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HONOURS EVEN!

A stirring book-length yarn of schoolboy adventure and fun featuring Nipper, Edward Oswald Handforth, Vivian Travers and many other favourite characters at St. Frank's.

New Series No. 127.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 6th, 1923.



Cornelius Trotwood was seized by the River House Fourth-formers and dragged across towards the ditch. "Now, all together!" said Brewster crisply. "Got him? Good! One—two——" Cornelius was swung through the air and next moment—— "Stop!" The voice came from behind the juniors, and it was the voice of their headmaster! The juniors turned in alarm.

Trapped in a Flooded cellar!Schoolboy Adventure, Fun and Thrills!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Still the rivalry between Nipper & Co. and Hal Brewster & Co. rages fiercely. Last week Brewster "put it across" the Removites in no uncertain fashion, and now the latter are snorting fury and breathing vengeance! They're grimly determined to get their revenge and prove beyond all shadow of doubt that they're the "top-dogs." Are they successful? Just read this stunning yarn and you'll know—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Well Away!

BOOM-OOM-OOM!

"Thunder!" remarked Reggie Pitt, as he glanced up at the lowering sky.

"Yes; and those clouds are coming over this way, too," said Nick Trotwood.

"The sooner the better, in my opinion. We shall get a nice cooling."

The two West House juniors of St. Frank's were in running shorts, and they were trotting across one of the meadows near the River Stowe, crouching low as they ran in order to obtain the cover of the hedge. Each of them had a satchel slung from his shoulders, and at intervals they scattered paper scraps over the ground.

"Any sign of the pack?" asked Reggie, as he noticed his companion glancing rearwards.

"Not yet," chuckled Trotwood. "We're well away from those Ancient House asses."

It was a Remove paper chase—West House versus Ancient House. The two hares, Reggie Pitt and Nicodemus Trotwood, had been going well, and ever since the start they had only caught one or two glimpses of the hounds.

"We've been giving them a proper twisting to-day," said Nick cheerily, as they ran. "I'll bet the hounds got a bit muddled in the woods, where we kept doubling back on our tracks, and dodging off at acute tangents. Poor chaps! I expect they're still in a mess."

"Well, it's a good thing they didn't spot us," said Reggie. "Come on—the old mill is in sight now. We'll go round the back of it, and then across the bridge."

Boom-oom-oom!

There was another roll of distant thunder, but the West House hares took no notice. A storm would not disturb them in any way; indeed, they would be glad of it. For the autumn afternoon was close and sultry, without a breath of wind. It was more like an August day, and the two runners were wet with perspiration. They would be glad of a rainstorm to cool them.

The weather had been threatening ever since the paper chase had started, but a trifle like this had not deterred the runners. The Ancient House pack came into sight from beyond a little spinney. The white, running figures were stretched out in a line, and among the leaders were Nipper, the popular Remove skipper, Handforth, Travers, and Fullwood. Even Archie Glenthorne, the languid, lackadaisical, genial ass of the Remove, was included in the pack. For Archie, notwithstanding his dandified ways, was really an excellent athlete.

"The tricky beggars!" Nipper was saying, as he and Handforth ran side by side. "They've given us a good old twisting to-day!"

Edward Oswald Handforth grunted.

"But they're not home yet!" he retorted. "They needn't think they're going to beat us!"

"Well, it looks a bit like it!" said Nipper.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We're not going to let those West House idiots beat an Ancient House pack!"

"There they are!" sang out Fullwood, with a yell of triumph.

"Where?" roared Handforth.

Fullwood pointed. Just for a second, the hounds caught a glimpse of the two white figures in the distance. They had left cover for a moment, and were dodging round an angle of the old ruined water-mill.

"Come on!" bawled Handforth. "We'll get 'em now!"

"Hurrah!"

"Stick it, Ancient House!"

The pack, with renewed vigour, ran like the wind. There was no need to follow the paper trail now; they had sighted the quarry, and they could take a short cut.

"It's a jolly good thing we spotted the beggars!" grinned Handforth, as they ran. "I had an idea they had veered off along the footpath to Edgemore. And they probably laid the trail in that direction, too, and then dodged back on the other side of a hedge."

"Yes; this ought to bring us half a mile nearer to 'em!" nodded Fullwood.

Sure enough, when the pack approached the old water-mill, the leading hounds found that the trail led off at a sharp angle—in the opposite direction from the ramshackle building. Of course, it was a trick, designed to lead the pursuers in the wrong direction. After wasting a lot of time following the paper trail, they would have been compelled to double back to the mill.

But as it was, there was no need to follow that trail now.

They had spotted the hares just near the building, and this was a strong point in their favour.

With Nipper and Handforth still leading, the hounds swept past a little clump of bushes and brambles, and took a short cut across a meadow to the old mill. And the hounds grinned with gratification when they

found the trail, clear and obvious, just near a corner of the crumbling wall.

"Here we are!" yelled Handforth exultantly. "Come on, Ancient House!"

"Hurrah!"

They had cut off a good half-mile, owing to that chance glimpse of the hares, and they now found themselves in the weed-grown wilderness that had once been the yard of the mill.

"Hallo!" said Nipper breathlessly. "What's this? Well I'm jiggered! They've gone inside!"

"Come on!" roared Handforth.

The paper trail, scattered thickly, led across the old yard, directly towards an open doorway. There was no mistaking that trail; the paper scraps were scattered more thickly here than at any other point since the chase had commenced.

With shouts of eagerness the hounds went piling through that open doorway into the mill, convinced that they were hard on the heels of the hares.

Boom-oom-oom!

The thunder rolled menacingly and loudly as the last of the hounds went running into the deserted, ramshackle building.



CHAPTER 2.

Tricked!

NIPPER was not quite so optimistic as the other hounds.

He rather admired Reggie Pitt and Nick Trotwood for this move. A good deal of time would be lost in the dim passages of the building. It would have been easy enough for the hares to run down passage after passage, dodging here and there, laying the trail thickly as they ran. But it would be a more difficult matter for the hounds, who were compelled to remain constantly on the guard for false trails.

"I'll bet the bounders mapped this all out beforehand," said Nipper. "Goodness only knows where they'll lead us to now! But I'll bet it'll be a proper dance!"

"Don't you believe it!" panted Handforth. "The trail's as clear as daylight! Come on! We're almost upon 'em now!"

But Nipper had his own opinion. It seemed certain that the hares were very familiar with the mill, and they had probably dodged out of a rear window somewhere; and thus, while the pack was wasting time in this old place, the hares were getting well away in the open. But, naturally, it was impossible to leave the mill until the trail had been closely followed.

"Look out, here!" said Nipper, as they came to a dim spot where two or three passages branched off. "Thought so! There are two or three trails!"

There was a good deal of confusion while the correct trail was picked out. Two of them were just blinds, ending abruptly and leading nowhere.

There was another trail, however, which shot off through a big open doorway and led across an old, musty-smelling apartment, and then into another passage, where the gloom was deeper than ever.

"My hat! They were jolly smart, anyhow!" said Fullwood. "I don't know how they found time to do all this work."

"We must have spotted them after they had come out of the mill," said Nipper shrewdly. "They couldn't have laid all this paper within these five minutes. Well, they're giving us a run for our money, anyhow."

"Let's get on!" said Handforth impatiently.

It was an unnecessary injunction, since the hounds were "getting on" as fast as they possibly could.

Handforth was about to plunge headlong through another doorway, when Nipper pulled him up short.

"Look out!" he yelled. "Do you want to break your neck, you reckless idiot?"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "It's—it's a cellar!"

He would have dived straight through that open doorway but for Nipper's detaining hand. A flight of steep wooden steps led downwards into mysterious blackness. On every step there were scraps of paper.

