth in a thick, tense voice. "Brought me as far as the village, and I walked the rest. By George! Those beastly River House rotters! Didn't you fellows see what happened?"

"Yes!" said Mac. "We were looking out of our own carriage, but before we could do anything the train started."

"They chucked me out!" said Handforth furiously. "Me, you know! They chucked me down that embankment into the ditch!"

"Hard lines, old son!" said Nipper, as he came up with a crowd of others.

"We've got to do something to wipe out the insult!" roared Handforth. "I've been planning it as I came along. Come on, you fellows! We've got to go to the River House School and——"

"Steady, old man—steady!" interrupted the Remove skipper. "There's no need for that."

"No need for it!" echoed Handforth, aghast. "You're not going to let it stand, are you?"

"Well, I rather thought that the thing was settled," said Nipper.

"Settled!" howled Handforth. "But it's an insult to St. Frank's!"

"You don't know all the facts, old man," said Church soothingly. "As soon as the train arrived at Bannington we jumped on Brewster & Co. and made mincemeat of them!"

"Oh!" said Handforth.

"Naturally, we couldn't allow the insult to go unanswered," said Nipper. "You can feel quite satisfied, Handy, old man. Brewster & Co. were wiped up in the most definite way. We distributed black eyes and thick ears very liberally. At least, the other fellows did; I couldn't do any fighting, worse luck!"

"Well, of course, this makes it different," admitted Handforth reluctantly. "But it's a swindle, all the same! I wanted to take a hand in this giddy reprisal! And now I'm dished!"

"I dare say you'll have plenty more opportunities, old son," said Reggie Pitt. "But you can be quite satisfied that we upheld the honour of the Remove. The stain is wiped out. And it wouldn't be a bad idea if you went indoors and wiped out a few of your own stains."

Handforth hesitated.

"You're sure you really made mincemeat of them?" he asked suspiciously.

"For the love of Samson!" said Vivian Travers. "Dear old fellow, the battlefield was littered with *debris* by the time we had done. We picked up trophies by the dozen!"

"Trophies?"

"And one particularly special trophy," nodded Nipper. "Brewster's cap, to be exact."

And he pulled the orange-coloured head-gear out of his pocket. Handforth took one look at it, then his face went red, his eyes bulged slightly, and he let out a roar of triumph.

"Brewster's cap!" he shouted. "By George! You *have* got a trophy!"

"Well, you needn't make such a song about it—"

"What!" yelled Handforth. "Don't you understand what you've got there?"

"It's a cap—that's all."

"All!" echoed Handforth. "My dear chap, that cap is a trophy of trophies! It's a special sort of thing, only just brought into force at the River House. This is the first day that Brewster has worn that cap!"

"So I imagined," said Nipper, examining it with fresh interest.

"It's a thingummy of office!" added Handforth firmly.

"A which?"

"A—a symbol," said Handforth. "That's it! A symbol of office! Only the captain of the River House Fourth can wear that orange-coloured cap. And if he loses it, it's a tragedy!"

"Then it's a tragedy," said Travers, "because he's certainly lost it."

"He won't be able to get another until next term!" grinned Handforth, his temper thoroughly restored. "Brewster was telling me all about it. In fact, he said that if he ever lost his cap, it would be a sort of disgrace. It would be a sign that he isn't fit to be the skipper of the Fourth. And he can't get another orange cap, even if he pays five hundred quid for it! His headmaster won't allow him to have one. So you can guess how keen he'll be to get that cap back!"

"My only aunt!" said Nipper, with a whistle. "Then it certainly is valuable. And what a corking triumph for the first day of term! This ought to keep those River House fatheads in place for weeks on end. They won't be able to show us their faces!"

Teddy Long, of the Remove, came pushing through the crowd, looking very important.

"I say, you fellows—" he began breathlessly.

"Clear off, Teddy!"

"You can't borrow anything from us—we know you too well!"

"Oh, I say!" protested the sneak of the Remove. "I've come here for Nipper."

"Well, you can't have me," said Nipper.

"But you're wanted on the 'phone," said Teddy Long. "I was in the Common-room and the 'phone rang, so I answered it. Brewster wants you, Nipper."

"Oh, does he?" said Nipper, with a grin. "Brewster, eh?"

"Yes—he's ringing up from the River House School," said Teddy Long, with great importance. "He asked me to tell you that it was urgent. He wants to speak to you on very important business."

"I think I can guess what that important business is!" chuckled Nipper. "Come on, you chaps! This ought to be worth hearing."

"Aren't you going to give me something for telling you about it?" asked Teddy Long indignantly.

But nobody took any notice of him, and he gave a grunt of disgust. Nipper and the rest of the Removites went hurrying to the Ancient House. They arrived in the Common-room, where a public telephone-box was installed. There was one in every Common-room at St. Frank's—a very handy innovation for the fellows.

"Hallo!" said Nipper, as he picked up the disconnected receiver. "You there, Brewster, my son?"

"Yes!" came Hal Brewster's agitated voice. "Look here, Nipper—"

"Sorry I can't look!" said Nipper sweetly. "But I can listen."

"Oh, don't rot!" came Brewster's agitated voice. "Did you happen to see an orange cap on the Bannington platform after that scrap?"

"Why, yes," said Nipper. "What about it?"

"Well, we don't want to keep up any animosity, do we?" asked Brewster, with a display of over-eagerness. "We chucked Handy out of the train, and you wiped us up on the Bannington platform. That squares the thing, doesn't it?"

"Well, I suppose so—in a way," agreed Nipper cautiously.

"All right, then!" said Brewster, with relief. "About that cap! It's mine."

"I know it is," said Nipper. "I've got it here."

"You have?" came Brewster's shout. "Good egg! My only hat! I've been worrying like the dickens about that cap. It's all right, I suppose? Not torn, or anything?"

"Only a bit dusty," replied Nipper.

"Thank goodness!" said Brewster. "Can I have it?"

"The cap?"

"Yes."

"If you come over to St. Frank's, we'll see about it," replied Nipper calmly.

"What do you mean—see about it?" asked Brewster, with a suspicious note in his voice.

"Well, if you can come here and get it, all well and good!" replied Nipper good-

naturedly. "You're perfectly welcome to it, Brewster—if you can come and get it."

"Thanks awfully!" said Hal Brewster, with relief. "I'll come along right away, Nipper. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Nipper, grinning.

He hung up the receiver, and he found the other juniors looking at him in astonishment.

"What did you tell him?" asked Pitt.

"I told him that if he can come along and get his cap, he's welcome to it," replied Nipper.

"Why, you ass!" roared Handforth. "It's a trophy—and we're going to stick to it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You must be dotty, Nipper!"

"Not quite so dotty as you think!" chuckled Nipper. "If Brewster can get his cap, all well and good. But you just let him try to get it!"



CHAPTER 7.

Nothing Doing!

THERE were many chuckles when Nipper's meaning became known and understood.

It would be one thing for Hal Brewster to present himself at St. Frank's and to ask for his skipper's cap; but it would be quite another thing for him to receive it!

There was a good deal of activity during the next twenty minutes. The fellows had been preparing for tea, but they forgot these important details. Tea, for the moment, was shelved. Tea had to wait.

When Hal Brewster arrived, he was accompanied by Glynn and Ascott, his two faithful chums of Study No. 1. None of the other River House fellows had come. It was, after all, a peaceful mission. Brewster was now wearing an ordinary school cap, and he felt painfully aware of the fact.

"Pax!" he said cautiously, as a crowd of Removites came across the Triangle to meet him.

"Pax it is," agreed Nipper promptly. "We've wiped you up once to-day, Brewster, and we're satisfied."

Hal Brewster grinned rather feebly.

"Well, we won't discuss the point," he said. "I only came along to get my cap."

"So I understood!" said Nipper, while many of the other Removites chuckled.

"Thanks awfully for keeping it for me," added Brewster.

"There's no need to thank me!" said Nipper blandly. "In fact, you'd better wait a bit before you start thanking anybody!"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Brewster, staring.

"Nothing much!" said Nipper. "Just come indoors, will you?"

"Indoors?"

"Into the Common-room," explained Nipper.

"But why? Can't you give me the cap here?"

"Not very well," said Nipper. "It's in the Common-room, you see."

"But these other caps are here, if you want them," remarked Reggie Pitt obligingly. "I dare say their owners will be glad to get them back."

Several caps were handed over with much solemnity. There were also one or two neckties, and a collar or so. Brewster & Co. took them gladly, and the St. Frank's juniors were quite ready to let them go. As trophies they were insignificant, and hardly worth keeping.

"Wait a minute," said Brewster, as they arrived at the doorway of the Ancient House. "I suppose there's no jape about this, Nipper?"

"Jape?" repeated Nipper in astonishment. "My dear chap—"

"You're not going to jump on us when we get inside?" put in Ascott.

"Didn't I tell you it was pax?" said Nipper reproachfully. "I'm the Remove skipper, and surely you can trust me? As long as you fellows don't start any trouble of your own accord, you can walk about St. Frank's just as you please. Nobody will interfere with you."

"That's good enough!" said Hal Brewster, with a grin. "Right-ho, then! Lead on, Macduff!"

The three River House boys went indoors with a feeling of perfect confidence. They knew that they could take Nipper's word. They were ushered into the Junior Common-room, and a crowd of Removites went in, too. Strangely enough, the Common-room was more or less crowded even before they arrived. Almost the entire Remove had congregated there.

"Why all this fuss?" asked Brewster, in astonishment.

"There's no fuss!" said Nipper, pointing. "There's your cap, Brewster, old son. If you want it—try to get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up, and Hal Brewster & Co. became more certain than ever that there was something behind all this. They weren't being interfered with, it was true, but there could be no doubt that the Saints were alive to some joke.

"Great Scott!" gasped Brewster suddenly.

He found himself looking at his orange-coloured cap. There it was, hanging on the wall on the other side of the Common-room. But that cap wasn't hanging on an ordinary hook.

On the wall there was a large square of drawing-board, and an amateur caricaturist had drawn an excellent sketch. It represented the head of a donkey, and yet, in some vague way, the face of the donkey bore a resemblance to Hal Brewster's features. And perched on the top of the donkey's head,

between the ears, was the orange-coloured cap, held in place by a couple of drawing-pins.

But this wasn't all.

Underneath the sketch were the words:

"HAL BREWSTER, Skipper of the River House Fourth Form, Wearing his Symbol of Office."

Brewster & Co. were wearing sickly expressions as they gazed at that caricature. But they were in the lions' den, and they could not very well start any trouble.

"Very funny!" said Brewster feebly. "You fellows will have your joke, won't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll jolly well make you laugh on the other sides of your faces soon!" said Dave Ascott warmly. "You rotters! Drawing old Brewster as an ass!"

"It's a life-like portrait!" said Handforth firmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, can I have my cap?" asked Hal, turning to Nipper.

"Certainly," nodded Nipper agreeably.

"Thanks!"

"Certainly you can have it—if you can get it!" added Nipper. "Go ahead, Brewster—try and get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try and get it!" roared the Remove in one yell.

Hal Brewster ran forward, but before he had gone three paces a line of fellows barred his way. Ascott and Glynn were similarly kept in check.

"Look here!" roared Brewster indignantly. "You promised me that we shouldn't be jumped on—"

"And you're not being jumped on, old man," said Nipper. "Nobody has interfered with you yet. But if you try to fight your way through this barrier, there's bound to be a bit of a bother."

"But how can I get my cap without fighting through the barrier?" roared Brewster.

"Is this a conundrum?" murmured Nipper.

"You—you funny ass!" hooted Brewster. "I don't believe you mean to let me have my cap at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yet you told me to come over—"

"We wanted you to see your latest portrait," chuckled Nipper. "Besides, what I said over the telephone I'll repeat now. If you can get your cap, Brewster, you're welcome to it! But try and get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

"It's a trophy, my lad!" explained Nipper. "This is the first day of term, and we've started well. As I said before, if you want your cap, you can have it—if you can get it. But, by Jove, we're going to see that you *don't* get it!"

"But it's my skipper's cap!" protested Brewster, in alarm. "I only put it on to-

day for the first time, and there'll be awful trouble at the River House! They won't let me have another cap, either!"

"Exactly!" said Nipper. "That's why we're keeping this one! We want it to be a constant reminder, Hal, old man, that you and your fellow asses are everlastingly inferior to the Saints. If you can get that cap back, you'll prove that you're our masters."

Brewster & Co. were utterly flabbergasted.

"You rotters!" panted Brewster. "All right! I can see what your game is—but you'll be sorry for it one of these days! It won't take the River House long to make you sing small!"

"But for the moment we'll sing big!" grinned Nipper.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Remove yelled with keen appreciation.



CHAPTER 8.

A Desperate Effort!

OUTSIDE, Hal Brewster & Co. halted in the lane. Ascott & Glynn were looking furious and hot; but Brewster himself was only anxious.

"The rotters!" panted Ascott fiercely. "The spoofing, kidding rotters!"

"They're a lot of cads!" said Glynn indignantly.

Their leader shook his head.

"Rats!" he said. "Don't talk rot!"

"Yes, but—"

"But nothing!" interrupted Brewster. "If we were in their position, we should do exactly the same."

"Eh?"

"Exactly the same!" repeated Brewster. "They've seized my cap, and they're holding it as a trophy. Just because we're up against them, my sons, there's no reason for us to lose our sense of proportion. Nipper's jolly cute to stick to my cap like that, and to hold it. But we've got to get it back!"

"Oh, rather?"

"By hook or by crook, we've got to get it!" insisted Brewster grimly. "That goes without saying. As long as my skipper's cap is hanging there in the Ancient House Common-room, the River House Fourth Form won't be able to hold up its head. This is the first day of the new term, and those bounders have started well."

Ascott and Glynn adjusted their focus, so to speak.

"Well, if you put it like that, I suppose you're right," admitted Glynn, cooling down. "And when you come to think of it, Hal, it was partly your own fault."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, didn't you tell Handforth about your skipper's cap?"

"That's nothing," said Brewster. "They would have found out, sooner or later. And it's just as well to have this thing settled straight away. I'm going to get that cap back this evening."

"How?" asked Glynn. "Even if we buzz back, and bring a whole crowd of fellows, we can't raid the giddy school! We should only get the worst of it——"

"No, we can't raid it in the usual way," said Brewster. "And there's no need for us to go back, either. We're going to do it—now!"

"It's impossible!"

"It only requires nerve!" said Brewster coolly. "Think it over, my sons! All those Remove fellows have now gone out of the Common-room, and we can take it for certain that they've left my cap hanging on the wall. You see, they'll never dream that I should be rash enough to come back straight away."

"And why do you assume they've left the Common-room?" asked Glynn.

"It's tea-time," said Brewster. "They'll be in their own studies—and there are bound to be lots of sprees to-day. We can take advantage of all this. Now, you fellows have got to stay outside here, behind the wall."

"You hopeless idiot!" said Ascott. "You're not going to try to get in—alone?"

"It's the only way!" replied Hal. "You fellows stop here, and be on the look out for that cap. If I can grab it, I shall bolt across the Triangle, and sling the cap over the wall. As soon as you get it, dive through the opposite hedge, and bunk! Run like the wind, and keep on running!"

"That'll be easy enough," said Ascott. "But what about you. You'll be spotted as you cross the Triangle. Somebody's bound to see you as you go into the Ancient House, too."

"I can nip in by the back door," replied Brewster. "Don't forget, speed is going to win this game. They won't be expecting me back in so short a time—and that's why I shall probably do the trick. Anyhow, you fellows wait out here."

He was off, before they could protest. He slipped in through one of the gates that led into the private drive—a kind of circular lane which entirely surrounded all the school buildings—and he soon came to the West Gate, which was practically opposite the rear door of the Ancient House. There was only a very small section of the West Square to be crossed, and there was nobody in sight.

"Good egg!" murmured Brewster, after a preliminary glance round.

He took the precaution of stuffing his cap into his pocket. Then he walked boldly across, and within a few seconds he was inside the Ancient House. His heart was beating rapidly now, and he was rather startled at his own audacity.

He sped down the passage, and he was overjoyed to find that the place was deserted. He could hear shouts of laughter coming from various studies, accompanied by the rattle of crockery. As he had assumed, the juniors were at tea.

At last he arrived outside the door of the Common-room. He had his fingers on the handle, and he was about to turn it, when the door opened, and Hubbard and Long, of the Remove, stood there.

"Brewster!" gasped Teddy Long.

Hal Brewster took one quick glance over the shoulders of the two juniors. He saw that the Common-room was otherwise empty. It was now or never!

"Yes, Brewster!" he said tensely. "Sorry, my lads, but it can't be helped."

Crash! Crash!

His right came out, and struck the flabby Teddy in the chest; then his left swung round, and caught Hubbard on the nose.

Teddy went over, howling wildly, and Hubbard staggered back, gasping with pain. But in a flash Hal Brewster had shot round them, and he slammed the door with all his strength.

Click!

He turned the key in the lock, and then he looked round triumphantly. There, on the wall, was his cap, as he had assumed.

"Hi! Help!" came a bellow from the other side of the door. "Rescue, Remove!"

Brewster sped across the Common-room, tore his cap down, and then leapt at one of the windows.

"Raiders!" came the shout from the corridor. "It's Brewster—he's pinching his cap! Quick, you fellows!"