"Phew!" breathed Handforth. "I should have gone down head-first! Of all the dotty, crazy——"

"Don't waste time in giving us your opinion, old man," urged Fullwood. "Let's be getting on."

"Yes, rather!" shouted several of the others.

Nipper led the way down, but, after taking a few steps, he issued a warning.

"Look out, you chaps!" he called. "Don't rush so much! These steps are pretty rotten, and they'll collapse if you come down too hurriedly."

"I say, what a dirty trick, you know!" protested Harry Gresham indignantly.

But he didn't mean it literally. Although the hounds chafed at this delay, they secretly admired the hares for their astuteness. Nobody could grumble at the plainness of the trail: it led straight down into the cellar, and it was difficult to believe that there was any spoof about this—since all the other trails had proved false. So this, obviously, was the true one.

And there was likely to be a lot of delay while the pack floundered about in the darkness of the cellar, looking for the exit by means of which the hares had continued on their way.

Nipper believed that there was a grating somewhere, leading out, in all probability, on the other side of the mill.

Nipper was first down, and he went plunging forward into the blackness of the cellar,

looking eagerly for a gleam of light that would denote the expected grating.

But all was darkness.

"It's a bit too bad, you know!" said Handforth roughly. "How the dickens can we be expected to see in the dark?"

"Wait until these other chaps are down," said Nipper. "They're blocking the light from the doorway. We might be able to see—— Ah, that's better!"

The last of the hounds had reached the cellar, and although the stone passage was in itself gloomy, a sort of subdued light trickled down into the cellar. Moreover, the juniors were now growing more accustomed to the blackness.

"Here's the trail!" said Nipper, bending low.

He went forward across the cellar, and he could just detect the thickly-scattered paper scraps on the damp, mouldering stones of the floor. They led back and back, and all the other hounds followed Nipper closely.

The Remove skipper suddenly came to a halt. He had been brought up by a stone wall, which was dripping with wetness. The trail ended here abruptly, in a little heap of paper.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Nipper, frowning.

He looked up, hoping to see an old wooden flap, which was possibly covering the looked-for grating. But there was nothing there but blank stones, mouldy and damp.

"It's jolly funny!" said Nipper, turning to the others.

"Funny!" snorted Handforth. "If you think it's funny, you'd better laugh at it!"

"I don't mean funny in that way, you ass!" growled Nipper. "I can't understand——"

"I say!" came a gasp from one of the other hounds. "Look at the ladder! Somebody's monkeying with it!"

All the others turned, and stared back at the steep wooden ladder which they had just used. It was hovering in the air, being pulled up silently by somebody above.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "What's the idea, you silly fatheads? This is a paper chase, not——"

"Look!" shouted Fullwood. "They're River House chaps!"

"Good gad!"

"Oh, my only aunt!"

"We've been spoofed, you fellows!" shouted Nipper. "It's a trick!"

On the instant, the thought of the keen rivalry between St. Frank's and the River House School sprang into all the Removites' minds. There had been a good many japes lately, and Brewster & Co., the cheery leaders of the River House Commoners, had entered into the feud with zest.

In alarm and dismay, Nipper & Co. now realised that their River House rivals were responsible for this cellar episode. The hares hadn't laid this trail at all! It was merely a wheeze on the part of the River House fellows!

"Quick!" said Nipper grimly. "Grab that ladder, you chaps!"

There was a rush, but before the hounds could get across the cellar the ladder had been reared up, and was beyond their reach. The threshold of the doorway was at least six feet above the floor of the cellar, and, even by taking a flying leap, the prisoners could not do much to help themselves.

For there was not time.

They merely caught a glimpse of figures in the doorway, and Nipper, too, saw the familiar River House caps. But as those tricksters were bending down, none of the faces were seen.

Slam!

The door was suddenly closed with terrific force, and a cackle of laughter came down into the cellar.

"Hey!" bellowed Handforth. "Open that door, you fatheads! Put this ladder back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A low series of chuckles came to the ears of the startled St. Frank's fellows.

Then they heard the sound of bolts being shot—shrieking in their rusty sockets!

CHAPTER 3.

Not Playing the Game!



NIPPER, his face grim, pushed past one or two of the others. "Brewster!" he shouted urgently.

"Hallo!" came a faint, muffled voice, from behind the bolted door—a voice that was full of laughter.

"Look here, Brewster, you can't do a thing like this!" yelled Nipper hotly.

"Rats! I've done it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fresh yells of laughter followed, and all the St. Frank's fellows shouted at once, angry and indignant.

"You rotters!" bawled Handforth. "Let us out of here!"

"River House for ever!" came the derisive answer.

"Unbolt that door, and put the ladder down again!" shouted Nipper. "Look here, Brewster, this is a paper chase——"

"Sorry!" came the cackling voice. "It was a paper chase, but it isn't now. This is one up for the Commoners, my sons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter grew fainter and fainter, and the imprisoned juniors caught a sound of receding footsteps. Then everything was silent.

"Brewster!" shouted Nipper.

But no reply came.

"A somewhat foul and poisonous predic., dear old things," remarked Archie Glen-thorne sadly. "I mean to say, the good old Black Hole of Calcutta, what?"

"It's a confoundedly dirty trick!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood, his voice full of fury.

"Hang it, this isn't playing the game at all!"

"Of course it isn't!" shouted Handforth. "A jape is a jape, but when it comes to messing up a paper chase——"

"They can't mean it, really!" said Nipper, biting his lip. "Hal Brewster is a sportsman——"

"We used to think so, but we shan't think so any longer!" said Church angrily.

The others gnashed their teeth and vowed a dreadful vengeance upon the River House fellows.

"I expect they'll come back in a minute or two, and let us out!" said Nipper, calming down. "Anyhow, it's no good getting excited or flustered."

"Even if they do come back, what's the good?" asked Handforth wrathfully. "We shall be too late to collar the hares, shan't we?"

"I'm afraid we shall," admitted Nipper. "They'll have got such a good start that they're bound to get home."

"So, whatever Brewster says, it won't excuse him!" exclaimed Handforth, clenching his fists. "By George! I'm going to punch that fathead in the eye when I get out! In fact, I'll slaughter the whole crowd! Huh! Bottling us up like this! What a rotten game!"

"Of course, they laid a false trail for us," said Nipper. "We weren't to know that the lunatics were playing a game of this sort, and we naturally fell into the trap. It's no good blaming ourselves over it, but the fact remains that the paper chase is ruined."

Boom-oom!

Even down in that cellar, beneath that deserted building, the juniors could hear the angry rolling of the thunder. The storm was now evidently much nearer. It seemed to the juniors that they could even feel the ground quivering.

"Well, we're sheltering from the storm, dear old fellows," murmured Vivian Travers complacently. "There are always consolations in this life——"

"Don't be an ass!" growled Handforth. "Where's the consolation here?"

"We shan't get wet, shall we?" said Travers blandly.

"Fathead!"

"Just as you like," said Travers. "We won't argue, dear old fellow."

While the prisoners were feeling their way about the cellar, and uttering all sorts of violent threats, the perpetrators of the very questionable joke were outside, in the open.

There were six of them, all River House juniors.

But, contrary to the belief of Nipper & Co., they were not Hal Brewster and his merry men.

The six River House juniors were the Hon. Aubrey De Vere Wellborne, the Hon. Bert-ram Carstairs, the Hon. Cyril Coates, of Study No. 10; and Delaney, Gadsby and Hammond, of Study No. 3. They all be-

longed to that section of the River House Fourth known as "the Honourables."

And, needless to say, they were cads. Any associates of Wellborne's were necessarily cads. At the River House School, the majority of the decent juniors were under Hal Brewster's leadership; and, in order to distinguish themselves from Wellborne's crowd, they had dubbed themselves "the Commoners."

"Well, that was pretty neat, what?" grinned the Hon. Aubrey.

"Dashed good!" said Delaney. "We've put those blighters into a nasty mess."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the others.

"And the way you imitated Brewster's voice was a real treat, Wellborne!" chuckled Carstairs. "The cream of the whole joke is that those footlin' idiots believe that the Commoners are responsible."

"Well, that's what we planned," said Wellborne complacently. "We've got a bit of our own back for the way those cads treated us the other day."

They walked away from the ruined mill, chuckling hugely. In their opinion, this joke was perfect in every way. The fact that they had ruined a sporting event made the thing all the funnier.

It had been so easy to "wangle," too.

Gore-Pearce, the cad of the Remove at St. Frank's, had given them the tip. Gore-Pearce was very thick with the Honourables. Quite by chance, he had heard Reggie Pitt and Nick Trotwood discussing the proposed route for the paper chase. And so Wellborne & Co. had waited in ambush, near the old mill.

They had waited until the hares had scooted by, and then, working rapidly, they had obliterated the trail that led round the building, and had laid a false trail into the open doorway. All the rest had been prepared for a good hour in advance.

In a way of speaking, it was an act of revenge.

Some days earlier, Nipper, Handforth, and a crowd of other Removites had given Wellborne & Co. a well-deserved hiding for acting caddishly towards a couple of helpless St. Frank's fags.

"Well, the best thing we can do is to get back to the school," said Wellborne, as he took a glance at the sky. "I don't like the look of these clouds—"

Boom-crash! Boom-oom!

Following a vivid flash of lightning, there was a terrific crack of thunder, which went rolling and echoing over Bellton Wood.

"By gad!" said Coates. "That was a pretty nasty clap, you fellows. We shall be caught properly if we don't look out!"

"Well, we mustn't shelter," said Gadsby nervously. "People get killed if they wait about under trees—"

"Let's make a rush for home, then!" said Hammond.

They hurried off across the meadows, and they soon reached the towing-path. One or two big spots of rain were commencing to

fall, and overhead the sky had become sinister in its blackness.

"We'll 'phone through to St. Frank's in about two hours," said Wellborne, with a grin. "I think two hours'll be about sufficient—"

"Look out!" gasped Delaney.

With scarcely any warning, the rain swept down. It was a deluge. It came in one terrific burst, and, before any of the River House cads could find shelter, they were soaked to the skin. They were drenched in less than half a minute. The rain was incredible in its fierceness. It hissed down to the accompaniment of further thunderclaps, and everything beyond a couple of hundred yards range was obliterated.

"Great gad!" ejaculated Wellborne. "This is a soaker!"

"Confound your rotten jokes!" said Carstairs. "I've got one of my best suits on!"

Somehow, the wheeze did not seem quite so funny now.

Boom-oom!

Again and again the thunder rolled; the beating of the rain was like a roar—a hissing, angry roar. And Wellborne & Co., more like half-drowned rats than human beings, struggled on towards the River House School.



CHAPTER 4.

No Escape!

REGGIE PITT stood on a little knoll, and stared back over the fields and meadows. "It's rummy, Nick!" he said, frowning. "There's no sign of 'em!"

"They must be jolly slow, then," said Nicodemus Trotwood. "I rather thought they had spotted us when we dodged round the mill."

"That's what I thought, too," said Reggie. "Yet we haven't seen a sign of 'em since. Oh, well—it makes our victory all the more certain. We'd better be going on."

The rain was beginning to patter down all round them, and they had been deafened, more than once, by the crashing of thunder. St. Frank's was not so very far distant now, and the hares were astonished because they had seen no indication of the hounds during the past half-hour.

Hiss-hiss!

Then the rain descended, catching the two West House juniors just as it had caught the Honourables.

"Phew!" gasped Reggie. "It means it this time, Nick!"

"Who cares?" said Trotwood. "We shall get cooled down a bit."

Truth to tell, they were both grateful for the drenching. Wearing nothing but scanty running attire, they had no reason to fear the soaking, and they continued their run,

scattering the paper trail liberally on the wet ground.

While they wondered why the hounds were so slow, the hounds continued to utter many threats against Hal Brewster & Co.

For there was no escape from that cellar.

Nipper, realising that the River House fellows had no intention of releasing them immediately, sought round for some means of escape. But it was a disappointing task.

"There's nothing here!" said Nipper, at length. "Only the bare stone floor, and the solid walls. Not even a grating—not even a loose stone. We shall just have to wait until those bounders come and let us out."

"The cads!" said Handforth hotly. "I can't imagine what's come over them! They seem to have forgotten what a real jape is. This business is nothing more nor less than a cad's trick."

"Well, I'm not going to make any excuses for them," said Nipper grimly. "In fact, when we get out of here, I'll tell Brewster, straight from the shoulder, that St. Frank's won't have anything more to do with the feud unless the common rules of sportsmanship can be maintained."

"Is it such a crime, after all?" asked Travers, in surprise. "Surely, dear old fellow, there's no need to use such exaggerated terms—"

"I'm not using exaggerated terms!" broke in Nipper quickly. "Don't be an ass, Travers!"

"For the love of Mike!" protested Travers. "Surely there's no need to jump down my throat? I'm not responsible!"

"I'm sorry!" grunted Nipper. "But I'm wild—confoundedly wild. If we had been out on an ordinary ramble, it would have been a different thing. Brewster & Co. would have been justified in playing such a trick —"

"Listen to that!" interrupted Tommy Watson breathlessly. "By Jove! That storm must be right overhead now!"

They could hear the crashing and rolling of the thunder, as though heavy guns were being fired over their heads. But it was muffled and deadened.

There were twelve Removites in the Ancient House pack—Nipper & Co. of Study C., Handforth & Co. of Study D., Archie Glenthorne, Fullwood, Russell, Travers, Potts, and Gresham. And they were all angry. Even Travers, in spite of his words, was as exasperated as the rest.

"Nothing can excuse the messing up of a sporting event!" said Nipper, as he stood looking up at the dim slit which indicated the space between the threshold and the door, six feet above. "And Brewster & Co. haven't a leg to stand on, because they knew jolly well that we were out for a run."

"Well, of course, the whole thing will be declared null and void," said Harry Gresham. "Reggie Pitt will be the first to admit it. We shall have to hold the run again, some other day."

"Naturally," said Nipper. "As matters stand now, the whole thing is a farce. The hares will get home, and——"

"Look here!" burst out Handforth. "There's no sense in sticking down here, idle. Can't we do something?"

"Really, dear old cheese, what is there to be done?" asked Archie mildly. "I mean to say, we can't push the dashed walls down, can we?"

"No; but we can open that door!" said Handforth. "It only needs a little ingenuity and resourcefulness. I'm the chap for the job."

Nipper, who had long since come to the conclusion that nothing could be done, merely shrugged his shoulders. It was no good arguing with Handforth, for such a thing would only make him worse.

"Go ahead then, old man—if you think you can do anything," he said shortly.

The only light that came into that cellar was through the slit between the door and the threshold. It was merely a glimmer, but it was sufficient for the entrapped juniors to just see themselves, faintly, like ghostly figures in the gloom. Again and again they had been round the cellar, feeling the walls and the floor. There was certainly no method of exit, except through that one door, six feet above them.

With the ladder removed, the difficulties were insurmountable. They had heard the bolts being shot, and they knew that the door was a strong one.

"Leave this to me, you chaps!" said Handforth briskly. "We'll soon be out in the open again!"

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "That's frightfully interesting, dear old fellow. Let's see how you're going to perform this miracle."

Handforth grabbed at the nearest form.