Brewster dived headlong out of the window, and he found himself in the West Square. But, to his dismay, a crowd of juniors were just coming through the West Gate, from Little side. In a flash, they could tell that there was something wrong here. They started running towards him, in order to head him off.

"Crumbs!" gasped Brewster.

He swerved, and dashed through West Arch. He was in the Triangle now, and he was just in time to see a crowd of Removites pouring out of the main door of the Ancient House. As he tore off towards the school wall, they were on his heels like a pack of wolves.

"Grab him!"

"He's got that cap!"

"He can't escape, though—he's trapped!"

And this seemed to be the case. A group of Fourth Formers were in the gateway, and it was quite certain that they would never allow Brewster to dash through. But Brewster had no intention of dashing through. He was thankful that he had taken the earlier precautions. Ascott and Glynn would be waiting outside—in the lane.

"Coming over!" howled Brewster, at the top of his voice.

He had nearly reached the wall, and he suddenly slung the cap upwards and outwards. It went sailing through the air, and a veritable hurricane of indignant shouts arose. The juniors could guess what that throw meant.

"Quick—outside!" shouted Handforth. "There are some other River House chaps out there, and they're going to—"

He broke off. The cap, sailing triumphantly over the wall, seemed lost for good. But at the crucial moment a gust of wind came along, caught the cap, and caused it to hover. Then, to Hal Brewster's chagrin and deep disappointment, the cap fell—struck the wall, and came tumbling over on the inner side.

"Collar it!" yelled Reggie Pitt.

In a flash the cap was seized, and Hal Brewster found himself surrounded by a hot, excited throng.

"Well, I nearly did it!" he said breathlessly.

"You—you bounder!" grinned Nipper. "You almost deserved to get away with it—for your cheek!"

"Well, I had a good try, anyhow," said Brewster. "Confound that gust of wind! Ascott and Glynn would have been off like a shot—"

"I don't doubt it!" nodded Nipper. "But this ought to prove that that cap is our property, my lad!"

"Rats! It's mine!"

"It's ours by right of conquest," said Nipper. "And it's going back in the Common-room."

"Hadn't we better put it under lock and key—or hide it somewhere?" suggested Tommy Watson. "If we don't, these River House fatheads will be after it night and day!"

"We shall!" said Brewster frankly.

"As we said before—try and get it!" said Nipper. "As for locking it away, there's nothing doing, my sons. It would simply be an admission that we're afraid of these fatheaded Commoners!"

"By George! So it would!" agreed Handforth.

"So it will remain in the Common-room!" said Nipper firmly. "I'm not saying that we shall keep it pinned up as it was. That's a bit too exposed, perhaps. But it'll be in the Common-room—in full sight."

"Good enough!" said Brewster, nodding. "I've failed this time, but what you've just said, Nipper, is a challenge."

"You can take it as one, if you like."

"I do like!" said the River House leader. "And I'm jolly well going to get that cap back!"

"But you mustn't do any burgling," said Reggie Pitt. "No sneaking in at dead of night—"

"Of course not!" said Hal. "In fact, I'll go further than that. I'll guarantee that we won't make any raids during lesson times or after bed-time. We'll get that cap back

in a sportsmanlike way—and at a time of day when all you fellows are free."

"Spoken like a man!" grinned Nipper. "But, my dear old Hal, you surely don't think that you'll be able to get this cap again, do you?"

"I don't think anything about it!" replied Hal Brewster, a grim note creeping into his voice. "That's my skipper's cap—and I've got to have it!"

He nodded and walked off. And the St. Frank's Remove knew that war was now definitely and irrevocably declared!



CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise from Brewster!

"WELL, it fizzled out!" said Ascott bluntly.

They were walking across the fields towards the River

House School. The River Stowe was on their left, and the countryside was looking very peaceful on this September evening. But Brewster & Co. were wearing solemn expressions and heavy frowns.

"Yes, but it came jolly near to succeeding," said Brewster regretfully. "But for that beastly puff of wind, the cap would have been over the wall. Now we shall have the very dickens of a trouble to get it back."

"A lot of fuss over a cap!" said Ascott gruffly.

Hal Brewster shook his head.

"It isn't the cap, old man," he replied. "That's really nothing. It's what the cap stands for. These St. Frank's fellows have captured it, and they mean to hold it. It's a trophy, signifying that we're the bottom dogs, and, until we recover it, we *shall* be the bottom dogs."

"It's all very well to talk about recovering it, but how is it going to be done?" asked Glynn gloomily. "They'll guard that cap like—like the crown jewels. They'll probably have guards there on duty all the time."

"Yes, they'll take plenty of precautions," Brewster said. "But that will make it more interesting—and when we succeed our success will be all the greater. That's one consolation, anyhow."

When they arrived in the quad at the River House School, they were immediately surrounded by an excited crowd. Kingswood and Norton and Robinson ran up with Driscoll and Buller and Pringle. Littlewood and Mann came along with Palmer, and there were lots of others.

"You didn't get it?" echoed Kingswood, aghast, when he heard the news.

"No," growled Brewster. "They're keeping it—as a trophy of war!"

There was a roar of indignation and fury, and the excitement increased when Brewster



The "girl" pressed Edward Oswald Handforth's arm more tightly and drew closer—much to that junior's delight—while the lads looked on in amazement. "Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Willy Handforth.

explained all the details. The River House Fourth Form was seething.

"It's a challenge!" said Lang, of Study No. 4. "That's what it is, Brewster—a challenge!"

"I know it, ass!"

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Lang excitedly.

"We're going to get that cap back, of course," said the skipper. "But there's no sense in getting flustered about it. These St. Frank's fellows mean business, and we shall have to employ strategy. Anyhow, until I get that cap back I shall feel jolly small."

"Well, I'm glad you feel small!" said the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellbourne, with a sneer in his voice. "By gad! On the first day of term, too! What a skipper!"

Brewster coloured.

"You keep out of it, Wellbourne!" he snapped.

The leader of the Honourables shrugged his shoulders.

"You bet I will!" he said sourly. "But it just proves what I've always said. As a leader, Brewster, you're a wash-out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You're no good, Brewster!"

"Yah! Beaten by the Saints on the first day of term!"

"Resign—resign!"

Hal Brewster was rather surprised at the open display of hostility. Quite a few of the Commoners were joining in the general noise. His own supporters were against him. His jaw set firmly, and he faced them all with blazing eyes.

"You know the circumstances!" he said fiercely. "Can't you be sensible? What chance had we on the Bannington platform, outnumbered as we were?"

"You ought to have stuck to your cap!" said Reeves hotly.

"Well, look here!" shouted Brewster. "If I haven't got that cap back within a week, and if I haven't made the Saints sing small within the same period, I'll resign from the captaincy!"

"That's fair enough!" said Kingswood. "Let's back him up, you fellows! We'll give him a week!"

"Hear, hear!"

And so the matter was more or less settled. But Hal Brewster knew that he had a heavy task in front of him.

Most of the Fourth-Formers broke up and went indoors to their own studies, or into the

gym, or the Common-room. And Hal Brewster found himself looking in some surprise at a new face. Ascott and Glynn were talking with a slim, slight junior, who was evidently a newcomer.

"Hallo!" said Brewster, walking up. "Who's this?"

"New chap!" said Ascott, with a grin. "I don't know what his name is yet, but I've got a good nickname for him."

"Oh!" said the new boy. "And what's that?"

"Cissy!" said Ascott blandly.

But the new boy, instead of taking offence, merely grinned.

"It's my misfortune," he said calmly. "I know I've got a slim figure and small hands and feet, and it's not the first time I've been told I look like a girl. But you needn't chip me about it."

The new River House boy was certainly a bit girlish. His skin was fresh and fair, and his eyes were of innocent blue. He had a small mouth, and a very feminine nose. Yet those blue eyes of his contained a mischievous twinkle while Brewster & Co. examined him.

"Well, what's your name, anyhow?" said Brewster.

"Cyril Graham," said the new boy.

"In the Fourth?" asked Ascott.

"Yes."

"Crumbs!" said Ascott in dismay.

"Cyril Graham!" murmured Brewster, scratching his head. "That's rummy! I seem to have heard the name before. It strikes a familiar note."

"That's not improbable," remarked the new boy. "I expect you're thinking of my pater."

Hal Brewster started.

"Why, yes, of course!" he said, slapping his thigh. "Cyril Graham, the famous West End actor. My only hat! Are you the son of Cyril Graham, the celebrated comedian, who's now appearing at the Pall Mall Theatre?"

"Well, yes," admitted Graham. "He is my pater, as a matter of fact."

"My sons, this is interesting!" said Brewster, regarding the new boy keenly. "The River House School is looking up! Jolly glad to have you here, Graham, my lad. And if you're anything like your pater, you must be a stunning actor."

"Well, I hope to go on the boards one day," said Graham easily.

"And, lemme see!" went on Brewster, frowning thoughtfully. "I was reading something about you in one of the papers during the holidays."

"Yes?" murmured Graham.

"Weren't you mixed up in some rag over at Twickenham?"

"Yes," said Graham. "My old school is at Twickenham."

"Then you're the fellow!" said Brewster. "My hat! He looks as innocent as a babe, you fellows—and yet, according to what I read, he's an unholy terror!"



CHAPTER 10.

Getting to Work.

IN the Junior Common-room at the River House School, Cyril Graham was very much of a "lion"

that evening.

Nobody had taken much notice of him at first, but when it became generally known that he was the son of the world-famous Cyril Graham, his popularity was assured. For Cyril Graham senior was an extraordinarily clever comedian.

The River House fellows soon discovered, too, that one of Graham's uncles was a bishop and another an admiral in the Navy. Quite a number of Graham's exploits came out, and were much talked about. There was no doubt about it, Cyril Graham, of the River House School, was a terror. At his previous school he had been the leader in all the mischief. His very air of innocence had saved him from many a dire scrape.

And before that evening was over Hal Brewster got a brilliant idea.

Somebody had asked Graham if he had ever impersonated a girl, and Graham had laughed coyly, and had replied in a sweet, feminine voice. In fact, he had startled everybody.

"It's one of my favourite roles!" he admitted in a modest voice. "But I couldn't do much of it towards the end, at my other school. You see, everybody got accustomed to it."

"But nobody here knows you!" said Brewster shrewdly. "Nobody at St. Frank's; anyhow! And you're a Fourth-Former at the River House now, my son—you're one of us!"

"I'm jolly pleased to be," said Graham, nodding.

"You'll have to help us in our campaign against Nipper & Co.!" added Brewster. "My son, there's a chance for you here! A chance for you to shine—and to do something big!"

"By jingo!" said Ascott excitedly. "You—you don't mean—"

"Yes, I do!" grinned Hal. "Nobody at St. Frank's has seen Graham, and if he gets dressed up like a girl, and goes there—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat, what a rag!"

"But there's something more in it!" said Brewster keenly. "What about my skipper's cap?"

"By jingo!"

"We've got to get it back—and if we can work the trick to-morrow, so much the better!" said Brewster. "Now, the thing has got to be done properly. What do you say about it, Graham? Are you game to go to St. Frank's to-morrow afternoon, dressed as a girl, and—"

"I'm game for anything!" said Graham promptly. "And the riskier it is, the better I shall like it. Just try me!"

"You'll do!" chuckled Brewster. "By Jove! I believe we'll work the dodge!"

At St. Frank's the Remove fellows were very much on the alert. A number of them were in the Common-room, and they were momentarily expecting some activity.

"Those River House bounders are certain to be here during the evening!" said Fullwood. "But they're not going to get that trophy, are they?"

"Not likely!" chuckled Russell.

And there was a roar of laughter from all the others. They glanced at Hal Brewster's cap, and there was, perhaps, some reason for their confidence.

The cap was in full sight, but it was no longer pinned openly to the wall. It was inside a little medicine-chest—the latter being, in fact, quite a commonplace bathroom fitment. Some genius had borrowed it from upstairs, and had screwed it to the Common-room wall.

The door of the cabinet was securely locked, but in the centre of that door there was a square of plate-glass, and inside the little cabinet was Brewster's orange cap, in full sight.

"We've kept our word, anyhow!" said Nipper. "We told Brewster that his cap would remain in the Common-room—and there it is. But, by Jove, if any of those River House fellows make a sudden dash and try to get the cap, they'll find themselves dished."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They can't pull the cabinet down, because it's screwed on too hard," said Nipper. "And if they break the glass, somebody is bound to hear it. I rather think we've got them on toast."

But nothing happened during that evening, and after bed-time the Removites knew that the cap was safe for that night, at least. Hal Brewster had given his promise that nothing would be done in the "off" hours.

Next morning St. Frank's was busy in settling down. Practically no work was done in the Form-rooms, of course, and most of the masters were quite satisfied if their Forms made some pretence of shaking down.

The afternoon was a half-holiday, and there was some talk of getting up a football match. But the leading lights of the Remove gathered together, and decided that it might be inadvisable.

"We shall have to be jolly careful this afternoon," said Nipper, as he stood on the Ancient House steps in the September sunshine. "Brewster & Co. did nothing yesterday evening, but they're certain to get busy to-day."

"Do you think they'll attempt a raid?" asked Handforth hopefully.

"It's hardly likely."

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "I wish they'd come here in full force, you know! Then we could have a real decent scrap!"

"No; they'll hardly do anything like that," said Nipper thoughtfully. "They'll use strategy."

"They'll use which?"

"Strategy—subterfuge," replied Nipper. "In fact, we must be on the look-out for all sorts of trickery. They'll probably attempt to get into the school by means of some dodge."

"Well, they won't be lucky," chuckled De Valerie. "There are five or six fellows in the Common-room, and we're going to take it in turns to keep guard during the afternoon. I'd like to see any of those River House fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo!" said Vivian Travers, as he gazed towards the gates. "What have we here, dear old fellows? Well, well! Surely this cannot be—— For the love of Samson!"

A stranger had just wandered through the gateway; a smallish, bewhiskered gentleman, wearing a frock coat and a battered topper. He wore enormous horn-rimmed spectacles, and he peered about him inquisitively.

At a casual glance, he seemed *bona fide* enough, but Nipper & Co. were on the look-out for something suspicious. And here they found it! This bewhiskered old gentleman did not seem quite genuine. There was something decidedly fishy about him.

"Poor old Brewster!" said Nipper sadly. "Surely he doesn't think that he can fool us with a game like this? I rather think we'd better go across to this elderly old gentleman, and find out what he wants."

"I rather think we had!" said Travers dryly.



CHAPTER 11.

Not Quite a Success!

THE gentleman with the whiskers peered amiably at the juniors as they surrounded him.

The juniors, for their part, gave him the most pitying looks. For it was as obvious as daylight that those whiskers were false, and that the enormous spectacles were unnecessary.

"Can we do anything for you, sir?" asked Nipper politely.

"Yes, yes, to be sure!" said the bewhiskered old gentleman, in a hoarse voice. "Thank you, boys—thank you! I—er—I am anxious to look over your school."

"Particularly the Ancient House, no doubt, sir?" asked Travers blandly.

"Yes, yes!" said the stranger. "You are quite right—particularly the Ancient House. That is to say——"

"And the Common-room—the Junior Common-room—will presumably be of special entertainment to you?" asked Nipper.

"Eh? Well, I don't know——"

"Come off it!" said Nipper, making a grab at the whiskers. "Ascott, my lad, you're hopeless!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered the stranger sheepishly.

Nipper gave the whiskers a jerk, and they came away in his hand. Dave Ascott, of the River House School, stood there, looking alarmed and flabbergasted.

"Oh, my goodness!" he said blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear old lunatic, it was simply dire!" said Nipper sympathetically. "Your voice gave you away in a tick."

"I—I was half afraid of it!" said Ascott glumly. "You rotters! I was all right otherwise, wasn't I?"

"Fine!" said Handforth, with heavy sarcasm. "A wonderful disguise, my lad. Except for the whiskers and the spectacles and the wig and the topper, you were pretty good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd of Removites gathered round menacingly, and Ascott looked at them with a wary eye.

"Well, I've failed!" he said carelessly. "I think I'd better be going!"

"Just a minute, my lad!" said Handforth. "You surely don't think that you can walk out like this do you? The nerve! Calmly barging into the Triangle as though you owned the place! What are we going to do with him, you fellows?"

"Duck him in the fountain-pool!" suggested Reggie Pitt promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab him!"

"Hi, leggo!" howled Ascott wildly. "You—-you fatheads! A master might spot you—"

But the juniors were evidently quite indifferent to the risks they ran. Dave Ascott was seized by many hands; he was rushed across to the fountain-pool, and he was sent into it, head-first.

Splash!

The unfortunate Ascott vanished under the surface, and when he came up he was looking very much like a drowned rat. He hauled himself out, and the juniors backed away, yelling with laughter.

"Go back to Brewster, and give him our compliments," said Nipper sweetly. "Tell him that he'd better try something a little more convincing."

Ascott crawled away, leaving a trail of wetness behind him. The Removites grinned cheerily.

"Well, so much for that dodge!" said Handforth. "I'm surprised at Brewster! I thought he had more brains! Surely he doesn't think that we can be sucked in by such idiotic wheezes?"

"Well, it hardly seems up to Brewster's standard," admitted Nipper. "But he hasn't got into the swing of things yet. The term's hardly started, remember. He's been too hasty—"

"By George!" said Handforth, with a jump.