"Who's this?" he demanded, peering forward.

"Eh?" said the form. "Well, the fact is, old thing——"

"Archie!" said Handforth. "You'll do, my lad!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "At the same time, I must confess that I don't quite gather the trend——"

"Stand against this wall, and hold still!" commanded Handforth. "I'm going to climb on to your shoulders, Archie."

"Good gad!"

"Now, don't waste any time by jabbering —"

"If it's all the same to you, old teapot, there's nothing doing!" said Archie firmly. "It may strike you as a frightfully good scheme to use me as a dashed step-ladder. But, personally, I regard the whole thing as a poisonous proposition. Absolutely!"

"Yes, cheese it, Handy!" said Church. "What's the good of getting on Archie's shoulders? You'd only just be able to reach the door, and you couldn't get at the bolts



"There they are!" sang out Fullwood, with a yell of triumph, and he pointed. Not far ahead were two white figures. They had left cover for a moment, and were dodging round an angle of the old ruined water-mill. "Come on!" roared Handforth. "We'll get 'em now!"

on the other side. We haven't so much as a pocket-knife amongst the lot of us."

Of course Church was right. The prisoners were seriously handicapped. They had no pockets in their scanty attire, and they were carrying nothing whatever, except, perhaps, handkerchiefs. And the cellar itself was barren. There were no scraps of iron which they could use as levers; no loose bricks which they could utilise as hammers. They had nothing but their bare hands.

Handforth's proposal was impracticable, and nobody felt inclined to assist him. He was a big, clumsy sort of fellow, and certainly not a light load on one's shoulders.

"Look here, you rotters! I can't do this myself!" shouted Handforth indignantly. "I must have somebody to help me. Come on, Churchy! You, too, Mac! I'm going to climb on your backs—"

"I say!" came a sudden shout from Tommy Watson. "What the dickens— Well, I'm jiggered! There's a lot of water on the floor over here!"

"What!"

"The cellar's getting flooded!" said Watson, in alarm. "I felt it coming round my feet, and I wondered—"

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Harry Gresham. "It's rising quickly, too! Over on this side it's nearly six inches deep!"

They all stood perfectly still, staring down at the blackness of the floor. And in that momentary silence they could hear an insistent, ominous gurgling!



CHAPTER 5.

Danger!

IT seemed to come from almost every corner of the cellar at once. There could be no doubt as to how that sound was being caused. Water was seeping through the interstices of the stonework, pouring into the cellar from all sides.

"Well, this is a cheery development," remarked Fullwood, with a grunt.

"It's rising like the dickens!" said Jimmy Potts.

"Oh, well, there's nothing to worry about!" remarked Nipper. "The majority of these old cellars get flooded when there's a big rainstorm. I expect it's pouring cats and dogs outside."

Boon-oom!

As though in corroboration of Nipper's words, another heavy clap of thunder sounded, proving that the storm was overhead. There could be no doubt that rain was flooding down in torrents.

"Well, those River House chaps are bound to let us out soon," said Church.

"I'm not so sure about that!" growled Handforth. "I expect they went off home as soon as the storm broke. The rotters! Leaving us here to get flooded out—"

"Cheese it, Handy!" protested Nipper.

"I don't suppose they knew that the cellar would get flooded. Such a thought never occurred to them. They played a dirty trick, but they had no intention of placing us in any danger——"

"Danger!" echoed several of the juniors, in startled voices.

"Well, perhaps there's no real danger," amended Nipper quickly.

But his tone did not carry conviction. Nipper, in fact, was thoroughly startled. He knew that this old water-mill was deserted—had been deserted for many years. It stood on low-lying ground, right next to the river, and quite often in the winter the whole place was unapproachable, owing to the surrounding floods.

Now a sudden thunderstorm had broken—a violent storm—accompanied by torrential rain. And this cellar was below the level of the stone passage! The stone passage, as Nipper well knew, was in itself slightly lower than the yard.

Nipper was no alarmist, but he was aware of a sudden, rapid beating of his heart. Those River House fellows had gone off, laughing, believing that they had left their rivals in just an uncomfortable predicament. But this violent thunderstorm——

"I say!" ejaculated Russell. "This is getting a bit thick, you chaps! The water's rising at a terrific rate!"

"Just what I was thinking!" said Fullwood grimly.

There was no sense in fooling themselves. Within the space of a single minute, the water had risen no less than seven or eight inches. They could hear it gurgling in from every dark corner of the cellar. Already the level was up to their knees.

"What are we going to do?" asked Gresham breathlessly. "If this water gets much higher, we shall soon be swimming! And there's only that one door, and it's bolted on the outside——"

"Steady, old man!" said Nipper quietly. "There's no sense in getting the wind up."

"I haven't got the wind up!" denied Gresham promptly.

"Then don't get excited," said Nipper. "Perhaps two or three of us had better get over by the wall here. Then somebody can try to force that door."

"Isn't that what I said at first?" demanded Handforth triumphantly.

Nipper did not deny it; but he was convinced, at the same time, that the expedient would fail. He was only suggesting it now so that the juniors should have something to do. Anything was better than standing here, idle, while the water rose higher and higher.

"Those River House chaps are certain to come back!" said Tommy Watson.

They all felt the same. Yet, at the backs of their minds, they all had an uncomfortable feeling that they were wrong. Perhaps Brewster & Co. were sheltering somewhere, and thus they would not get back until another half-hour had elapsed. If this water kept on rising at the same rate——

"Come on!" said Nipper crisply.

Several of the juniors crouched against the wall, immediately beneath the high doorway. Then Handforth—who insisted upon conquering the door with his own hands—climbed on their backs. But even then he found that he could only just reach that heavy door.

When he felt desperately for some sort of grip, he was unsuccessful. The door fitted closely and tightly. There were no projections—no crevices. There was no handle, either.

"Well?" panted Church. "Can't you do anything, Handy?"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "This beastly door is about four inches thick, and it's made of solid oak, or something! I can't even shift it! There's nothing to grab hold of!"

Nipper didn't like to say "I told you so," but the words were nearly on the tip of his tongue. He remained silent.

"Of course, it's bolted on the other side!" went on Handforth. "I believe there's a big lock there, too! If only we had a crow-bar——"

"It's no good saying that, Handy!" broke in Fullwood. "We've got nothing—not even a bent pin! If you can't do anything up there, you'd better come down."

"Listen!" exclaimed Handforth, with a queer catch in his voice. "I can hear a rummy kind of roaring up here. Hold still, you chaps!"

Standing on the backs of those other fellows, and clutching at the threshold of the door, Handforth could see through the slit. It was possible, indeed, for him to obtain quite a good view of the stone-paved passage outside. Yet, when he had pulled at the door, by placing his fingers round the lower edge, he had not been able to shift it by a fraction of an inch. That slit was only a few inches in depth.

Staring through, Handforth could see the stone floor, and the paper scraps littered about. It seemed to him that there was a roaring and swirling of water from somewhere beyond, and he was puzzled. Then a sudden gasp escaped his lips.

Without warning, a surging flood of brown, dirty-looking water had come tumbling into the passage at the far end, its crest foamy and angry. The whole mass of water came roaring down the passage.

"Look out!" gasped Handforth.

Crash—swish!

The great body of water struck the door of the cellar like something solid. The door shook and shivered, but did not give way in the slightest degree.

An enormous flood of water came shooting through the slit, pouring down into the cellar in cascades. Handforth was struck by the first onslaught, and he went over backwards, falling heavily into the water of the cellar, and sending up a terrific splash.

As he struggled up, with most of the breath knocked out of him, he could hear

shouts and confusion. Through that slit, the water was pouring into the cellar in a tremendous, never-ceasing flood. It was foaming and boiling, and nearly all other sounds were obliterated by the deafening roar.

"We're caught like rats in a trap, you chaps!" shouted Gresham hoarsely. "There's no escape for us! We shall be drowned!"

"Good gad!"

"But—but we *must* escape!" shouted Handforth desperately.

The level of the flood was up to their armpits, and it was rising with startling speed. At any moment they would be swept off their feet.

It was foolish to blind themselves any longer to the deadly danger. They were trapped, and it seemed that death was staring them in the face!



CHAPTER 6.

Very Mysterious!

THE HON. AUBREY DE VERE WELLBORNE grinned maliciously as he and his companions de-

scended the stairs at the River House School.

"That's better!" he remarked. "Gad! We had a proper soaking, you fellows!"

"My clothes are ruined!" grumbled Delaney.

"Confound your rotten clothes!" said Wellborne. "You've got another suit, haven't you? And wasn't the wheeze worth it? Think of those St. Frank's rotters, bottled up in that cellar!"

"They must be as mad as hatters!" grinned Carstairs.

The Fourth Form passage was deserted, and Wellborne hesitated as his companions led the way towards Study No. 10.

"Just a minute, you fellows," he said. "Let's go into the Visitors' Room, in the other passage."

"Why?" asked Coates.

"Well, old Wragg is out this afternoon, and there's more space in the Visitors' Room," replied the Hon. Aubrey. "Why should we be cramped in the study? We're going to have a little spree, aren't we?"

It had been decided, whilst changing, that they would indulge in a little game of cards, to while away the interval before tea. As Wellborne had said, the Visitors' Room was larger, and certainly more comfortable. There was very little chance of being interrupted.

"There'll be a few complications over this business later on!" chuckled Wellborne, when all the Honourables were behind the closed door of the Visitors' Room. "Nipper and those other fools think that Brewster is responsible. There'll be a proper shindy!"

"Yes, but what's going to happen when they find out that Brewster didn't do it?" asked Gadsby.

"Who cares?" said the Hon. Aubrey, with a yawn. "There's no proof against us—they'll never be able to find out who actually did it. That's where we've got the laugh over them."

They all grinned widely. It struck them as being an excellent joke. In fairness to the Honourables, however, it must be plainly stated that none of them had the faintest idea that the victims of their ill-natured practical joke were in peril. The possibility of the cellar becoming flooded had not occurred to them.

While they prepared to have their little "flutter," two wet, bedraggled figures approached St. Frank's. The hares were nearing home.

Outside the main gateway of St. Frank's, a goodly number of Removites were waiting. They were mostly West House juniors, and a yell went up when the two hares were observed, far up the lane.

"Here they come!"

"Hurrah!"

"And not a sign of the hounds!"

There was much satisfaction amongst the West House juniors. The torrential rain had ceased now, and, although the road was swimming with moisture, the storm had passed. Black clouds were visible in the sky, and now and again a rumble of thunder sounded. But the centre of the disturbance had passed completely over the district. To windward, specks of blue sky were appearing amidst the tumbled clouds.

"Come on, West House!"

"Good old Reggie!"

"Well done, Nick!"

The juniors were enthusiastic as the hares trotted leisurely up. Both of them were showing signs of having been soaked, but now they were almost dry again.

"Not so much cheering, my lads!" said Reggie Pitt, as he came to a halt. "It may be a West House win, but it's pretty hollow, by the look of things."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Dick Goodwin, of Study O. "It's such a good win that the hounds aren't even in sight!"

"Those Ancient House chaps aren't much good!" said Castleton, with a grin.

But Reggie Pitt was frowning.

"I can't understand it!" he said, as he stared back along the lane. "It's—well, it's rummy. We haven't seen the hounds for over half an hour."

"They must have gone off on the wrong trail," suggested Alan Castleton.

"That's impossible," put in Nick. "We laid the trail clearly, and even the heavy rain couldn't have washed it away. Besides, we lost sight of them even before the rain started."

All the fellows were puzzled. As a general rule, it was a tight finish in a paper-chase. Seldom had the hounds been more than a few hundred yards behind the hares at the end

of the chase. But Reggie and Nick had not seen the pack for miles.

"I could understand two or three of the chaps falling out, and taking a short cut home," said Reggie. "But they've all vanished! Even Nipper and Handy and Travers have given up."

"Perhaps they've sheltered somewhere because of the rain?" suggested Levi.

"Oh, rot!" said Pitt. "We didn't take any notice of the storm—so why should they?"

"They're not West House chaps!" said Singleton.

But this, as they knew, was a very feeble explanation. There wasn't one chance in a thousand that the Ancient House fellows had sheltered.

"Well, you fellows had better run in and change," said Castleton, as he looked at the two hares. "As far as I can see, you must have made a mess of the trail laying——"

"Ass!" said the hares, in one voice.

Castleton grinned.

"Well, anyhow, the hounds must have mistaken the trail somewhere," he said. "How about a few of us going back over the course? We might be able to see some sign of them?"

"Just what I was going to suggest," said Reggie firmly.

"Yes; but you needn't come!" put in Farman, of Study P. "I guess we can look after this job, Pitt. You and Nick are worn out——"

"Rats!" interrupted Reggie. "We've been taking it easy for miles, and we're not even tired. Come on! Let's make a party of it, and see what's happened to those silly chumps."

Within a couple of minutes a large crowd had started off—including Jerry Dodd and Jarrow and Adams, and a few other Ancient House Removites. Little did they realise that this move was to prove providential!



CHAPTER 7.

In Desperate Straits!

WE can't last much longer!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"Oh, why don't they come back?"

muttered Church. "The cads! The rotters! The inhuman brutes! Why don't they come and release us?"

"Steady, old man!" grunted Edward Oswald. "They shoved us into this cellar for a lark. They didn't know what they were letting us in for!"

"All the same, it was a dirty trick!" said McClure in a hard voice. "I'll never forgive Brewster for this—never!"

"None of us will!" said Fullwood angrily.

The peril in the cellar of the old mill was worse. Rapidly the water had risen, and even by standing on tiptoe the im-

prisoned juniors could only just keep their chins out of the water.

And the level was still steadily rising!

Upon the whole, they were very plucky about it. The situation was full of horror—for, unless help came, a ghastly death was inevitable. Before long the water would rise to the very ceiling of the cellar—and then, of course, the occupants would be caught like rats in a trap. For even though they were all good swimmers they could not save themselves if the cellar became completely filled.

Nipper, who had been watching the flood, calculated that they only had about another ten minutes. The water was still rising steadily from below—the flood sweeping through the stones of the floor and of the walls. In addition to this, the flow from the passage continued, splashing noisily into the cellar through the slit under the door.

"Here, I say!" ejaculated Watson suddenly. "I'm off my feet, you chaps! I can't feel the floor any more!"

"Begad!" murmured Tregellis-West. "That's frightfully awkward, old boy. But it can't last much longer—it can't, really."

"Yes; there'll be an end, one way or the other, before long," agreed Fullwood. "If we're not rescued pretty soon, we shall be drowned."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "The water won't rise much higher."

Yet his words sounded hollow, for the level had risen by three or four inches during the last two minutes. Not one of them could now feel the cellar floor. They were all swimming—some floating, some treading water, others swimming round with a short breast stroke.

Nipper put one of his hands out of the water, and he felt the ceiling—ominously close above his head.

"Can't we do anything to that door?" asked Gresham huskily.

"Nothing," replied Nipper. "Be reasonable, old man. The flood hit it with full force, and yet it hardly shook. So what chance is there for us to move it?"

"None!" groaned Gresham. "Oh, my goodness! What an awful mess we're in!"

"And all through those River House chaps!" said Handforth, as he took a tight hold of Church and McClure, keeping them near him. "We'll have nothing more to do with them after this—nothing! We'll cut them dead!"