A telegraph boy had just ridden briskly through the gateway, and he was now pedalling towards the Ancient House. There was something about the appearance of that telegraph boy which caused all the Removites to look at him very, very closely.

In the first place, his bicycle was too red. It was glaringly red, and, obviously, it had only been enamelled that morning. The telegraph messenger's uniform was somehow reminiscent of stage "props." The peaked cap was too big, and the tunic was too small. Besides, this particular messenger boy had never been seen before.

"After him!" roared Handforth, in alarm.

For the telegraph messenger had reached the Ancient House steps, and was already dismounting from his machine. He was making a quick dive into the Ancient House. But before he could enter the lobby, he was seized by several juniors, and hauled round.

"I—I've got a telegram!" he stammered.

"I—I mean—"

"Glynn!" yelled Reggie Pitt.

"Oh, crumbs!" said the telegraph messenger blankly.

His face was ruddy—extraordinarily ruddy. There was a kind of lump on his nose, but it did not look convincing. Handforth reached out a fist, and knocked the lump off. Then he pulled one of the telegraph messenger's eyebrows, and this came off, too.

"Hi, steady!" gasped Glynn, of the River House School.

"Here's another of 'em!" said Nipper grimly. "What's the wheeze, Glynn, my son? Surely Brewster didn't believe that you could fool us, did he?"

Georgie Glynn grunted.

"You're too jolly cute for us!" he growled. "What's the good of trying a jolly decent dodge like this?"

He looked mournfully across the Triangle, and was just in time to see Mr. Beverley Stokes, the popular Housemaster of the West House, strolling through the gateway in company with an exceedingly dainty, pretty girl. Glynn tried his utmost to keep a little glint out of his eyes, and he succeeded. He turned his gaze quickly away.

"Well, you've got me!" he said. "I've failed. What are you going to do to me?"

"Duck you in the fountain-pool!" said Handforth, without hesitation.

"No, we can't do that!" put in Reggie Pitt quickly. "Old Barry Stokes is in sight—and, by Jove, there's a jolly pretty girl with him, too!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, looking round. "By George! I wonder who the dickens she can be?"

"Somebody's sister, I suppose," said Nipper. "It's only the second day of term, you know, and there are still a few relatives knocking about. We'd better finish with this ass straight away. We'll let him off the ducking, though."

"Supposing we just bump him?" suggested Fullwood.

The proposal was carried unanimously. Glynn, much to his indignation, was bumped

hard. He was bumped several times. Then he was allowed to get on to his bicycle again and escape. Surprisingly enough, however, he was grinning happily—almost forgetting his aches—as he cycled out through the gateway.

"They think they're jolly clever—but we're going to diddle 'em yet!" he murmured joyously. "My only Sunday topper! That chap Graham is a marvel!"



CHAPTER 12.

"Miss Scott!"

CYRIL GRAHAM was perfectly comfortable and at ease.

Walking sedately beside Mr. Beverley Stokes, he had a sensation of absolute security. He could not have entered St. Frank's in a more convincing manner. For here he was, escorted by one of the Housemasters!

It was really a piece of pure luck.

Coming up the lane, the River House junior had encountered Mr. Stokes, and had demurely made some inquiries of him. Mr. Stokes had gallantly offered to take the "young lady" to the school.

And here "she" was, very self-possessed, and very confident.

Nobody could be blamed for failing to detect the deception. For Graham's impersonation was a sheer triumph. Not only did he look the part, but his acting was perfect. His very walk, his very look, his every action—all were supreme.

Indeed, before starting out from the River House School, Graham had succeeded in fooling several of his own Form fellows—and they had already met him in his own personality! So what chance was there for these St. Frank's fellows?

It seemed incredible—ridiculous—that this remarkably pretty girl could really be a boy. It was such an outrageous idea that nobody ever thought of it. For a more charming girl never existed—at least, so far as appearances went.

The St. Frank's juniors saw a slim, graceful girl of about fifteen. Her skirt was fashionably short, revealing shapely, silk-clad legs. Her high-heeled shoes were small, and her delicate fingers were adorned with one or two simple rings. Her frock was a light, flimsy, summer confection, with a delightful little hat to match.

From beneath that hat smiled one of the prettiest faces that Nipper & Co. had ever seen. The blue eyes were frank and friendly, and there was something roguish about this girl's little nose, and her small, but resolute mouth. Exquisite little waves of hair peeped out from beneath the front of her hat, and added to the general charm of her appearance.

In a word, this girl was a stunner.

Mr. Beverley Stokes hadn't the faintest idea that she was anything but what she pretended to be. Her voice was soft and alluring; it contained a note of truly feminine sweetness. It was a voice that one could listen to for hours.

But then, Cyril Graham had every chance.

Not only was he slight in figure and small in features, but he was the son of a celebrated actor. This sort of thing was second nature to him—it was born in him. He just couldn't help himself. And being a youngster of colossal nerve, he carried the thing through with a *sang froid* that was quite remarkable. Hal Brewster knew that the River House School had secured a prize who was simply worth his weight in gold.

Mr. Stokes paused as he and his companion approached the centre of the Triangle.

"I think you said that you want to find Scott, of the Remove?" he asked smilingly.

"Yes; my brother," said the "girl," with a nod. "I do hope that Larry is here."

"Oh, I think he is sure to be," said Mr. Stokes. "Just one moment, Pitt!" he added.

"Do you mind coming here?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Reggie Pitt promptly.

He and Nipper and Handforth and a crowd of others came up, doffing their caps deferentially, and looked at the sweet newcomer with admiring eyes.

"This is Miss Scott," said the Housemaster. "She would like one of you to find her brother——"

"By jingo!" said Reggie Pitt. "Larry Scott never told us that he had a sister, sir!"

"Was there any real reason why he should do so?" smiled Mr. Stokes.

"Er—no, I suppose not," said Reggie. "Awfully pleased to meet you, Miss Scott! Your brother is in my House, you know. I'm Pitt."

"And I'm Handforth, of the Ancient House!" said Edward Oswald cheerfully.

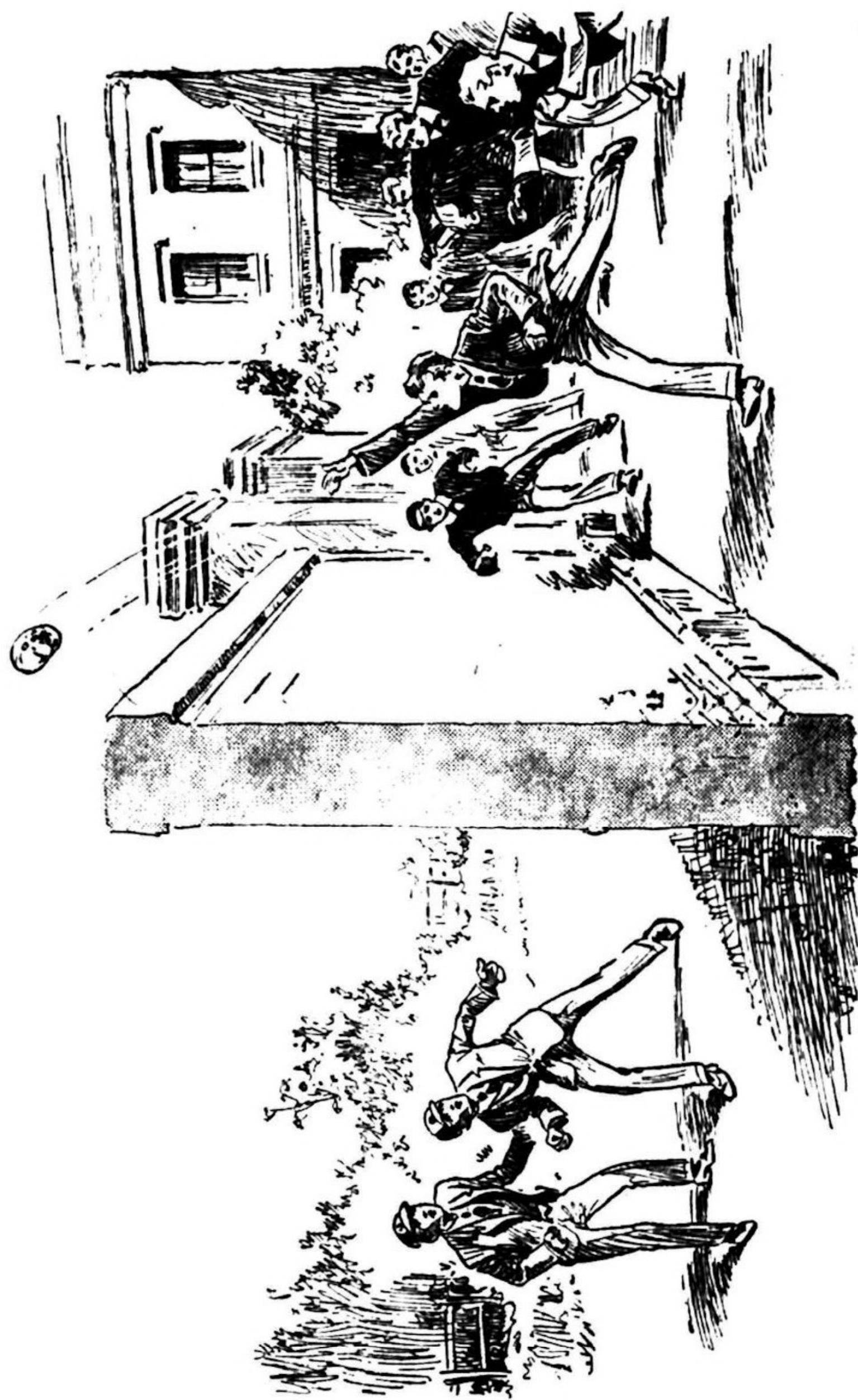
They all swarmed round her, and the deceiver was in no way flustered. He had expected this. It was by no means his first attempt at this sort of thing, and he was a past-master in the art.

"Well, if you don't mind, Miss Scott, I will leave you in the hands of these boys," said Barry Stokes, with a twinkle in his eyes. "I have no doubt that they will be pleased to obey any commands that you may give."

"Thank you so much!" said Graham, giving the Housemaster a friendly smile.

Mr. Stokes went off, and Graham knew that he was now, indeed, in the very midst of the enemy. But he was enjoying himself immensely. This jape was going to be rich.

For even Brewster & Co., when they had seen this "girl," had refused to believe their eyes. Ascott had positively declared that he had never seen such a pretty girl in all his life. So the St. Frank's fellows were fooled "up to the eyes." Even Nipper suspected nothing.



Hal Brewster sped towards the school wall, the Removites on his heels like a pack of wolves. "Coming over!" yelled Hal to his two school-fellows waiting outside, and he threw the cap upwards into the air.

How could he? For Graham was wearing no facial disguise. His features were his own—and the only aids to his impersonation were feminine attire, a wig, and a certain amount of face powder.

"So you're Larry Scott's sister?" asked Pitt, with renewed interest. "This is fine, Miss Scott! I hope you'll come down often!"

"I cannot promise that!" smiled this remarkable young "lady," giving Reggie a dazzling glance. "I'm rather annoyed with Larry for not having mentioned me."

"We'll scrag him when we find him!" declared Handforth. "Any chap who has such a ripping sister ought to boast about her! By George! I've never seen such a lovely — I—I mean— Crumbs! Where's Larry Scott?" he added, looking round in confusion.

"Anybody seen Scott?" sang out Dick Goodwin.

Doyle, of Study R, in the West House, came along.

"Scott?" he repeated. "Are you chaps looking for Scott?"

"Yes."

"He's gone out!" said Doyle, giving the "girl" an admiring glance. "Well, you chaps, I hope you're going to introduce me," he added.

"This is Miss Scott—Larry's sister!" said Dick Goodwin.

"My hat!" said Doyle. "And that ass, Scott, never told us!"

Doyle shared Study R with Scott and Yung Ching, the Chinese boy, and so he was certainly in a position to know something of Scott's movements.

As it happened, Hal Brewster knew, too. He had made it his business to find out that Larry Scott was going over to Bannington that afternoon with one or two Fourth-Formers from the Modern House. Thus the coast was clear.

"It's too bad!" said Graham, with a little laugh. "Of course, I didn't tell my brother that I was coming, and I cannot really blame him. Have you any idea when he will be back?"

"Oh, at about tea-time," said Doyle.

"Good egg!" chimed in Handforth. "Perhaps you'll allow us to show you round the school, Miss Scott? And then you might like to stop to tea, eh? We'll have a special spread in Study D—"

"Rats!" said Nipper. "Miss Scott is going to have tea in Study C!"

"Not likely!" said Reggie Pitt firmly. "Scott is a West House chap, and you Ancient House fatheads can go and eat coke! You're going to have tea in Study K, aren't you, Miss Scott?"

Graham laughed merrily.

"Don't you think we'd better leave it for a bit?" she asked in a demure voice. "Please, please! I don't want you to quarrel over me!"

"Oh, no; of course not!" said Nipper.

"And cannot I be allowed to choose my own escort?" went on the "girl," with a twinkle in those innocent, blue eyes. "I would just love to look round the school."

They all pressed round her, offering their services. But Graham, after glancing from one to the other, moved a step nearer to Handforth.

"I would just love you to show me round, if you don't mind," she said coyly, linking her arm with Handforth's. "You will be nice and escort me, won't you?"

Edward Oswald Handforth went hot and cold all over. Then he bestowed a triumphant glance on all the others.



CHAPTER 13.

A Little Mistake!

WELL, I'm blown!" said Nipper, scratching his head.

"Nerve!" said Pitt indignantly.



Hal Brewster sped towards the school wall, the other two school-fellows waiting.

They watched in consternation as "Miss Scott" walked off arm-in-arm with the victorious Handforth. But, of course, they could do nothing. She had chosen for herself, and although the other juniors were mystified regarding her choice, they could not very well object.

"Handy ought to be boiled!" said Church warmly. "Supposing Irene should walk into the Triangle now?"

"I hope she does!" grinned McClure. "My hat! Then there would be some fireworks!"

"Rubbish!" said Nipper. "Irene Manners is pretty friendly with Handy, but she's not a jealous girl."

"Don't you believe it," said Reggie Pitt. "Look at those two—thick as thieves! I'm blessed if that girl isn't clinging to old Handy's arm like a leech! Lucky beggar! She's a corker!"

"But why did she choose *him*?" asked Goodwin in astonishment.

"There's no telling with girls," said Pitt sadly. "Just look at my own sister, for example. A sensible sort of girl in most ways, and yet she has a soft spot for Fullwood!"



als like a pack of wolves. "Coming over!" yelled Hal to his
threw the cap upwards into the air.

"You silly ass!" roared Fullwood, turning red.

"Oh, sorry!" chuckled Reggie. "Are you there, Fully?"

"Yes, I am!" snorted Fullwood. "And why shouldn't your sister be a friend of mine?"

"Don't let's argue," said Nipper soothingly. "I rather think, my sons, that there's some further work for us to do. Don't forget those River House bounders!"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Tommy Watson.

They all stared towards the main gates. Handforth and his charge had vanished through West Arch, and the Triangle was now empty, except for one or two groups of juniors. But a stranger was just entering, and there was certainly something suspicious about his appearance.

"Oh—ho!" murmured Reggie Pitt. "What have we here?"

The stranger was a smallish man attired in blue overalls. He carried a little bag of tools slung over his shoulder, and a greasy peaked cap was set at an angle on his head. His face was rather ruddy, and he wore ginger side-whiskers.

"Come on!" said Nipper grimly.

They bore down upon the new arrival, surrounding him, and their expressions became more determined than ever.

"Well?" said Nipper. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Afternoon, young gent!" said the newcomer briskly. "Now about these 'ere telephones."

"What telephones?"

"There's some repair work to be done in the Ancient House, ain't there?" said the man. "Line's out of order in the public box in the Common-room—"

"Common-room!" roared all the Removites.

"'Ere!" protested the stranger. "There's no need to—"

"Cheese it, Brewster!" said Nipper, with a pitying note in his voice. "My hat! You surely didn't think that you had fooled us, did you?"

"Brewster!" repeated the man. "'Ere, what's the game, young gent? I've come 'ere about the telephones—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper had reached forward, and he had grabbed one of the side-whiskers. It came off in his hands, and the next moment Hal Brewster himself was revealed. He looked at the juniors in a startled way at first, and then his expression became sheepish.

"Dished and diddled!" he said complainingly. "My goodness! You chaps are too smart for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try again, Brewster—and try something a little better," said Nipper genially. "My poor, deluded ass! We knew in a flash that you were a fake."

"Well, we're all doing our best," grumbled Hal.

"So you thought you could calmly walk into the Common-room, eh?" said Nipper. "And, once there, you thought you could grab your precious cap, did you? We're not quite so green, Hal, my beauty!"

"What are we going to do with him?" asked Pitt.

"Duck him in the fountain-pool and chuck him out!" said Fullwood promptly.

"Hi!" howled Brewster. "You—you—Leggo! What the—"

His protests were useless; he was dragged to the fountain-pool, ducked in, and then rushed off the premises. He was deposited in the middle of the road outside the gates, and a yelling crowd of Removites watched him bolting down the lane.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the way to deal with 'em!" said Nipper, grinning. "We'll show these River House fatheads that we're not blind!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fullwood. "It doesn't matter what disguises they come in, we'll spot them."

"Here, I say!" gasped Church suddenly. "Look! Look at that chap coming round the gym!"

They all turned and stared across the Triangle. A little wizened man had just appeared in sight from round an angle of the East House. He was looking up at the gymnasium with peering interest. He was a small, untidy man with a wizened face and a hat that was too large for him. He wore large spectacles which were slightly blue-tinted.

"This is getting too thick!" said Nipper indignantly. "There are swarms of the beggars! Come on!"

"Hear, hear!"

"No questions—no inquiries!" shouted Pitt. "Let's duck him straight away!"

"Good egg!"

There was a mad rush, and the man in the blue spectacles gave a howl of astonishment and alarm as the juniors swarmed round him and swept him off his feet.

"Good heavens!" he panted. "What the— Release me! How—how dare you? You unmitigated young rascals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck him in the fountain-pool!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop!" shrieked the unhappy victim. "Desist! I shall complain to your headmaster— Good heavens! This—this is outrageous! I command you to—"

"Cheese it, you River House fathead!"

"You can't fool us like this!"

With a rush the unhappy man was whirled across to the fountain-pool, he was raised up in the air, and he was allowed to drop.

Splash!

He descended into the water with much noise, and he wallowed about helplessly.

Fullwood leaned forward and grabbed a handful of the stranger's long, untidy hair.

"Off with this wig!" he said cheerfully.

But the stranger gave a fiendish yell of agony, and Fullwood found that the "wig" refused to come. A startled, anxious expression came over Ralph Leslie's face.

"It's stuck!" he gasped.

"You—you young demons!" screamed the victim. "Where is Mr. Pycraft? Where is my friend, Mr. Pycraft! Find him at once! I come to this school, innocently enough, seeking my friend—"

"Great corks!" gurgled Gresham. "We've made a bloomer, you chaps!"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"He's not disguised at all—he's a real man!" babbled Gresham.

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"Cave!"

They bolted in all directions, and, as it happened, they were only just in time. For as they vanished into various doorways and arches the stranger pulled himself out of the fountain-pool, and Mr. Horace Pycraft, the unpopular master of the Fourth, came into view.

"Help—help!" moaned the stranger, in a feeble voice.

"My dear Weston!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "Upon my soul! What have you been doing?"

He ran up, and helped the luckless Mr. Weston towards the East House.

"Outrageous—abominable!" came Mr. Pycraft's indignant voice. "Yes, to be sure! I shall make inquiries, my dear Weston! I will see into this, and find out who is responsible! An outrage—an appalling outrage!"

They vanished, and the juniors mopped their heated brows.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "That was a narrow shave, you chaps! We shall have to go easy after this!"

"It's becoming a nightmare!" said Reggie Pitt breathlessly.

CHAPTER 14.

Handforth Enjoys Himself!



E

DWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

In the first place, he was gratified and overjoyed by the fact that "Miss Scott" clung to his arm closely and affectionately. There was no getting away from it—her delicate little hand was gripping his arm quite strongly. And Handforth wasn't used to this kind of thing.

True, he was very friendly with Irene Manners, of the Moor View School. But Irene was a brisk, cheery, chummy sort of

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girl. There was no nonsense about her. Handforth could not remember the time when she had linked her arm in his—at least, not in this way.

Miss Scott was so different—so bewilderingly fascinating.

There was something clinging about her, something so excessively feminine. Which was all the more surprising, considering that "she" was masculine! But Cyril Graham was an extraordinarily clever young actor.

And in Handforth he had chosen the easiest of all victims!

Needless to say, Graham had received precise instructions from Hal Brewster before starting out—and his selection of Handforth was deliberate. He had never seen Handforth before, but there could be no mistaking this burly, bluff Removite.

Graham was going to work cautiously—and with deliberate cunning. He had already passed the test, and was not suspected. He could wander about with Handforth, and nobody would ask any awkward questions.

Graham knew that Brewster himself had already been—attired in the garb of the telephone man—and this was really the signal for Graham's own activity.

He was filled with inward amusement. These St. Frank's fellows thought they were very clever—but little did they realise that they had, themselves, been fooled from the start!

Little did they guess that Hal Brewster had intended them to see through all those imperfect disguises! It was part of the plot. The one disguise that was to be kept a real secret until the last moment was Graham's—and Graham was doing his job superbly.

But he told himself that there was no immediate hurry. The last of the other raiders had been, and now the Saints would be on the alert, out in the Triangle, waiting for other victims. There was no reason why the new River House fellow shouldn't have a little fun at Handforth's expense.

The innocent Handy had not the faintest suspicion!

At that moment, he was standing in the West Square, pointing out the beauties of the architecture to his fair companion. And "she," for her part, listened with intent interest to all he had to say.

"Of course, it's an old place," remarked Handforth proudly. "So jolly old that lots of people don't know when it was first built. Just have a look at the stones, Miss Scott!"

"Yes!" murmured the girl, giving his arm another press. "How wonderful, aren't they? So rugged—so eloquent of strength. Do you know, they remind me of you!"

Handforth felt himself going limp.

"I—I beg pardon?" he stammered.

"Rugged, and eloquent of strength!" murmured "Miss Scott." "Isn't it so apt? Oh, I do love ruggedness and strength!"

"Yes, rather!" mumbled Handforth breathlessly.

"Won't you let me call you Ted?" went on this extraordinary "girl." "It's a wonderful name—Ted!"

"I—I—I——"

"If you do, I'll let you call me Phyllis!" murmured Graham coyly. "Do you like my name—Phyllis?"

"It's—it's topping!" said Handforth.

He happened to glance round, and he found those blue eyes turned full upon him. They were full of softness—full of gentle admiration. He found himself gazing into their liquid depths, and a kind of lump came into his throat.

"I—I—— Oh, my hat!" he panted. "Let's—let's go and have a look at the other buildings!"

Without a doubt, Handforth was now thoroughly and positively in the grip of his companion. He was like putty in "her" hands.

"Must we look at some more buildings?" she whispered, in that slightly-hooky, alluring voice of hers. "Oh, please, Ted! Can't we go indoors?"

"Yes, if—if you want to!" stammered Handforth.

"I want to see your study!" said the girl tenderly. "The room where you work—the room where you spend so much of your time. I want to sit in the chair that you sit in!"

"Oh, corks!"

"I like you, Ted!" she went on dreamily. "You're so different from the other boys! So big—so powerful—so strong!"

At the moment, Handforth was feeling about as strong as a half-set table jelly.

"Let's—let's go indoors, then!" he said, with a kind of gulp.

Although he was so dizzy, he was nevertheless filled with ecstasy. This girl was undoubtedly a stunner. She was a peach, and Handforth was overjoyed because she had "fallen" for him. The other juniors were nothing to her; he was everything. And it is to be feared that Handy forgot all about Irene during these wonderful minutes.

They went indoors, and in the rear lobby they passed Willy Handforth, and one or two other fags. They all stared at the pair with frank, undisguised astonishment. The Third-Formers were not famed for their discreet manners.

"My only hat!" said Chubby Heath. "Look at your major, Willy!"

"I'm looking!" said Willy sternly.

"Spooning with this girl!" said Juicy Lemon, in a voice that could have been heard on the other side of the Square.

Handforth went as red as a beetroot.

"Clear off, you young rotters!" he hissed. "This—this is Miss Scott——"

"Don't take any notice of them, Ted," said the girl smilingly. "We don't care, do we? Oh, I'm so fond of you—and it doesn't matter who knows it!"

She pressed his arm more tightly than ever, and drew closer. The fags looked on in

blank amazement as the pair passed on down the passage.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Willy, scratching his head.

"She's a bit of a nut, isn't she?" asked Chubby. "Great pip! Did you hear what she said to your major?"

"I did!" nodded Willy. "There's something fishy about it, my lads!"

"Rats!" said Chubby. "Your major is smitten, that's all." In about five minutes, she'll be angling for ice-creams and chocolates! I know what girls are!" he added sagely.

In the meantime, Handforth and his charming companion had reached Study D, and Handforth was terribly self-conscious because the little room was rather untidy. He started making excuses as he closed the door, but the girl laughed at him.

"Why, it's lovely!" she said, clasping her hands, and looking round with wide-open, admiring eyes. "It's gorgeous, Ted! So this is your study? Splendid!"

She went across and sat in the arm-chair, and undoubtedly she made an entrancing picture. A vision of silky fluffiness, pretty and dainty; a stray curl or two escaping from under her charming hat; a glimpse of

slim, silk-clad legs. It was scarcely any wonder that Handforth felt extremely dizzy.

"Won't you come over?" suggested the girl softly. "Please, Ted!"

"C-c-come over?" stammered Handforth.

"Yes!" she murmured. "Come and sit on the arm of the chair, beside me."

Handforth went over, and sat on the arm of the chair. He could feel her presence near him; he could catch a faint odour of the alluring scent that arose from her handkerchief as she held it in her hand.

Then, just at that moment, the door burst open, and Church and McClure strode in!



CHAPTER 15.

Getting Down to Work!

"My hat!" ejaculated Church blankly.

"Great Scott!" said McClure.

Handforth leapt off the arm of the chair as though it had become white-hot.

"I—I—I—" he began, in a gurgle.

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Then there was a complete silence. Leisurely, easily, the girl rose from the chair, and she gave Church and McClure one of her most bewildering smiles.

"Ted was just showing me his study," she explained roguishly.

"Tut-Ted?" babbled Church. "Oh, I see! You—you mean Handy?"

Handforth partially recovered himself.

"Clear off!" he said thickly. "You're not wanted here, you fatheads!"

"So it seemed—when we came in!" remarked McClure pointedly.

"You—you—I'm showing Miss Scott round the school!" blustered Handforth. "I think we'd better be getting along, Miss Scott!" he added hastily. "There's—there's a lot more to show you yet!"

He fairly grabbed the "girl," and hustled her out of the study. Church and McClure glanced at one another, and their expressions were startled.

"Well, I'm blessed!", breathed Church. "He's smitten again!"

"Yes; but she's the cause of it!" said Mac sternly. "My only hat! She's vamp-ing him, as they call it!"

"All girls are the same!" said Church bitterly. "She's just getting round him, that's all! Before the day's out, he'll be buying her presents and things. She'll skin him clean!"

"I believe you!" said McClure. "But all girls aren't the same, though. Irene wouldn't do anything like this—nor would Winnie or Doris, or any of the others. Scott's sister seems to be pretty rapid!"

Scott's alleged sister was coming to the conclusion that the time was ripe to act; that he would have to put an end to this little comedy.

For one thing, Brewster & Co. were waiting about outside; they had arranged it. They would be quite close, and, at an arranged signal, they would swarm into the Triangle in great force—nearly the whole of the River House Fourth Form.

The whole success of the thing would depend upon Graham. Then, after that pre-arranged signal, everything would be dependent upon speed. According to the way things were going, there was not much doubt that the afternoon's plottings would end in complete success.

The next item on the programme was to locate the Common-room. Graham, of course, had never been to St. Frank's before, but he did not regard this as a serious handicap. With Handforth as an innocent accomplice, things were comparatively easy.

"You mustn't take any notice of those rude boys," said the "girl," as she clung more closely than ever to Handforth's arm. "It was a pity they interrupted us like that."

"I'll give them a couple of black eyes later on!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Oh, Ted!" whispered his companion, shocked.

"I—I mean— My hat!" gasped Handforth. "Well, you see, they butted in, and —"

"Oh, please forgive them," whispered the charmer. "You've shown me where you work. Can't you show me the other places of interest? Isn't there a big room where you sometimes congregate together, to discuss football and boxing?"

"You mean the Common-room?"

"Yes," she murmured. "Is it anywhere near?"

"Only at the end of the corridor," replied Handforth. "We'll go along there, if you'd like to see it."

"I should love to," said the "maiden," pressing his arm with affectionate force. "Oh, it's so good of you, Ted, to take all this trouble over me!"

"It's no trouble at all!" said Handforth promptly. "I—I love it! I hope you'll come to St. Frank's often!"

"Oh, I expect you'll see quite a lot of me," promised the deceiver, with perfect truth. "I'm living in the district now, you know."

Handforth started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "Really!"

"Yes, really!" she murmured. "And so I expect I shall be at St. Frank's quite frequently."

"Good egg! Don't forget to look me up, will you?" asked the leader of Study D. "Perhaps you'll come to tea sometimes?"

"I should love it—if I can have tea with you, alone!" said the "girl" softly. "I don't want anybody else with us, Ted. Just you and I! Won't it be lovely?"

Handforth again found himself swallowing something that wasn't really there.

"This—this is the Common-room!" he said thickly. "This door leads—"

"Don't let's go in for a moment, please!" said his companion. "There might be somebody there—and I want you alone!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What a pity it is we're so far from the shops!" added the "girl" regretfully. "I thought perhaps an ice-cream—"

"Ice-cream!" echoed Handforth, with a start. "Why, yes! Mrs. Hake, in the school tuck-shop, has got ice-cream!"

"Oh, has she?" cried the fair one. "How splendid! Would you mind very much—"

"I'll buzz off like a shot!" said Handforth eagerly. "I'll get you a couple of wafers, Miss Scott."

"Please, Ted!" she said, looking straight into his bewildered eyes.

"I—I mean—Phyllis!" he stammered.

Then he escaped, running down the corridor in a whirl of confusion. Never in his life had any girl treated him like this! Irene had always been so matter-of-fact—so exactly similar to a boy chum. But Phyllis was— Handforth couldn't quite get the hang of it yet. He was in the throes of bewilderment.

As he vanished round the corner, his late companion became brisk.

Cyril Graham knew that this was the moment to act. Handforth would probably be three or four minutes before he returned, and during that time much could be done.

Graham turned the handle of the Common-room door, opened it, and walked in. He was not altogether surprised to see a couple of juniors in that big apartment. They were De Valerie and Somerton, of Study G. Very obviously they were on guard.

During that first glance Graham spotted Hal Brewster's yellow cap, and he was just a little startled. For there was the cap, behind its protection of plate-glass, in that little metal case. Still, a trifle of this sort was not going to deter him. The metal case was not particularly big, and he could easily grab the whole contraption. There would be no time to open the thing, for everything, now, would depend upon rapidity of action.

De Valerie and Somerton jumped to their feet as "she" came in.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" murmured the "girl," hesitating.

"That's all right!" said De Valerie gallantly. "We didn't expect—"

"I'm just looking round, you know," said Graham, giving the pair a dazzling smile. "So this is the Common-room? Isn't it lovely? How lucky you boys are to live in such a wonderful school!"

"Yes, it's pretty good!" said Somerton.

"You don't mind if I sit down, do you?" went on the "maiden." "I—I'm not feeling quite well. Just a little faintness, I believe. If there is any water—"

She broke off, sinking into one of the chairs. De Valerie and Somerton ran towards her, full of alarm and concern.

"Oh, I say!" burst out Val. "Is—is anything really the matter?"

"Just a little water—please!" murmured the visitor softly.

"I'll get it!" said De Valerie promptly.

"No! I will!" shouted Somerton.

They both rushed off, as Graham had fully anticipated.

He had been prepared, however, to ask the second junior to "find" a handkerchief—a mythical handkerchief—which had been dropped somewhere outside.

"However, there was no necessity for that.

The instant the two juniors had gone, Graham leapt to the door and closed it. Then he rushed across the Common-room, grabbed the metal box containing the precious cap—and a wild howl of surprise and anguish escaped those rosy lips!



CHAPTER 16.

Bowled Out!



YLIL GRAHAM received the shock of his life—in a double sense.

A second earlier, he had told himself that the game was won.

Nipper & Co. were beaten—and the River House fellows would be able to crow unceasingly over their great triumph.

For what could be easier than to unhook this little metal box, dive through the window, give the signal, and rush out? None of the Saints would be in time to stop the thing.

But then, all in a flash, the whole programme crashed to the ground.

For, as Graham seized the metal box, he found his whole frame tingling with agony. In spite of himself, he gave a shriek of pain.

The metal box was electrified!

It is to be feared that this dainty, charming miss cut a very undignified, ungraceful figure at that moment! Handforth, coming back with the ice-creams, and a number of other fellows, attracted by the shouts, paused in consternation as they swept into the Common-room.

They beheld the alleged young lady dancing madly and spasmodically against the other wall, and giving vent to wild howls at the same time. Worst of all, "her" hat had been jerked off during the last few moments, and the wig, too, was askew. It was only a small wig—giving the appearance of shingled hair.

"Great guns!" gurgled Handforth.

"Look!" yelled Gresham. "It's a wig! I don't believe she's a girl at all!"

"WHAT!" bellowed Handforth.

In his excitement, he tossed his ice-creams into the air. They weren't wafers, but big, well-filled cones. One of them struck Fullwood in the middle of the face, and the other splashed down the front of Archie Glen-thorne's noble waistcoat.

"Good gad!" shrieked Archie. "Odds horrors and foulness! You frightful blighter! I mean to say—"

"Quick!" yelled Nipper, running in. "It's a spoof, you chaps! We've been diddled—and if that metal case hadn't been electrified we should have been done!"

Nobody could quite understand the situation at the moment. But there could be no doubt that this "girl" was a deceiver. For the wig had now completely come off, revealing a sleek, well-brushed head of hair.

"My hat!" said Reggie Pitt breathlessly. "That was a good stunt of yours, Nipper, to connect the electric wires to that box. You made it into a 'shocking' battery, and this raider can't let go now."