"Isn't that a rather poisonous sort of word to use, laddie?" murmured Archie, with a wince.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Rot! We're not dead yet, Archie."

"Perhaps not, old thing," agreed Archie. "But I mean to say, what about it? The ceiling is dashed close, and——"

"Great Scott!" came an exclamation from Jimmy Potts, on the other side of the cellar. "The water is up to the ceiling over here! I just caught my head a terrific crack, and I've swallowed about two pints of this filth!"



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"Well, well!" said Travers. "Hadn't you better swim over this side, then?"

Potts came over.

"It's awful!" he said desperately. "We can't possibly hold on for more than five more minutes!"

"Those River House chaps will come back!" said Nipper steadily.

"They won't—they won't!" panted Church, with a wild note in his voice. "I'll bet they've gone home—and they don't mean to come back until this evening! They think it's just a joke!"

"It reminds me of that awful flood in London some months ago," said Fullwood, in a curiously disinterested sort of tone. "Don't you remember, you chaps? The Thames overflowed suddenly, and lots of people were drowned in their cellars. Now I can understand what a ghastly time they must have had!"

"Cheese it!" protested McClure. "What's the good of saying things like that, Fully?"

"Sorry!" muttered Fullwood. "I—I didn't quite realise—"

He broke off, and there was a brief silence—broken only by the splashing of the flood as it continued to come in, and the movements of the imprisoned juniors.

Nipper was the only one who noted that the rise was now more gradual. It indicated that the rainstorm was over. But, even so, there wasn't the slightest doubt that the cellar would sooner or later become completely flooded. Five minutes, perhaps—with luck, seven or eight minutes. But after that—

The prospect of such a terrible death was appalling enough; but the juniors were horrified, too, by their helplessness. Never had they felt so futile. For they could do nothing—absolutely nothing.

It was just a question of waiting.

"Well, it can't be much longer now!" said Gresham abruptly. "By Jove! The level has risen above the threshold of the door! That water isn't splashing in any more."

"He's right, you chaps!" said Church excitedly. "The water isn't coming in now!"

Handforth grunted.

"Don't fool yourself!" he said. "It's coming in just the same—but it's not making any noise. The water has risen so high in here that it's now on the same level as the water in the passage!"

"Great Scott!"

"A poisonous statement—but probably a true one," declared Archie Glenthorne. "Well, laddies, it's a bit murky, and all that sort of thing, to finish up like this. But it wouldn't be fair to kick the good old bucket with words of anger on our lips. I mean, about Brewster & Co."

"The cads!" said Russell wildly.

"Absolutely not!" broke in Archie. "Odds injustice and slander! I mean, the dear old lads didn't mean to do anything like this. So let's forgive them."

"Good old Archie!" said Nipper, drawing his breath in sharply. "That's the right spirit, you chaps. Brewster & Co. didn't mean to expose us to this danger, so it wouldn't be fair to——"

"Listen!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly. "What was that?"

"Go easy, old man!" said Nipper. "There's nothing——"

"There is—there is!" shouted Handforth. "I heard voices! I'll swear it, you chaps! I tell you I heard voices!"

"Well, it's about time!" said Travers steadily. "At a rough estimate, I should imagine that we have just about another minute."

This was perfectly true. There was scarcely room for their heads between the water and the ceiling.

Only by keeping their heads well back and their chins up, could they still continue to breathe. Every now and again they felt their heads bumping against the ceiling. A further rise of three or four inches would mean death—a horrible, unbelievably awful death.

Now that the end was so close at hand they could not credit that help was near. Handforth had said that he had heard voices. But when the others listened they detected nothing but the continuous gurgling of the flood.



CHAPTER 8.

In the Nick of Time!

REGGIE PITT came to a sudden halt, and his face was flushed with excitement and bewilderment.

"Just a minute, you fellows!" he exclaimed tensely. "There's something wrong here! There's something mysterious!"

"Something fishy!" said Nick Trotwood, in a grim voice.

The crowd of Removites, searching for the lost hounds, had arrived in the yard of the deserted water-mill. As Pitt and Trotwood had led the way back from St. Frank's they had become more and more puzzled.

At any moment they had expected to come across the hounds, but not the faintest glimpse of them had been seen. Yet the trail was quite clear—so plainly marked that

all the Ancient House juniors were ready to admit that the hares had not been at fault.

Now, in the mill-yard, Reggie Pitt had suddenly noticed that the trail was broken. For some little distance round the building there were no paper scraps in evidence. Yet, further across the yard, they were thickly scattered—now half obliterated by the heavy rain. But it was perfectly clear that the trail led through a doorway into the old building.

"Well, what's wrong?" asked Castleton curiously.

"Everything!" replied Pitt. "Look there! The trail leads into the mill!"

"Didn't you lay it there?"

"Of course we didn't!" said Reggie. "We scattered it along this wall, and came straight round the building. We didn't go inside at all!"

"Well I'm blessed!"

"Then what could have happened?" asked Dick Goodwin. "You must have forgotten——"

"We haven't forgotten!" put in Nick Trotwood. "Reggie and I came straight along this wall. We didn't stop here for more than twenty seconds, because the hounds were comparatively close behind us. By jingo! No wonder we lost sight of them, Reggie! They must have gone into the mill!"

"Of course!" nodded Pitt. "The whole thing is explained now. But who interfered with our trail and laid this fresh one? Some interfering rotter has been playing a trick!"

"Well, don't waste time!" said Castleton. "Let's get inside and find out if there's any sign of the chaps. Perhaps they're locked in."

"How can they be?" asked Larry Scott. "The door is open."

"But they may be locked in somewhere inside!" replied Castleton. "Anyhow, that would explain why they haven't turned up. And it's as clear as daylight that some rotter has been playing Old Harry with the paper chase."

With Pitt and Trotwood leading, the juniors entered the old mill. There was no difficulty in following the trail here for the rain had not affected it, and it led straight down the passages, the paper being scattered very liberally.

"Yes!" said Reggie, as he ran. "It's fishy, Nick. Look at all this!"

"I'm looking!" nodded Nick. "What a dirty trick!"

They were delayed once or twice by false trails, but at last they found the true one, and suddenly they pulled up short at the end of a long, sloping passage. Just in front of them there was a flood—scum-covered and brown and ugly. Fragments of paper were floating idly on the surface, amidst the scum.

"Hold on!" said Reggie. "We can't go any further. The giddy place is flooded!"

"My goodness!"

"How deep is it?"

They all came crowding up, and they stood at the edge of the flood where it lapped the sloping floor. There was a big gap in the crumbling wall beyond, in the other passage. Water was still trickling through.

"That's where it came from!" said Reggie, pointing. "During the height of the rain-storm the yard was flooded, I expect—on the other side. It wasn't deep enough to affect the yard we've just come from, and the water must have poured through these holes and gaps."

"Listen!" said Singleton, holding his head in an alert attitude. "I thought I heard somebody shouting!"

"We'd better give a yell!" said Reggie. "Come on—all together!"

They gave a united yell:

"Hallo, there!" they roared. "Where are you?"

Then they waited, their hearts beating rapidly.

"Help—help!" came a confusion of desperate, muffled voices. "Quick, you fellows!"

"My only aunt!" gasped Reggie. "They're here, you chaps!"

"Help—help!" came the dim, far-away shouts.

"The cellar!" called another voice that was unmistakably Nipper's. "The cellar at the end of the passage! Help!"

It was a dramatic moment.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Alan Castleton. "They must be in danger!"

"Isn't it obvious?" shouted Pitt. "If this passage is flooded, what about the cellar? It must be full!"

"Great Scott!"

"Come on!"