"She's not a raider!" roared Handforth. "You silly fatheads! I expect she examined the box by accident. Why can't you cut off the current?"

Handforth was very excited. He wouldn't believe that "Phyllis" was false. It was too incredible—too outrageous.

Nipper pulled a key out of his pocket and ran swiftly across to the now gasping Graham. He inserted the key in the lock of the metal case—getting none of the current, since he did not touch the electrified metal with both hands. The door came open, and Nipper clicked a switch.



Brewster, disguised as Dr. Stafford, strode across to the box fixed to the wall, producing a small hammer as he did so. Crash! With one blow the River House raider smashed the glass to smithereens!

"Oh, thank goodness!" breathed "Phyllis," as she sagged away.

Handforth caught her in his arms and held her tenderly.

"Water, you chaps!" he said, looking round. "She's nearly fainting!"

Even now quite a number of the juniors still believed that they were in the presence of a girl. Perhaps she had had an Eton crop and did not like the style, and so was wearing a wig. Undoubtedly Graham still looked very feminine.

But he gave himself away quite unconsciously. He took it for granted that he was bowled out. He knew that his wig was off, and he had heard practically nothing of what had been taking place.

"Well, I'm dished!" he said, when he had partially recovered. "You—you rotters! Electrifying that box like that! Brewster didn't tell me——"

"Brewster!" shouted Handforth. "But—but——"

"Cheese it!" said Graham. "I'm not a girl! I'm a River House chap!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then—then——" began Handforth, turning pale, and then violently red. "Then—then you were spoofing—— Oh, crumbs! You rotter! You—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper grinned with appreciation.

"I don't know who the dickens you are, but you're as smart as they make 'em!" he said frankly. "By Jove! You fooled the lot of us! I've never seen a more clever impersonation. Congrats, old man!"

"Thanks!" said Graham feebly. "I'm a new chap at the River House, you know. Graham's my name—Cyril Graham, of the Fourth."

"Jolly pleased to meet you!" chorused the juniors, crowding round.

"It was Brewster's idea," went on Graham. "But how were we to know——"

"Exactly!" murmured Nipper. "But you can go back and tell Brewster that we weren't born yesterday. Of course, now I can understand the reason for those other impersonations. They were meant to be exposed. What a deep bounder Brewster is!"

"And those River House chaps nearly got that cap back!" said Reggie Pitt, with a whistle. "In a way, I'm a bit sorry for them. They jolly well deserved to win! Graham, you're a marvel!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Wait until you hear how he spoofed old Handy!" grinned Church. "We went into Study D——"

"Dry up!" hooted Handforth wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Ted!" said Graham in a soft, alluring voice. "Won't you come and sit with me, Ted? I like you so much! You are so rugged—so strong——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme get at him!" howled Handforth. "Great pip! He was pulling my leg all the time! And I thought——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Compliments were showered upon Cyril Graham unceasingly. All the Removites were full of enthusiasm for his extraordinarily clever performance. He was allowed to don his wig and hat again, and then he was escorted off the premises.

The juniors solemnly crowded round the "girl," and displayed the utmost gallantry in taking her to the main gates. Nobody suspected that anything was wrong. But Brewster & Co., who had been waiting and watching, knew that something must have gone wrong. And they were sad at heart.

Graham joined them two or three minutes later as he was walking down the lane—and after the grinning Removites had waved their hands to him. Quite a number, in fact, had kissed their hands very affectionately—much to the amazement of the scandalised Mr. Pycraft, who happened to witness the incident from his window.

"Well, it failed, you chaps!" said Graham reluctantly, after he had explained. "I did my best, and I spoofed them up to the eyes. But how the dickens was I to know that they'd keep your rotten cap in an electrified box?"

"My goodness!" said Brewster, with a deep sigh. "This has knocked me all of a heap! I thought we should do the trick as easily as winking. But it seems to me that these St. Frank's chaps are brainier than we gave them credit for being."

"And your skipper's cap is still in their possession!" said Glynn grimly. "I'll bet they're crowing no end!"

This was a safe assumption!



CHAPTER 17.

The Traitor!

TEDDY LONG, of the Remove, took a deep, deep breath.

He was in the Ancient House Common-room—alone. It was this fact which had given him the brilliant idea. Alone in the Common-room—alone with Hal Brewster's orange-coloured cap! There it was, just inside the metal case, with the door unlocked and the electricity switched off! It was indeed a dramatic situation.

In the rush to get "Miss Scott" off the premises nobody had thought of relocking the precious case. Certainly nobody had taken any notice of Teddy Long. He was a nonentity, anyhow.

"Great guns!" whispered Teddy Long.

He was a brainless sort of junior, but what he lacked in cleverness he made up for in cunning. He was for ever cadging, sneak-

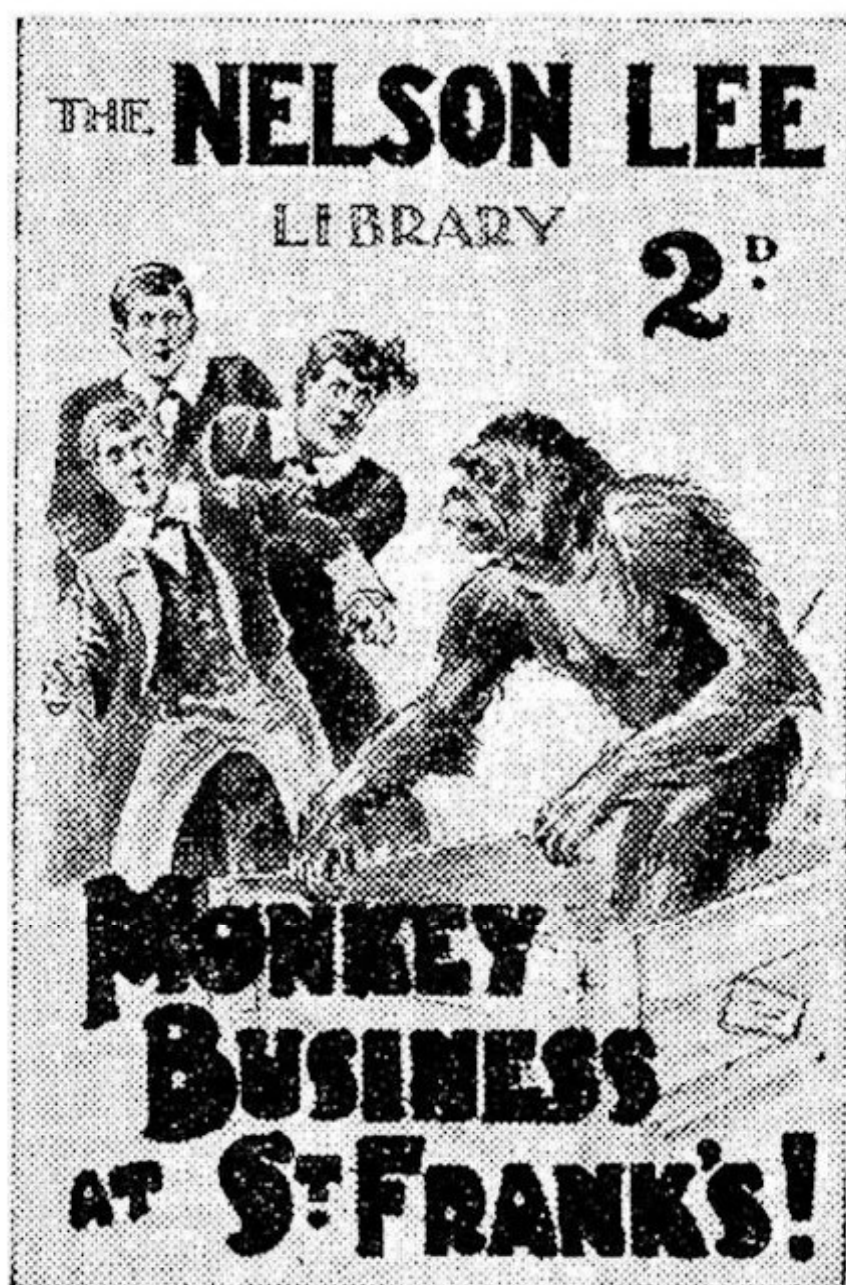
ing, and doing all those things that the majority of the fellows detested. And although it was so early in the term, he was already broke to the wide.

Here was a chance of obtaining wealth! Riches untold!

He knew how much the River House fellows wanted to get that cap back. According to Teddy Long's way of thinking, they would surely be willing to pay heavily for the return of it. They couldn't get it themselves, but supposing somebody went to them and offered it?

There was no time to be lost—no time for

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



deep thinking. Teddy Long made up his mind suddenly. He was startled by his own audacity, but Fate had played into his hands, and he could not resist the temptation.

Cautiously he went to the metal box which hung upon the wall. He touched it gingerly and found that he received no shock. Then with a hasty glance over his shoulder he assured himself that he was not observed by anybody. He still had the Common-room to himself. Outside he could hear the shouts of the juniors.

With a sudden movement he opened the glass-fronted door, tore the cap out, and closed the door again. He stuffed the cap into his pocket and raced for the door. But he need not have worried. There was still nobody in sight.

Breathless with triumph, Teddy Long scooted for Study B, and he bolted in. His study mate, Hubbard, wasn't there. With trembling fingers he took the cap out of his pocket, gazed at it gloatingly, and then hid it away beneath a pile of books and papers in a corner of the cupboard.

"Good egg!" he whispered exultantly. "That's done the trick! But I shall have to be pretty careful!"

He left the study, strolled out through the lobby, and joined a crowd of juniors who were just coming from the gates. Nobody noticed him; nobody gave him a glance. If

all have our own little specialities one way or another."

"Yes, it was a masterpiece," nodded Nipper. "He was so jolly realistic, too! I don't think I've ever seen a prettier girl—or daintier, either. He was just marvellous!"

"When I get hold of Graham I'm going to punch his nose!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The best thing you can do, Handy, is to forget all about it," said Church. "After all, Graham was only acting his part according to Brewster's instructions. Brewster is the chap you ought to go for."

"But Graham picked on me, didn't he?" roared Handforth.

"Naturally, dear old fellow," nodded Travers.

"Why naturally?"

"I'll leave you to guess!" smiled Travers blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was about to grab Travers by the shoulder when there was a sudden interruption. Tregellis-West and Watson came running helter-skelter out of the Ancient House. They were looking excited and alarmed.

"Hi, Nipper!" bellowed Tommy Watson. "Have you got Brewster's cap?"

"Got it?" sang out Nipper. "Of course not! It's in that box——"

"It isn't!" gasped Watson, running up. "It's gone!"

"Gone!" roared everybody.

"Yes—it's vanished!" said Watson. "Montie and I went into the Common-room just now. We saw that the door was half open, and when we looked——"

Nobody waited to hear any more. There was a mad rush for the Ancient House. Half the Remove sped along the corridor and plunged into the Common-room. They discovered that the story was only too true. The priceless trophy had disappeared!

Nipper was unstinted in his abuse of himself.

"Idiot! Ass! Fathead! Dolt!" he exclaimed.

"Look here, you ass——"

"I'm talking to myself!" snapped Nipper. "I must have been dotty! Why on earth didn't I lock that door?"

"You were going to, old man, but one of the chaps spoke to you and distracted your attention," said Pitt. "I noticed that particularly, and didn't think it mattered. Then, in the excitement, we escorted Graham off the premises, and the cap was forgotten."

"But how did the rotters get it?" asked Gresham blankly. "None of the River House fellows have been in here!"

"They must have been—or the cap wouldn't be gone," said Nipper. "Unless—unless——"

"Unless what?" demanded Handforth.

"Unless there's a traitor in the camp!" said Nipper, frowning. "Oh, but hang it, none of our fellows would have taken the cap!"

"Impossible!" agreed Reggie. "It wouldn't be of any value, anyhow. The only

"MONKEY BUSINESS • AT ST. FRANK'S!"

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When Nipper & Co., of the St. Frank's Remove, and Hal Brewster, of the Fourth Form at the River House School, learn that a gorilla has escaped from a neighbouring circus, they little realise that the animal is to play a big part in the "war" now being waged between the two schools.

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any of those juniors had been asked they would probably have declared that Teddy Long had been with the crowd all the time. Not a single suspicion was likely to fall on him.

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper genially. "It was a near shave, you chaps, but they didn't succeed."

"We're going to have some trouble with that new chap, Graham," said Vivian Travers languidly. "Mark my word, dear old fellows! Graham is hot stuff!"

"He was jolly hot stuff as a girl, anyhow!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's no good blinking at facts," continued Travers. "There isn't a fellow in the whole of St. Frank's who could make up as a girl as cleverly as Graham. Well, well! We

thing that I can think is that one of the River House bounders must have hidden away somewhere."

"We thought we were jolly clever—but they've diddled us, after all!" said Nipper gloomily. "Well, my only hat! What a game!"

The Removites gnashed their teeth with helpless rage. Not that this did much good.

Teddy Long, who had had a short spasm of heart-failure during Nipper's reference to a traitor, was now feeling more comfortable. Later on in the afternoon his confidence was supreme. Nobody had suspected him, and now he was free to carry on with his little scheme.

He went to Study B, got the cap out of the cupboard, and stuffed it carefully into his pocket. He went out through the gates, and not a soul asked him where he was going. It was too easy for words!

The storm had gradually died down by now, and the Remove fellows were going about, threatening all sorts of things against the River House when their turn came. Teddy went down the lane, reached the stile, and took the footpath through Bellton Wood. He hurried his pace after he had gone through the wood, and in due course he came within sight of the River House School. It was a picturesque range of buildings, standing comparatively near to the delightful River Stowe.

Something warned Teddy Long that it might be unwise for him to carry that cap into the school grounds. So, as a precautionary measure, he dived into the hedge opposite to the main gates, and concealed the cap behind a clump of heavy ferns. Then, taking his courage in both hands, he boldly entered the quad. A number of shouts rang out, and Teddy hesitated. He found swarms of River House fellows bearing down upon him.

"Here, pax!" he gasped nervously.

"What are you doing here, you St. Frank's bounder?" asked Kingswood, with suspicion.

"Better look out, in case there are some others!" said Pringle.

"No, there aren't any others!" ejaculated Teddy hastily. "I—I'm all alone! And I've come here on a matter of business."

Hal Brewster pushed his way through the crowd.

"What's that?" he said. "You've come here on business, Long?"

"Yes, please, Brewster."

"Then, if I know anything about you, it'll be a tricky business!" said the leader of the Commoners, in an ominous voice.

Long's record; and Teddy's presence here, with this show of effrontery, was not exactly a good augury. Brewster knew, at once, that the sneak of the Remove had not been sent by Nipper. This was clearly a stunt of his own.

"Oh, really, Brewster!" protested Teddy. "I—I— You see, I thought you might want that cap of yours."

"I do want it," replied Brewster bluntly.

"Then you can have it—for a quid!" said Teddy, in an eager voice. "If you give me a quid, Brewster, I'll—"

"Hold on—hold on!" said the River House Junior leader. "Who the dickens do you suppose you are, to make me offers like this? How can you promise to give me that cap?"

"Because I've got it," said Teddy triumphantly.

"Got it!"

"Yes!"

"Grab him!" yelled Kingswood. "Come on, you chaps! Let's search him—"

"Hi, leggo!" howled Teddy. "I haven't got it on me, you asses! You don't think I'd be such a fool as that, do you?"

"Leave him alone!" said Brewster, more ominously than ever. "How did you get hold of this cap of mine, Long? Out with it!"

"I don't see that it matters to you!" protested Long. "As long as I've got it, and as long as I'm willing to give it back to you—"

"Give it—for a quid?"

"Well, I—I mean, I'll sell it—"

"Never mind!" said Brewster. "I understand that you've got this cap? Before I promise you anything, I want to know how you got hold of it."

"Yes, out with it, you young bounder!" chorused the others.

"I don't see why I should tell you!" argued Teddy stubbornly. "There's no reason why you should know that Nipper left the case unlocked, and—"

"That's enough!" said Brewster curtly. "So Nipper left the case unlocked—and you seized your opportunity and bagged the cap. Now you've come here to let me have it back—for a consideration. Is that it?"

"Yes, that's it," said Teddy eagerly.

Hal Brewster was disgusted. He was angry, too. He badly wanted that precious cap back—but not in this way. He meant to obtain it by fair means, and not by taking advantage of this junior's treachery.

It occurred to Brewster, however, that it might be a good idea to lead this young rascal on.

"You're too modest, Long!" he said smoothly. "Altogether too modest. It's quite evident that you have secured my cap at some risk, and, naturally, you want something in return."

"Yes, rather!" said Teddy. "I can tell you, it was a jolly dangerous thing! I only just managed— Ahem! Still, I'll take a quid—or two quid—"

"Why mention money in actual terms?" asked Brewster. "It's pretty dangerous,



CHAPTER 18.

The Bargain!

H

AL BREWSTER had every reason to look grim.

He was well acquainted with Teddy

my lad! I think we can understand one another quite well if we don't go into those exact details."

"Look here, Brewster—" began Ascott excitedly.

"Leave this to me, old man," interrupted Brewster. "Now then, Long, you've actually got this cap somewhere handy?"

"Yes."

"And you want me to give you—well, we'll say two?"

"Two what?"

"Now then!" said Brewster, with a wink. "Surely you can guess what I mean?"

"Oh, rather!" grinned Teddy Long. "My word! You're a cute one, Brewster! All right, then! If you give me two—or three—"

"Four, if you like!" said Brewster promptly. "I'm very anxious to get that cap back, and I don't mind how many I give you."

"All right—make it five!" said Teddy breathlessly.

"Done!"

"You—you howling ass!" said Glynn indignantly. "You're not going to give this young rotter five quid for your cap, are you?"

"That cap of mine is valuable!" said Brewster sternly. "It's not the exact cost of the cap itself—but what it stands for. All right, Long. That's a bargain! As soon as you give me my cap, I'll give you five!"

"That's a promise?" asked Teddy breathlessly.

"Yes, a promise."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright."

"Oh, good!" said Teddy Long. "Wait a minute, you chaps! I'll be back in no time—and I'll bring the cap with me!"

He ran off, and during his brief absence the other Commoners gathered round Brewster, indignant, excited, and angry. But, in a flash, they altered. A few words from Brewster caused them to stare, and then to grin. Finally, they were laughing uproariously.

"Cheese it, you fatheads!" warned Brewster. "He's coming back!"

Teddy Long appeared, triumphantly carrying the orange-coloured skipper's cap. Shouts of triumph rose from the Commoners, and Brewster seized the cap lovingly, and looked at it with fond eyes.

"So near—and yet so far!" he murmured. "Oh, well, it can't be helped."

"What are you jabbering about?" asked Graham, who had joined the crowd. "And I must say, Brewster, that I don't altogether like this thing. It smacks too much of treachery."

"All's fair in love and war!" grinned Teddy Long, with egregious complacency. "Now then, Brewster. You've got your cap. I want my five quid."

"Your five what?"

"Five quid."

"My dear chap, you must be dreaming!" said Brewster kindly. "I made no mention of five quid."

Teddy Long started.

"You did!" he said excitedly. "You distinctly promised me—"

"I promised you *one*!" said Brewster. "There was nothing said about what the five would be. I appeal to all you other fellows," he added, turning to the crowd. "Did I promise Long five quid?"

"No, you didn't!" answered the crowd, in a solid voice.

"Did I promise him five—without saying what the five would be?"

"Yes, you did!" thundered the crowd.

"Good enough, then!" said Brewster. "You've heard all these witnesses, Long? You've given me my cap, and now we'll proceed to give you your five."

"My five—what?" asked Teddy in bewilderment.

"Bumps!" snapped Brewster.

"Here, I say—"

"Your five bumps!" said Brewster indignantly. "You young rotter! You treacherous little blighter! Pinching that cap from Nipper, and bringing it here to sell! Grab him, you fellows! Bump him as he has never been bumped before."

"Hi! Leggo!" hooted Teddy wildly. "You—you rotters! You swindlers! You promised me five quid—"

Bump!

Teddy hit the ground with terrific violence. His howls were terrific.

Bump!

Again and again he was bumped, and the sorer he got, the wilder he howled. And even when the punishment was over he was not allowed to escape.

"Now, come along!" said Brewster gruffly. "We're going to take him back to 'St. Frank's.'"

"Good wheeze!"

"And we're going to take this cap back, too!" added Brewster sternly.

"Here, what rot!" protested Kingswood. "You've got your cap back now—"

"My dear chap!" protested Hal. "You don't think I'm going to keep it, do you?"

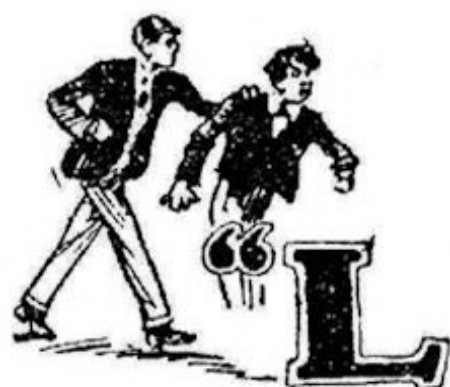
"But—but—"

"Not in *this* way!" said Brewster gruffly. "When I get this cap, I'm going to get it by fair means! I'm going to raid St. Frank's, and take the thing properly. Why, we should never be able to lift our heads up again if we took advantage of this young rotter's treachery!"

"Yes, by Jove, I suppose you're right!" admitted Kingswood, after thinking for a moment or two.

The others all agreed. Never could they be a party to this despicable act. Then and there, Teddy Long was hustled back towards St. Frank's. He was in a rare state of funk, too—for there could be little doubt that when he arrived at his destination he would be given a fresh dose of punishment.

The sneak of the Remove certainly deserved it!



CHAPTER 19.

A Desperate Idea!

LOOK out!"

"River House rotters!"

"Rally round, Remove!"

There were many shouts in the Triangle as the strong force of River House fellows marched in through the gateway. Hal Brewster was in front, leading Teddy Long by the scruff of his neck.

"Pax!" he said gruffly. "We haven't come here on a raid."

"Which is just as well for you!" said Nipper cheerfully, as he walked up. "You bounders! How the dickens did you manage to do the trick, after all?"

"We didn't do it," replied Brewster bluntly. "Here's the cap—you'd better take it!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Good gad!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

There were all sorts of exclamations as Hal Brewster calmly handed over the orange-coloured cap. Nipper took it in surprise. This, indeed, was an extraordinary development. Never had the Saints expected to see that cap again—at least, not in this way.

"But—but why?" asked Nipper. "You got hold of it fairly enough, didn't you?"

"I'm afraid we didn't," replied Brewster. "I imagine that you have been thinking that we raided it, eh?"

"Well, that's what we assumed."

"Then you're wrong," replied Brewster. "It was this young cad who pinched the cap—presumably while you were showing Graham off the premises. He brought it to us, and offered to sell it back to me for a quid."

"You—you young rotter!" said Handforth furiously, as he turned upon Teddy Long. "So that's how the thing happened! By George! I'm going to smash——"

"Oh, let him go!" said Brewster. "We've given him a terrific bumping, and he's sore in every limb. Naturally, we couldn't keep the cap, so we've brought it back."

"Brewster, you're a sportsman!" said Nipper frankly.

"I hope I am!" replied Brewster, with a grin.

The Saints were, indeed, enthusiastic. The River House fellows were cheered for their sportsmanship, for it must have been a sore temptation to them to keep the cap, once they had it.

"Well, that's that!" said Hal, at length. "And you'll stick to your promise to keep

the cap in the Common-room, in full sight?"

"Yes, we'll stick to it!" said Nipper.

"Then we're going to get it!" replied Brewster cheerily. "One of these days we'll do the trick, my sons!"

"And the next time we'll come with rubber gloves!" added Graham thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper & Co. were looking at the new boy curiously. Cyril Graham was attired in an ordinary suit, and the Removites, taking note of his slight build and girlish features, were able to appreciate how it was that he made such a realistic girl.

Amid further cheering, Brewster & Co. took their departure. Matters were now "as you were," notwithstanding all the excitement of the afternoon. Once again the cap reposed in the Common-room of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. And once again Brewster & Co. racked their brains for some likely scheme. But the problem was becoming more and more difficult.

After tea, in the dusk of the September evening, Brewster and Ascott and Glynn had occasion to go into Bellton, and while they were strolling down the village High Street, Brewster was looking thoughtful.

"Of course, it's very tricky now," he said. "Those St. Frank's chaps will be suspicious of everything. It'll be almost impossible to fool them again."

"Even Graham won't be able to do it," said Ascott gruffly. "Unless, of course, he gets dressed up as an old woman, or something. But old women don't go into Junior Common-rooms, do they? I say, what a frost it was! If it hadn't been for that electricity, the thing would have been done! Graham succeeded all right——"

"Look out, you chaps!" put in Glynn.

A big car came rolling by—an enclosed limousine. Brewster & Co. caught a glimpse of Dr. Stafford, the headmaster of St. Frank's, and they respectfully doffed their caps. The Head acknowledged the salute with a smile.

"He's not our Old Man, but there's no harm in showing due respect," said Brewster. "He's a decent old boy, too——"

He broke off, and a startled expression came into his eyes.

"By Jove!" he said, in a quivering voice. "I wonder if—— Great Scott! What a wheeze!"

"You haven't thought of anything, have you?" asked his chums breathlessly.

"Yes!" said Brewster. "Look here! Dr. Stafford is going out, and the chances are that it'll be a fairly long journey. To Bannington, anyway! That means that he won't get back for half an hour, or perhaps an hour. We shall have time——"

"But—but——"

"Let's dash back to school!" said Brewster. "This is going to be one chance in a thousand, you chaps—but it may come off!"

They arrived at the River House School breathless, and Ascott and Glynn were still

very puzzled. Brewster led the way to his own study, and he gathered in Cyril Graham on the way.

When they arrived, Brewster shut the door, and then produced a photograph of Dr. Malcolm Stafford.

"See that?" he said, placing it before Graham's gaze.

"Yes!" said the new boy. "What about it?"

"That's Dr. Stafford, the Head of St. Frank's."

"Not a bad-looking old boy," said Graham critically.

"Look here, Graham, you're a dabster at disguising and making up," said Brewster. "Do you think you could make me look anything like Dr. Stafford?"

An amused expression came into Graham's eyes.

"Oh—ho!" he murmured. "So that's the wheeze, is it? Yes, I think I could manage it, Brewster."

"Good man! Then get busy!"

"Ye gods!" gasped Ascott. "Then—then this is the wheeze? But, I say, Brewster! Why not let Graham himself make up as the Head?"

"He's too small," replied Brewster. "He couldn't even look the part. I'm a pretty big chap—broad and hefty. And I'm not such a duffer at acting, either," he added defensively.

Cyril Graham entered into the spirit of the

thing with great enthusiasm. During that next half-hour Hal Brewster's appearance was amazingly altered. Under the skilful hands of Graham the make-up was completed. Without any exaggeration, Brewster's resemblance to Dr. Stafford was now truly startling.

In a strong light he would never have survived a close scrutiny. But in the dusk, or in the shade, he would pass muster anywhere.

The next move in the game was rather tricky.

Hal Brewster and a crowd of other fellows reached St. Frank's by a round-about route. Cautiously they crept over the wall into Dr. Stafford's garden, and then Brewster took leave of his fellow conspirators. In the dusk he managed to creep round behind bushes and trees until at last he was hidden behind some laurels close beside the Head's front gates.

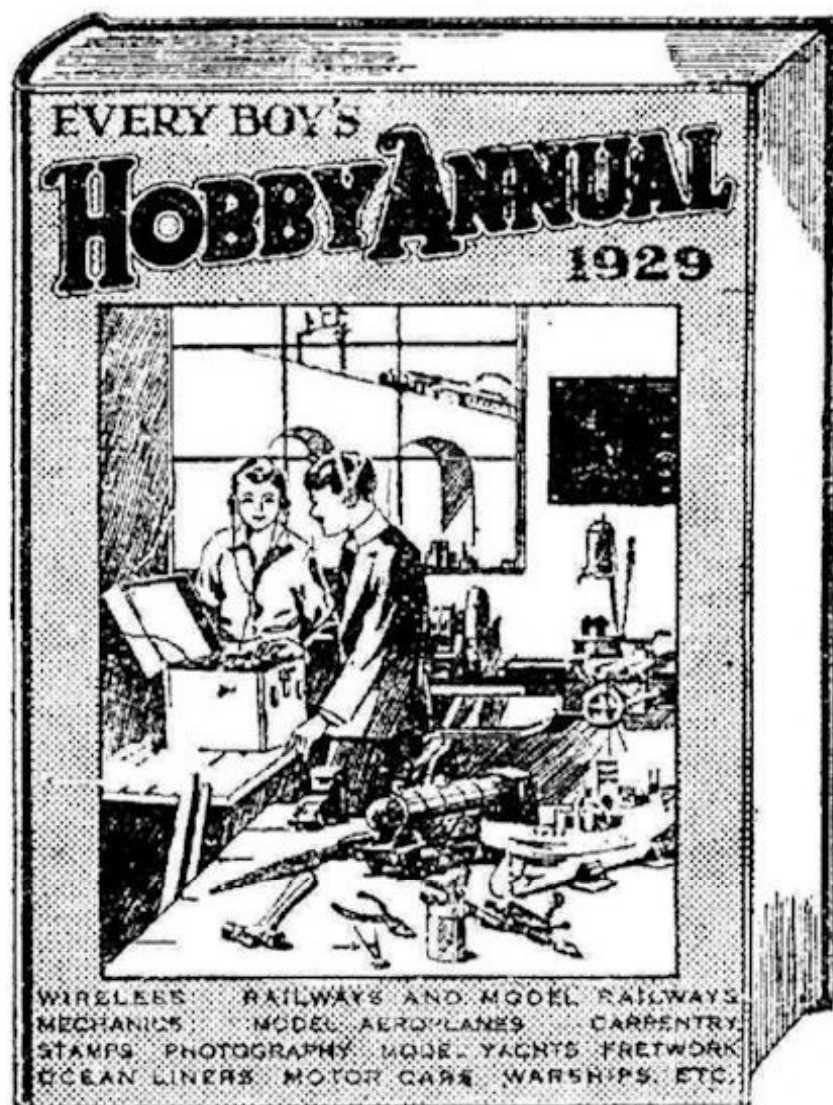
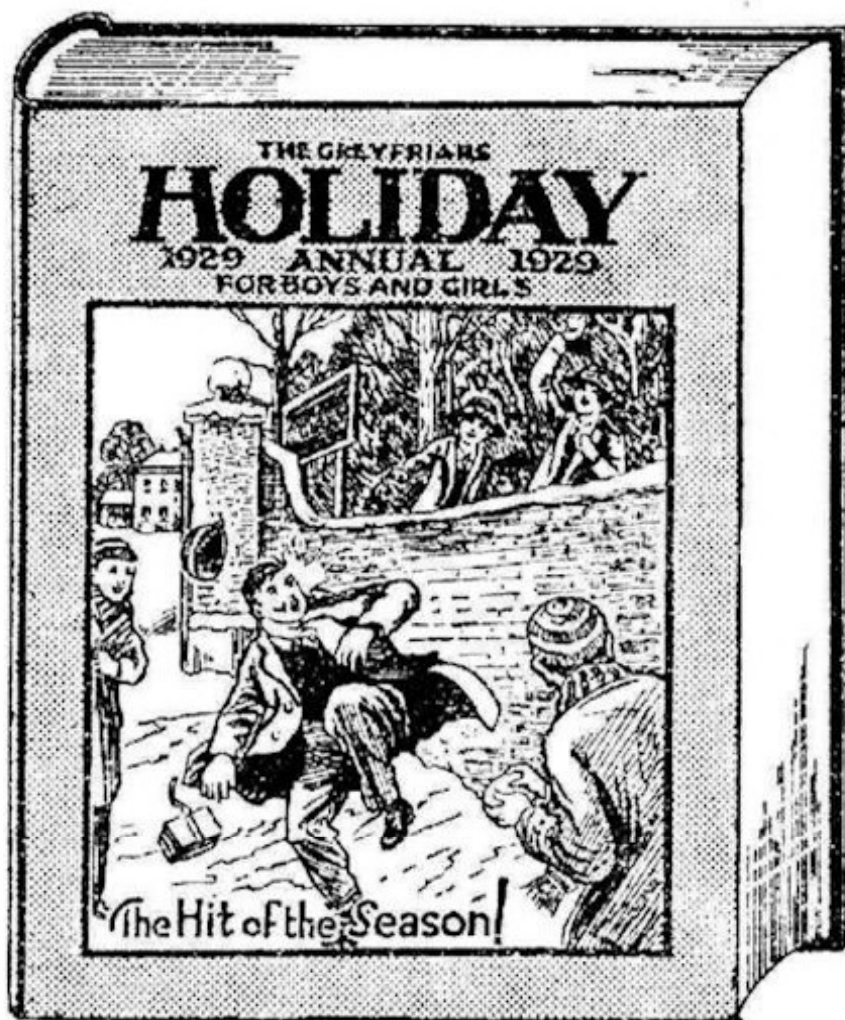
So far, so good!

The great question now was—had all this trouble been for nothing? Had the Head got back from his journey? If so, then the Commoners would be out of luck.

Brewster waited in a fever of impatience, and the dusk grew deeper and deeper. Brewster had another reason for his anxiety, too. It was getting close to call-over, and after call-over nothing could be done. There was an automatic armistice, according to the agreement.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Hal suddenly.

TWO OF THE BEST!



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He had caught a glimpse of a big car gliding through the Triangle. It came under Big Arch, and swept across Inner Court. Then it drew up opposite the Head's doorway, and Dr. Stafford himself stepped out.

Now was the crucial moment!



CHAPTER 20.

Honours Even!

SLAM! Dr. Stafford had gone indoors, and the chauffeur was just preparing to engage his gears. Now was the moment for action! Hal Brewster stepped hurriedly from behind the laurels, dodged round into the porch, and prayed fervently that his movements had not been observed.

"One moment!" he said loudly, trying to imitate the Head's voice.

The chauffeur, who had just set his car in motion, applied the brakes and caused the vehicle to come to a standstill. He glanced round, and it seemed to him that the Head was standing there in the porch.

This was rather strange, too, for the chauffeur could have sworn that he had seen the Head go indoors. However, he must have been mistaken. The man did not suspect anything.

Brewster stepped boldly forward, opened the door of the car, and hesitated for a moment.

"Drive me back to Bannington," he said briefly. "Stop at the post office."