"Rescue, Remove!"

Shouting excitedly, they splashed into the flood, caring nothing about their clothing. The water came well above their shins and almost to their knees. They splashed along the passage, and in the gloom they soon detected a heavy door at the end.

"Where are you?" roared Pitt, who was leading.

"Here—in the cellar!" came a desperate chorus.

There was no doubt about it: the imprisoned juniors were behind that heavy door. Pitt reached it, and his eyes blazed with anger and bewilderment as he saw that the great bolts were shot home into the sockets. There was a lock, too, but this was almost rusted away and out of action. Still, those heavy bolts were sufficient.

"Lend a hand!" panted Reggie.

It required a couple of them to pull the top bolt back. It creaked and groaned and protested, but at last it was drawn. In the meantime, two other fellows had successfully wrestled with the lower bolt.

"Stand out of the way!" said Pitt breathlessly.

They pulled the door open, forcing back the flood waters in the passage. Immediately a torrent of water came rushing out of the cellar.

"Oh, thank goodness!" came a fervent shout.

"We're saved, you chaps—saved!"

"What-ho! The rescue of the perishing, what?"

The new arrivals were staggered and startled. In that dim, subdued light they could just see a number of heads and a great deal of splashing. The imprisoned juniors were all swimming towards the door and climbing out.

And the level of the water had been within an inch or two of the cellar ceiling!

The rescuers had come only in the nick of time. Indeed, the narrowness of the whole thing was startling. A mere delay of five minutes, and there would have been tragedy instead of a mere bit of excitement!



CHAPTER 9.

Need For Action!

WITH pale faces and drawn features, the twelve Ancient House juniors were helped out of the cellar. In some of their eyes there was a feverish light, and all of them were shaky with sudden reaction. They had expected—

But what was the good of dwelling on that? Rescue had come, and everything was now all right.

"What on earth happened to you fellows?" asked Pitt, in amazement. "How did you get into this cellar? And why did you yell so frantically? Was the danger very serious?"

"We were as good as dead!" said Travers calmly. "Without exaggeration, dear old fellows, we were on the verge of eternity. Things weren't at all pleasant."

"Somebody's going to pay for it!" said Handforth, recovering himself with his usual rapidity. "By George! The water was practically up to the ceiling! And there we were, caught like rats in a trap! A couple of minutes more, and we should have been all under, without any hope of being saved!"

"Don't talk about it!" said Nipper quietly. "Let's get outside—into the open. Let's see the daylight. We've had enough of this gloom and dimness!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's get outside!"

The others were eager and anxious. In all truth, they had had enough of these black passages and cellars.

As they hurried out, they could not help thinking of one thing. It was not the River House fellows who had come to their rescue—but their own school chums. They had been rescued by St. Frank's. The River House crowd had gone off—callously, with scarcely a thought, it seemed, for the luckless juniors they had imprisoned.

And the affair was by no means over!

Naturally, the rescuers were eager to hear the full details—to discover how it was that their schoolfellows had been in such a predicament.

"Thank goodness!" said Harry Gresham, as he came out into the open under the blue sky. "My hat! We thought we should never see this again, you chaps!"

"We all thought so!" said Church soberly. They stood there, in the watery sunshine, feeling rather at a loss for words. Their thankfulness was too great.

None of them had come to any real harm.

The rescuers had arrived at the last minute—before any of the victims had gone under. None of them had swallowed much of the flood water. A mouthful or two here and there, perhaps, but certainly nothing to worry about; and as they had been on the move practically the whole time, the coldness of the water had not affected them. They had remained energetic and warm.

Now, however, there was a danger of catching a severe chill. Nipper, for one, realised it. The others, perhaps, were not so thoughtful.

"Well, you're out now!" said Jack Grey eagerly. "Tell us what happened, Nipper! We're all in a muddle, you know! We can't imagine——"

"Sorry; can't tell you anything now!" interrupted Nipper crisply.

"Oh, I say! But look here——"

"Wait until we've got to St. Frank's!" broke in Nipper. "If we stand about here, jabbering, we shall all catch cold."

"That's true enough," said Reggie, nodding. "Better not risk it, you fellows. A brisk trot will do you good, and prevent any chills."

"But can't you tell us what happened as we run back?" asked Goodwin.

"No!" replied Nipper, with a curiously grim note in his voice. "We'd better say nothing about it—yet. We'll get changed, and in the meantime I want some of you fellows to go round and call a full meeting of the Remove."

"But what on earth for?" asked Somerton, in astonishment.

"You'll find out later," replied Nipper. "Handy! Fullwood! In fact, all of you! Don't say a word about what happened to these other chaps. Leave it to me—until I have a jaw to the meeting."

Handforth nodded.

"Perhaps it'll be as well!" he agreed. "By George! We'll set things moving soon! We'll show those rotters——"

"Chuck it, Handy!" protested Church. "Didn't Nipper ask you not to say anything?"

"Well, I'm not saying anything!" protested Handforth, with a start.

"Yes; but you were going to!"

Handforth compressed his lips, and held himself in check. He was boiling with anger and indignation, but he realised that Nipper's policy was right. This affair was serious—really grave. It wouldn't do to have a lot

of talk in advance. Far better to leave it until the Form-meeting was called.

By the time St. Frank's was reached, the twelve juniors who had had such a narrow escape were feeling more themselves. They were getting over the shock of the ordeal.

The thing was over, and they were saved. There was really no need for the authorities to know anything—or to guess anything. For if any of the masters got to know of the episode, there would be inquiries, and, quite possibly, the twelve juniors would be packed off to the sanatorium, just to be on the safe side. And not one of them had any relish for such a development.

The run home had not only warmed them up, but it had restored their nerves.

Even if some masters or prefects had seen them entering the school in their drenched condition, it would have made no difference. For everybody knew that there had been a heavy thunderstorm, and it was only natural that the fellows should look bedraggled.

There was an immediate rush to the dormitories, where the fellows sponged themselves down, indulged in a brisk towelling, and then dressed. By the time this was over, they felt practically normal.

That adventure in the cellar seemed like a kind of horrid nightmare.

In the meantime, Jack Grey and Castleton and De Valerie and two or three others had hurried round, giving the order.

A full meeting of the Remove!

So when Nipper and the others came down, they went straight to the Common-room in the Ancient House. The apartment was packed. Nipper looked round, and everybody could see that he was unusually grave.

"All here?" he asked quietly.

"All except Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell," replied De Valerie. "Oh, yes—and Lord Pippinton. He isn't here."

"Well, I don't think it will matter much," replied Nipper. "We can easily do without Old Pippy—and without those cads of Study A, too. We can regard this as a full Form meeting."

"But what's it for?" demanded several voices.

"You'll soon hear," replied Nipper grimly. "There's work to be done this afternoon, you fellows, and I shall need the whole crowd of you!"



CHAPTER 10.

The Remove Meeting!

O it, Nipper!"

"We're waiting, old man!"

"Isn't it about time you explained things?"

Nipper, on a table, faced the excited crowd. Near him were the eleven other fellows who had shared his own ordeal. The rest of the Remove were still in a complete state of



An enormous flood of water came shooting through the slit in the door, pouring into the cellar in cascades. Handforth was struck by the first onslaught, and he went over backwards, falling heavily into the water already in the cellar.

bewilderment. They had yet to learn the facts.

"First of all," said Nipper, "you had better understand that this thing is to be kept quiet—so the less shouting you do, the better."

"But why must it be kept quiet?" asked Russell.

"Gee! That's the bunk!" said Adams. "You guys were nearly drowned, and——"

"That's why we've got to keep quiet about it!" interrupted Nipper. "We don't want to get anybody into serious trouble—and, quite apart from that, we don't want to be ordered into the sanny!"