"Yes, sir!" said the chauffeur, touching his cap.

Brewster got in, closed the door, and sank back into the rear seats. His heart was thudding violently. He knew what a risk he was running. He knew that he was guilty of colossal cheek to appropriate Dr. Stafford's car in this way. But he was trusting that his identity would never become known.

And now the remarkable astuteness of Brewster's plan was obvious.

If he had walked into the Ancient House in the ordinary way he would probably have been suspected. But when the fellows saw him drive up in the Head's own car, how could they guess the truth? It was really a master-stroke on Brewster's part.

Hal's heart gave another jump when he saw that there were crowds of fellows on the Ancient House steps. It was not quite time for calling-over, and they were having a last breath of fresh air before going indoors to answer to their names. Nothing could have panned out better.

"Just a moment!" said Brewster, leaning forward and addressing the chauffeur. "Stop outside the Ancient House, please."

"Yes, sir!"

The car stopped near the Ancient House steps, and Nipper & Co. raised their caps

respectfully as they caught sight of the Head's figure in the rear of the car.

"Wait!" said Brewster curtly to the chauffeur.

He mounted the steps, the juniors drawing aside. When he was near the top he paused.

"Where is Long, of the Remove?" he demanded.

"We don't know, sir!" said Handforth. "But I'll find him, if you like——"

"You will do nothing of the sort, Handforth!" snapped the faked Head. "I will find Long for myself! I have heard a certain story concerning him, and I intend to—— But never mind!"

"I think you'll find him in the Common-room, sir!" said Harry Gresham.

"Very well!" nodded the Head, brushing past with a swish of his gown.

He crossed the lobby, hot with anxiety. The electric lights were burning here, and the danger was greater. However, it was a bad habit to stare at the Head, and Brewster was relying upon the fellows to scuttle away before him, or to lower their gaze.

In any case, there was no time for fancy work.

He reached the Common-room, opened the door, and strode in. There were only a few juniors there, and they jumped to their feet at once. In the first glance Hal Brewster knew that he would have to "look lively." He would never be able to take this crowd on single-handed.

"What is this thing?" he said sternly, as he pointed to the electrified box.

He walked across to it, and before anybody could answer him he produced a small hammer with a short handle from underneath his gown.

Crash!

With one blow Brewster smashed the glass door to smithereens. Then he grabbed his cap with a yell of triumph, turned, and bolted from the Common-room. It had all been done in a flash.

"Great Scott!" yelled one of the juniors. "It's not the Head at all!"

"River House raiders!"

"My only hat!"

"After him!"

There was a wild rush, but the juniors only jammed themselves in the doorway. In the meantime, Brewster was tearing down the passage at full speed. He rushed through the lobby, swept through the crowd on the steps, and was out into the dusk before anybody could understand what was happening.

The Head's car was still standing there, but Brewster took no notice of it.

"After him!" came a yell from behind.

"Raiders—raiders!"

"He's got Brewster's cap!"

Instantly there was tremendous confusion. "It must have been Brewster himself!" panted Nipper. "Great Scott! What a wheeze! That bouncer has diddled us, after all!"

(Continued on page 44.)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR 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.



ROSINA CARINI

CLARENCE FELLOWE is "the junior who makes up poetry as he speaks"—Fred Miller (Lower Edmonton, N.9). I am afraid he has been rather in the background of late, but one of these days he will bob up again. It is rather a good idea of yours to give your weekly copy of the Old Paper to other boys to read. But do you give them to the same boys every week, or to different boys? This is an important point, because if you give them to different boys each week you stand a good chance of doing the Old Paper a good turn by getting a lot of new readers.

Yes, you are quite right about Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn and the Hon. Douglas Singleton—Reginald Bryant (Sydney). It was quite a mistake to say that these two juniors boarded in the Modern House. They occupy Study N in the West House. Perhaps this answer will be of some use to other readers, too. You'd better buck up with those six other members of your family, old man. Distribute a few copies of the Old Paper amongst them, and see what happens. Tell them that I particularly ask them to read at least *one* story. No, I am still hoping to see your photograph. And as soon as it comes along I'll send you one of mine in return—duly autographed.

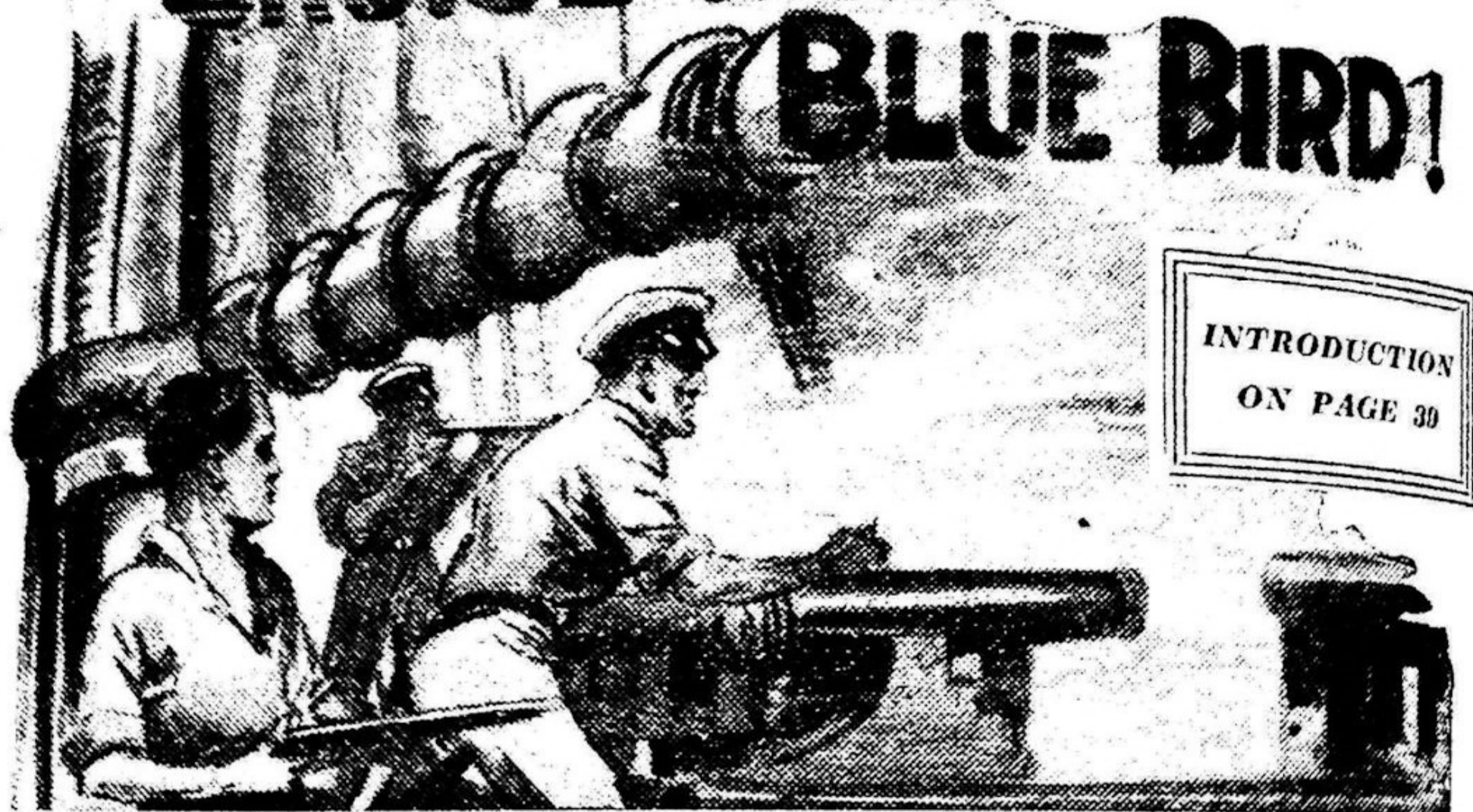
Just a word in regard to two letters that have recently come to hand. Both are anonymous, one being signed "Independent" (Walworth), and the other "A Band of N.L. Readers," with no address at all—though I think the latter comes from the neighbourhood of Pontefract. Now, on principle, I don't like anonymous letters. If you have something to say to me, criticising my stories, calling them drivel or bosh, I would much rather you wrote to me under your own names, giving your full addresses. In that case, I will comment upon them (if they contain matters of general interest) on this page. If you don't want your names to appear, they won't appear—but, in fairness to myself, I must have them. Anonymous letters, particularly when they are of an insulting nature, are beneath

So you prefer the longer series—J. Galli more (Hanwell, W.7). I wonder which are really the most popular—four stories to a series, six stories, or eight? It would help me quite a lot if all readers will mention this matter when they write to me. You see, I want to give you what you really like the most. With regard to Ezra Quirke, it won't be so very long before he makes his reappearance.

Thanks for your offer to send me some first-hand information about Australia—Peter M. Johnstone (Moonah, Tasmania). Yes; by all means. If you feel inclined to send me any such descriptive letters, I shall be quite delighted. For, even though I may not be able to use the information at once, I can always file it away, ready for future reference.

You needn't be afraid of me "hitting the trail" for New York—William J. Aldous (Norwich). This country is the best in the world, and I'd rather live in it than anywhere else. I don't quite agree with you that "it is but common sense and reason to look to the inevitable day" when you will be too old to enjoy reading the St. Frank's yarns. At any rate, I have had heaps of letters from readers of between sixty-five and eighty (yes, and even older than that!). So I don't think that "inevitable day" ever need materialise. And if you come to think of it, why shouldn't elderly people read school stories? They are mainly for young people, I know, but you might just as well say that only the youngsters enjoy eating toffee! Still, as you say, later on in your letter, that the inevitable day will never come in your case, I shall now regard you as an everlasting reader. Many thanks for your long and interesting letter. I am looking out for your next.

THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD!



The French convicts may have captured the Blue Bird with all its valuable cargo, and they may hold the upper hand, but Captain Manby and his intrepid crew are far from beaten. This fine instalment simply teems with excitement.

A Dangerous Mission!

CAPTAIN MANBY fired, hit a man who was in the act of aiming at Jack, and saw him fall. The boat moved, sagging over.

"Pull! Bale, a couple of you!"

Thud of bullets, yells, the voice of Benoist bidding his fellows shoot straight. Manby blazed away, hit another man. The boys fired, the boat moved off stern foremost. Time seemed to recover a little, seized a baler, and began heaving out the water. Slowly, painfully, the boat drew back and back, while Manby and Ned exchanged their hot rifles for others and kept up a rapid discharge.

It was only this that saved more casualties, for again the convict fire became wild. And then the boat was out of effective range, the shooting ceased. She was put about and, as fast as possible, was rowed around the point into safety and beached, half-full of water. The attack had been a costly failure. Two men were dead, two others were badly wounded.

body had flesh wounds to show. The boat would need a day's work to make her seaworthy again.

Captain Manby, with the help of Ah Mor, dressed the wounded, then sent him off with the boys to collect fruit. Two men caught fish from the dinghy, while another pair buried the dead. The most expert carpenters set to work upon the repairs of the boat. A sentinel was posted on the point to keep watch upon the convicts, who had resumed their water carrying. And so the day passed.

"An hour or two's more work in the morning will finish the boat," said Captain Manby, throwing himself down on a bed of dry grass before one of the fires that had been lighted. "If she had been ready I might have tried a night attack, but as it is—we can't. And the men are weary and dispirited, and a rest will do them good. We will lie low to-morrow and attack after dark."

"But what if these brutes try to sail?" asked Jack. "I don't know."

...they will sail until it has blown over. There will be a heavy sea running before me. I'm more afraid that they will try to run down the lagoon to surprise us. Ned and Ned will keep watch in the boat sleeping alternately. Don't go too far from the schooner, though. Better get off the schooner to keep watch here for the night. I'm going to keep watch here for the night. Ned laid a finger on his lips, fearing that Jack would say something of his intended plan. Jack merely nodded. Without more ado they got aboard the dinghy and slipped out into the lagoon. "You'd better not try it," said Jack, "you were well away." "I'm going to," replied Ned obstinately. "I've a bit of a snooze now. I'll wake you when I'm ready to go ashore. You can keep your eyes open!" Jack was tired out. With only a murmur of protestance, he dropped back into the dinghy and in a moment was sound asleep. It was well after one o'clock when Ned reached him. The dinghy had drifted close to the reef some five hundred yards away from the Blue Bird. A heavy sea was breaking on the outer side of the reef, but there were no signs of life from the schooner. Ned shook himself and yawned. "Don't do it, old chap. There may be something there. Wait a bit longer anyhow." "No. It will soon be light, and I might as well. Don't jaw, but keep your ears open. Since I've had a shot at Benoist, I'll take you, and you'll pick me up down by the lagoon. I'm going now. You must go on once. Good-bye!" Ned's hands gripped, then Ned stepped over a projecting snag of coral and disappeared into the darkness. Jack pulled away from the reef oppressed by fear for his cousin. He remembered what Mr. Sinclair had said: "Don't go on the reef at night. It's dangerous."

Caught by Crabs!

Ned was so fool. He knew that he was doing a risky thing when he stepped upon the reef in the darkness. In the night the sea disgorges many strange things in tropical waters, and for all he knew some huge octopus might be lurking in wait

upon the coral, or a poison ray might be in some pool into which he should chance to stumble.

But all the risk was worth while if only he could get a shot at the arch-hypocrite, Benoist, whose abominable treachery had so evilly repaid the kindness with which Captain Manby had treated the castaways. Besides, Ned had a score to settle on account of Jack and himself, and he felt thoroughly justified in trying to snipe the man who had ordered them to be killed in cold blood.

Slowly and cautiously, for he might easily have disabled himself by stepping into a crevice, Ned moved along the reef. The tide was going down, but the squall had raised a heavy sea. Breaking waves sent showers of spray over the reef and he was quickly drenched, but the night was warm and this didn't trouble him much. He was chiefly concerned with getting into position as quickly and silently as possible, for in less than an hour now the dawn would come.

Suddenly he halted, for he found himself on the edge of a pool. It was shallow, but in the middle of it lay a writhing, oddly phosphorescent thing with points of light scurrying to and fro around it to the sound of a queer clashing, accompanied by splashes faintly audible above the noise of the waves.

"What on earth is it?" muttered Ned, and instinctively brought his rifle round to the ready.

There was a stir by his feet, two tiny points of light appeared, then something laid hold of his leg just above the ankle with a vice-like grip. A crab! Ned smashed the butt of his rifle down upon the brute, heard its shell crunch, and drew back as more points of light appeared.

He understood now. Some dead thing of the sea had escaped the scavenging sharks and had been cast up by the sea for the benefit of those other scavengers, the crabs. They had been in the act of finishing their meal, tearing apart the last fragments of the phosphorescent meat. But the crabs were many. They had had a whet, not a satisfying gorge, and they were still hungry. They came hurrying across the pool, flung themselves upon their broken brother, tore him asunder.

In a moment Ned found himself ringed by

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner *Blue Bird*, which is bound for the *Malea* in the *Southern Pacific*. He is accompanied by his son *ALF MANBY*, and his nephew *EDDY SUTTON*, two adventure-loving boys. From a native Captain Manby has learned that in these atolls is an uncharted lagoon of which is full of pearl shells. The captain is successful in finding the atoll island, and to his surprise discovers that it is inhabited by a number of French castaways.

friendly, but later, when Captain Manby finds out what they really are shipwrecked convicts--their attitude changes and they capture the *Blue Bird* and its valuable cargo; for already the Britishers have found many pearls and much pearl shell. Fortunately Manby and the boys and the majority of the crew are not on board when the schooner is seized. They make an attempt to recapture it, but suffer heavy casualties, and also their boat begins to leak badly. They are forced to retreat. "Back water!" roars

them. It was a real danger, for they were hefty brutes; they came in swarms, driven by the eternal hunger of the sea, climbing over each other in their eagerness. If he should fall they would be all over him in an instant, and the nip of their cutting claws was like the snip of a blacksmith's shears.

Another laid hold of his ankle just above the canvas shoe. Smash! The butt settled it, but already another couple had taken hold. Smash-ash! Ned retreated, jabbing the butt before him like a blind man tapping a pavement, turned, knocked over the foremost of the pursuers, gained the top of the reef, found a jutting bit of coral and mounted it.

A few moments later they were round him, but now he was a couple of feet above the ledge. Pivoting about, he struck down at them as they climbed, and as the fallen dropped back they were instantly torn to shreds by their fellows, for the law of the crab folks is the law of the hungry wolf-pack, and he who is hurt must die for the good of the others.

Ned was fairly safe for the moment. But now the first faint light of dawn began to show in the upper air. Soon there would be light enough to disclose him to the look-outs on the schooner, and then he would be shot down, for he was now within easy range, and would be plainly visible.

Yet he dared not step down into the midst of that writhing horde, for his legs would be literally torn from under him before he could make more than a few steps. He could see the glistening shells, the waving claws of the foremost, the dimming light of their eyes like dull fireflies all about him.

Smash, smash! They still continued the attack with stupid persistence. Ned swung from side to side, dropping his butt on them mechanically, trying to think of a way of escape, but finding none.

And then, of a sudden, the attack ceased, the shelly legion was in retreat, scuttling for the water, diving into crevices of the coral, as eager to get away as they had been to come on.

What was it? Jack looked towards the lagoon. All was quiet there. He turned towards the outer side of the reef. Something seemed to be heaving itself out of the water in a sort of cove of the coral where an upflung ridge served as a breakwater upon which the waves spent their force.

It was a large something glinting with sea fire—and then a long arm snaked out from it. Ned knew what it must be—one of those super-octopods or decapods of which Mr. Sinclair had spoken. The crabs had come out of the sea to feed upon the dead fish. This huge brute had come forth to feed upon the crabs.

Ned saw its arms go flashing into the retreating horde, saw them gather the crabs into a crashing embrace, then waited to see no more. If the brute spied or scented him it would most likely try to nab the bigger meal. Crouching low, Ned stepped down, and as swiftly as he could made his way in the direction of the schooner.

Day was coming swiftly. With the light, the crabs and octopus would retire, but the fiercest beast of prey, would be on the alert. He must be well concealed within a few minutes, or a bullet would do what claws had failed to accomplish.

Breathing hard, Ned stumbled along till he saw the dark lines of the schooner's spars and rigging cutting against the paling sky, though as yet darkness brooded over the waters. A minute later he spied a dark clump of bushes and knew where he was, for it was behind them that Ah Moy had hidden the rifles little more than twenty-four hours before.

Stealthily Ned crawled round behind the clump, settled into the grass that grew thickly over the shallow soil, laid his rifle before him, and dropped his head on his arm. And as he did so weariness flooded over him like a tide, for he hadn't closed his eyes during the whole eventful day and night. His eyelids drooped, and in a moment he was deep in sleep!

Old Friends!

ABOVE him the sky lightened, the eastern horizon grew red, the ruddy glow spread, and it was day. Aboard the schooner a man in the foretop shook himself drowsily, yawned, and hailed the deck. Another man replied. The fellow aloft descended, rubbing his eyes as he gained the deck, and pointed towards the dinghy which lay a little way out from the reef, away down the lagoon near the opening.

The pair watched it for a few minutes, then turned to the galley. A thread of smoke began to ascend from the stovepipe, there was a stir in the after deck cabin, and Papa Benoist came out. Now would have been Ned's opportunity—but Ned was fast asleep!

A shot sounded from away beyond the point. Captain Manby had fired it to recall the dinghy. Jack heard and understood. He sculled away to the camp. Benoist grinned.

"That one has had his job for nothing," he remarked to another man who had joined him. "I had thought to sail to-day, but there is still a heavy sea running. It must be to-morrow."

"And if they make another attack? That one was costly. Four men dead, and another dying."

"We will give them more of the same medicine," replied Benoist, with a ghastly grin. "And as for those dead ones—why, there will be so much more left for the living. Ah, there comes the sentinel boat back again! Well, let them watch! We are safe so long as you keep your eyes open."

When Jack returned alone he expected a scolding, but to his surprise his father merely shook his head.

"Ned's notion was right enough. If we could only pot Benoist, the others would lack a head. But—well, let's hope for the best. Tino, Long Boy, take the dinghy out. Keep along the reef. Keep

your eye lifting for any movement from the ship."

"Yes, cap'n!" responded Timo, and went aloft.

Still Ned slept on. The sun rose, the air grew hot, the breakers thundered, and

Captain Manby completed the repairs on the cutter, and, manning her, paddled out into the lagoon. He

thought of landing half a dozen men on the reef with orders to creep up and clear the schooner's deck with a volley, but

a moment's reflection told him that the move would be

spied on and a party landed to counteract it, in which case Ned

would probably be found—if he were still alive—and

butchered before he could retreat.

"But I'll do that early to-morrow morning," he

thought. "If only I'd had two or three

more along there to-day we'd have got

board. I wonder what has happened to the youngster?"

Ned was still asleep. An hour more passed. Captain Manby, sitting in the sternsheets of the cutter, began

grow drowsy, for he had had but little sleep. Suddenly he lifted his head sharply

and stared up into the sky. Had he been sleeping with his eyes open? No! Again

came the sound that had aroused his failing attention—a faint, far-off droning that

gradually increased in volume, a sound that was unmistakable, though wholly unexpected; the

droning hum of an aeroplane's motor. The men had heard it, and stared about

anxiously. Remembering the part the 'plane had played by Trotter and Coombes had played

in the rising of the Solomon labour on Graden Island months ago, they

imagined that again defeat would be turned into victory by aid from the air.

"It must be the same 'plane and the same

men," thought Manby. "They have doubt-

less been ordered to chart this bit of sea, and

they are!" He had spied the 'plane, a mere speck,

gliding from on high. Nearer it came, and

passed overhead with a rumble

as the woods echoed its

passage. The

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Surrounded as he was by the hefty crabs, Ned realised that it would go badly with him if he should fall. Smash! Crunch! Again and again he smashed down his rifle butt, but still the crabs continued to come.

"Pull men!" cried Manby. "Pull for all you're worth! They'll alight near the Blue Bird and go alongside, and be shot or captured!"

He rose, stripped off his white coat and began waving it to and fro in code signals.

"Keep—away—from—ship. Come down—this—end," said the signals. "Danger by ship. Danger. Come down this end."

He repeated the message, but apparently the airmen didn't see him. The 'plane slanted steeply down, the motor drummed out a final rattle and stopped—and Ned, the sleeper, awoke.

The sleep had done him good, and he was once more his clear-headed self. He remembered where he was, and so did not spring to his feet. Instead, he glanced upwards as the sound of the motor died away, and saw the 'plane sliding down to the space of water between the reef and the schooner.

He saw, too, the deck of the schooner, the men on it running to and fro and snatching up their rifles, saw the atrocious Benoit come to the rail, heard his voice as he shouted: "Wait for the word!" and knew what that portended. Very deliberately he slipped back the safety catch of his rifle, and, smuggling down, raised it.

Smash! The 'plane had alighted on the deck. In a few

moments it would be alongside the schooner. Benoist leaned forward over the rail, a smile of welcome on his face, one hand behind his back ready for the signal that was to launch death on the unsuspecting airmen.

Ned saw them clearly. They were Trotter and Coombes, the two who had saved the situation and the lives of the Blue Bird's crew at Graden, and if he had had any lingering distaste for shooting Benoist from cover, the sight settled it.

"Welcome, gentlemen!" shouted Benoist.

"You dirty hound!" muttered Ned, and pressed the trigger.

Crack!

Papa Benoist sprang erect, reeled back and collapsed on the deck, shot through the head.

"Look out! Treachery! Get away!" yelled Ned at the top of his voice. "Bolt for it, Trotter! You'll be shot!"

Failure!

EVEN as Ned uttered the words, a couple of men leaned over the schooner's rail, levelling their rifles, while the others, momentarily paralysed by their leader's downfall, crowded round him.

Crack!

Ned's rifle spoke again. One of the pair sagged across the rail, letting his rifle fall overboard, but the shot came too late to stop the other. He fired. The bullet grazed Trotter's head, and with an involuntary jerk he twisted the 'plane's head round. Still moving, it glided up to the reef and stopped.

Crack-ack!

Several shots were fired from the schooner. Ned let fly again, heard a yell, raised his voice frenziedly, rising up from cover.

"Trotter! Coombes! On to the reef for your lives! Up here! Quick!"

This time they saw and understood, and flung themselves out of the 'plane on to the shelving coral. Ned fired again, emptying his magazine upon the deck of the Blue Bird. He didn't score again, but at least he spoiled the aim of the convicts, for though bullets thudded and whined about them, the two airmen escaped hurt as by a miracle while they scrambled up and over the ridge of the reef into the shelter beyond.

Ned rolled from his hiding-place, ducking low. No time for explanations. In a few moments the convicts would rally from their surprise and remember that they could command the further side of the reef from the tops of the schooner.

"C'mon! Run for your lives! This way!" he shouted, and led the flight.

"What's it—all about?" gasped Trotter.

"Not—mutiny? Those—fellows—are—white?"

"Not! Dirty yellow scoundrels! Convicts! Run!"

With a hurried glance behind, Ned had seen the head of a man appearing in the foretop of the schooner. He halted, flung up his rifle, fired, and saw the man hastily scuttle out of sight, scared, though not hit.

A burst of rifle-fire came from down the lagoon. Captain Manby had seen

happening. He saw Ned appear for a moment, saw the airmen make their dash for safety, and now opened fire at long range to distract the attention of the convicts.

There was no reply. The fellows were in the moment demoralised by the fall of Benoist.

Presently, having traversed some one hundred yards, Ned and the two airmen appeared on the top of the reef and came down to the water on the inner side.

"What's it all about?" demanded Trotter once more, dabbing at a long wound on his scalp where a bullet had scraped him.

"There were fellows on this island. They said they were winegrowers going to start a vineyard. They'd been wrecked here. But they weren't. They were convicts taken to Noumea who had seized the ship. And yesterday they played the same game with us," explained Ned. "They have killed some of our men and women and taken a prisoner aboard, and they have killed others. And now they've got your 'plane'."

Here the boat came up, and they were taken aboard.

"No chance of us doing the rescue on this trip, sir," Trotter said to Captain Manby. "D'you think we might try an attack?"

"I potted Benoist, uncle!" cried Ned excitedly. "I don't know whether he's dead, but I'm certain I hit him in the head, and anyhow, he dropped."

"That's good news!" said Manby. "He was the only man of brains in the gang. I'm glad to see you, Trotter, and you, Coombes. Yes, I think we'll try an attack as soon as we can get the rest of the men aboard. You have pistols, I see. They will help."

Captain Manby paused and stared keenly up the lagoon. "They've boarded your 'plane,'" he added. "I see they're towing her out into the lagoon."

They all watched as four men in the Blue Bird's quarter boat towed the 'plane into the middle of the lagoon.

"Oh, the brutes!" exclaimed Trotter. "They're sinking her!"

An axe flashed, the sound of crashing wood echoed along the water. The convicts were smashing the floats. The 'plane tilted, rolling from side to side, then slowly at first, but gathering speed, sank down and disappeared below.

Trotter muttered furiously under his beard for he loved the 'plane as a sailor loves his ship. Coombes growled.

"Let's get at them, sir," he growled.

"Give way, men!" cried Manby.

And then, as the boat began to move, came the splutter of the schooner's auxiliary motor and the clank of her winch.

"They're getting under way. They're going to take her out. Now!" yelled Manby.

"If we can get her before she reaches the open sea, we have a chance yet. Run!"

(Will Captain Manby be able to reach the schooner in time? And if he does, will he and his companions be able to capture it? Next week's thrilling instalment.)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers: send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Troubled by His Contributors.

A SMART, real live wire of a reader who is running a magazine of his own finds the business isn't all lavender. He has a wealthy uncle, just like the lucky bargee in the story books, and this uncle has bought him a printing set.

No. 1 of the giddy mag. came out a winner. Then there was a perfect rush of copy. Everybody wanted his yarn to be printed. It was a case of "Just shove this tale in, old chap. It's a corker. It doesn't matter about the rot the others send you." The editor got snowed under. He says most of it is tripe and bilge, but the writers feel they are all geniuses, and they won't take a civil "No." What's he to do about it?

Well, he went in for this most perilous and deadly business of editing, and though, of course, I'd like to bear his troubles, unfortunately I have a full-time job with my own, and that's that. If matters come to such a pass that he dare only venture out after dark with a muscular policeman to look after him—it has been known—he will be compelled to resign his billet as editor and sell his printing equipment off at job lot rates as scrap iron.

But he has my sympathy, especially over the up-to-date boxing article he asked a fellow to do for him. Instead of a brain-wave on the arena and Gene Tunney, he got a set of verses on love in spring-time! I ask you!

Advice on Collecting.

An earnest-minded correspondent, who is obviously very keen on the study of fresh-water denizens, tells me that it worries him the way some fellows collect. They just get minnows and tadpoles into bottles, following the whim of the moment, and then forget them. The minnow has no whim for this sort of treatment. Nor a tadpole who ever flicked through a pond appreciates being cooped up in a time-expired jam-jar, with out-of-date water.

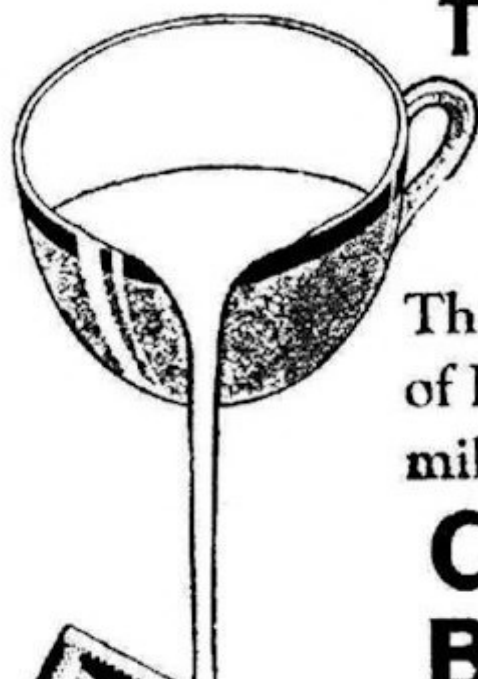
Unfortunately, the same kind of thoughtlessness prevails in regard to butterflies and

moths. It is O.K. to capture a specimen, kill it painlessly and set it out in a collection; but what on earth is the good of blundering after some exquisite Clouded Yellow, or Brimstone, or the brightly-coloured Orange Tip or Peacock, and smashing the lovely creature down in the hedgerow with a cap? The poor thing is beyond recognition when the "collector" has done his fell work.

A Chance for Musicians.

J. S. W. Cook, 10, Denbigh Mews, Portobello Road, Notting Hill, W., has formed a band, and wants to hear from players, age about 16, who are interested in dance music.

ATHLETES TRAIN ON IT



There is half a cup
of English full cream
milk in every

**CADBURY
BIG MILK
BAR 2^D**



THE RIVER HOUSE RAIDERS!

(Continued from page 36.)

"By George!" roared Handforth.

They went tearing across the Triangle, and by this time Hal Brewster had reached the main gates. His heart was singing a song of triumph within him. He had succeeded!

Then, in that moment, when everything seemed plain sailing, disaster overtook him.

He collided full tilt with somebody who was just coming through the gateway. The next moment he was grabbed and held.

"Steady, young man—steady!" said a voice.

"Mr. Lee!" gasped Brewster hopelessly.

Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, held on to Brewster very tightly. With rare presence of mind, Hal whisked off his wig and false whiskers. He hoped fervently that Nelson Lee had not seen whom he was impersonating.

Crowds of juniors came swarming round, and in the gloom they failed to recognise Nelson Lee at first. The famous school-master-detective was nearly bowled over.

"Now then, you young rascals!" said Lee. "Cool down! What's all this excitement about?"

Brewster tried to wriggle free.

"Well, I've got my cap!" he said defiantly. "I should have got away if Mr. Lee hadn't stopped me. It's a victory for the River House!"

"Give us that cap back, you rotter!"

"Which cap is this?" asked Nelson Lee curiously. "Oh, I see! This is the headgear, no doubt, that has been hanging up in the Junior Common-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do not think I will make any close inquiries," said Lee dryly. "However, it is

obvious that this cap belongs to Brewster. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, Brewster, you had better keep it," said Lee.

"Thank you, sir!"

"But that's our cap, sir, by right of conquest!" protested Handforth.

"I do not doubt it," said Nelson Lee.

"But I think it will be far better if you let the affair end here and now. I am all in favour of this healthy rivalry between the two schools. Continue it, boys! It does you good—and as long as you don't overstep the mark nobody will grumble at you."

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"I shall not make any inquiries as to why the headmaster's car is now standing empty, outside the Ancient House," continued Lee amiably. "However, I think I can guess—and I will speak to the chauffeur."

Lee chuckled, and walked away.

"By jingo, he's a brick!" said Brewster. "And as for this cap business, it's over!" he went on amiably, as he donned the priceless headgear. "I suppose we can call it honours even, eh?"

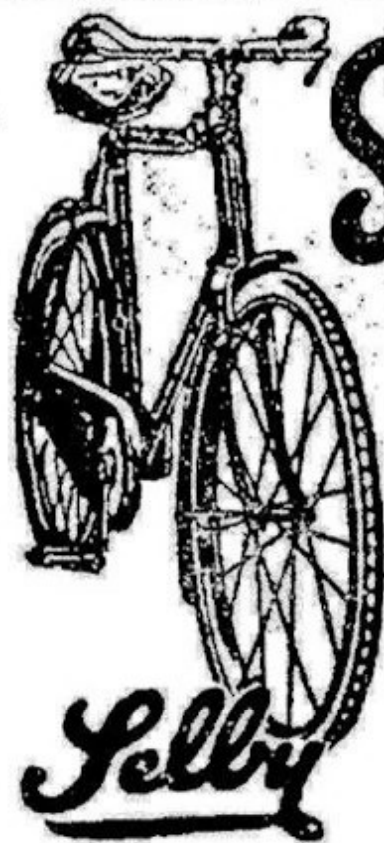
"That's a fair way of looking at it," nodded Nipper. "It's the first round in this term's warfare, Brewster, old man. But next time it won't be honours even—it'll be honours all on one side."

"Exactly!" said Brewster sweetly. "Our side!"

"Well, we won't argue!" replied Nipper; and he smiled significantly.

THE END.

(The first round of the "war" between the two schools has ended in a draw; what will be the result of the second round? You'll know in next week's grand yarn, which is entitled, "Monkey Business At St. Frank's!")



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