"That's true enough!" said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "If your Housemaster gets to know about this—or the Head—there'll be the very dickens of an inquiry."

"But how did it happen?" demanded half a dozen voices.

"I'm just going to tell you," replied Nipper. "But, as I said before—keep it to yourselves. In a nutshell, it was a River House jape."

"What!" roared the Remove.

"Brewster & Co. laid that false trail, and led us into the mill!" said Nipper grimly. "So the affair rests between the River House fellows and ourselves. We don't want any outsiders coming into it. I'm going to pro-

pose, too, that we should deal with it—at once!"

The Common-room was filled with excited shouts.

"Here, I say, Nipper!" protested Reggie Pitt. "Isn't this a bit too thick? Those River House chaps wouldn't play a rotten game like that!"

"Unfortunately, they did play it," said Nipper steadily.

"Rats!"

"We don't believe it!"

"You must have been mistaken!"

There were all sorts of fresh shouts, and every face was eloquent of excitement and incredulity.

"You silly fatheads!" roared Handforth, exasperated. "Do you think Nipper doesn't know what he's talking about? Here! I'd better give this speech——"

"If it's all the same to you, Handy, I'll carry on with it!" interrupted Nipper.

"Well, why don't you tell them all the facts?" said Handforth impatiently. "It would only take me two ticks to explain the details——"

"It'll take me less!" said Nipper. "Those River House fellows were waiting in ambush," he went on, turning to the Form. "They laid a false trail for us, and we went into the ruined water-mill. Naturally, we

thought we were on the track of the hares, and we didn't realise the truth until we were actually in the cellar."

There was no need to explain, of course, that the hounds had been nearly drowned. That piece of information had passed from mouth to mouth in the Remove like wild-fire. The juniors were now only anxious to know how it had come about.

"When we were all down in the cellar, we heard cackles of laughter!" continued Nipper. "Then we caught a glimpse of some River House caps, and the door was slammed."

"Great Scott!"

"What a filthy trick!"

"I yelled out to Brewster, and there was a lot of laughter in reply," said Nipper. "Brewster took no notice of me—at least, he and the other chaps only yelled 'River House for ever,' and things like that. Then they all cleared off."

"They must have gone right back to their own school," said Pitt. "There was no sign of them when we came along, anyhow."

"That's the shabby part of the whole affair," continued Nipper, his voice becoming more and more grave. "As far as I can see, Brewster & Co. haven't a leg to stand on. It was a rotten jape. It was a dangerous, unsporting piece of trickery!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie stoutly.

Everybody in the Remove was startled.

"But it was practically criminal!" protested Castleton, aghast. "Those River House fellows bottled you up there, and nearly sent you to your deaths! I can't believe that Hal Brewster would lend himself to such a horrible thing!"

The Remove was in an uproar; everybody was furious—except Nipper. He remained cool, and, also, he kept his sense of proportion.

"Just a minute, you fellows," he said quietly. "There's no need to jump to these silly conclusions."

"What silly conclusions?" asked Grey.

"Why, that Brewster & Co. deliberately trapped us in that flood," replied Nipper. "However bad their conduct, they're not guilty of that."

"But they did it!" shouted Johnny Onions.

"It is impossible to ignore the simplicity of the truth," put in Hussi Kahn, the Indian boy. "And the dirtiness of the trick is only paralleled by its extraordinary lack of sportsmanship."

"Hear, hear!" said Doyle.

Nipper was very patient.

"If you'll let me speak, I'll try to explain things to you," he said. "We were trapped in that cellar before the storm happened—before the rain came—and so it stands to reason that the River House chaps knew nothing about the flood. When they went into the cellar and scattered the paper about, everything was dry. I don't suppose it occurred to them that there would be any danger."

"Yes, that's true, I expect," agreed Owen major.

"So the sooner we forget the flooding episode the better," said Nipper.

"Forget it!" ejaculated Handforth, staring.

"Yes, we must forget it!" insisted Nipper. "That was an accident—and Brewster & Co. are not responsible. They simply bottled us up in the cellar for a lark. You know how we've been having japes with the River House School lately, and I suppose they thought it would be a pretty funny affair. And I've really called this meeting because I want you all to promise me that you'll say nothing more about that flood."

"Yes, but hang it——"

"We don't want any inquiries," continued Nipper grimly. "It was a purely unforeseen development, and as we have all escaped let's look upon it as though it hadn't happened."

"Well, that's one way of looking at it," said Reggie Pitt thoughtfully. "And a jolly decent way, too."

"We've got to remember that the River House chaps are innocent of any vindictiveness of that sort," said Nipper. "If they had known of our danger, they would have come back, frantic with anxiety. But, of course, the flood was an unlooked for event. So, once again, let's forget it."

"But aren't we going to do anything?" roared Handforth indignantly.

"We are!" replied Nipper. "And we're going to do it—now!"

"That's better!" said Pitt cheerfully. "Go ahead, Nipper—we're all ears!"

"We can agree on one point," said Nipper. "The River House fellows indulged in a dangerous and unjustifiable trick. They deliberately ruined our paper chase; and that, in itself, was nearly a crime."

"Hear, hear!"

"It was an unsporting act!" said Nipper. "It was no jape at all. And I want the Remove to understand, here and now, that there's got to be prompt retribution. In other words, a picked force is going to the River House School this very afternoon—to tell Brewster & Co. straight from the shoulder that they've acted like cads. Incidentally, Brewster & Co. are going to be wiped up!"

And the Remove enthusiastically cheered this proposal!



CHAPTER 11.

On the Warpath!

Of course, everybody wanted to go.

But Nipper was firm. He declared that a force of twenty-four would be quite sufficient. So, in the end, it was decided that the picked force should consist of twelve Ancient House fellows, and twelve West House fellows. In order to save time, Nipper himself named the juniors he needed.

"We don't want to argue!" he said, when the rest protested. "Time's getting on, and we want to catch Brewster & Co. in the quiet of the afternoon, before tea-time. If we hurry we shall just do it."

"By George!" said Handforth, in surprise. "Isn't it tea-time yet?"

So much had happened during the past exciting hour that many of the juniors had an idea that evening had already arrived. But they were wrong. It wasn't yet four o'clock.

Some of the fellows who had not been selected decided to get up a force of their own; they would follow on behind, and would be handy if they were needed.

"Reinforcements, as it were!" said Owen major, who was one of the unlucky ones.

The Remove agreed with its skipper that immediate action was necessary. Brewster & Co. had done this thing, and it was imperative that they should be taught a sharp lesson. They must be made to understand that there were japes *and* japes. And in this affair they had gone beyond all the limits of sporting decency.

So it was a grim, rather silent, force that marched across the meadows towards the rival school.

Even Handforth had very little to say. But it was noticed that his fists were clenched already; and on his face there was a dreamy expression of happiness. A fight was in prospect, and there was every justification for hard hitting.

As they caught sight of the River House buildings in the distance, Reggie Pitt gave Nipper a curious glance.

"How do you propose that we should go to work?" he asked.

"We shall have to leave that to chance," replied Nipper. "Perhaps the River House fellows will be on the playing fields. If so, I shall tell Brewster exactly what I think of him, and then we'll pile in."

"Good egg!" said Handforth heartily.

"Or they may be indoors," went on Nipper. "If so, we'll march straight in, and do exactly the same thing. Anyhow, we're going to 'get' them!"

"We'll reduce them to mincemeat!" said Handforth, with relish.

"But I can't understand it, all the same," continued Nipper, frowning. "It's a complete mystery to me. Until now, the Com-

moners have been sporting in everything. It's just a lapse, I suppose. It didn't strike them that the whole thing was questionable. Well, we've got to make them understand that there's a limit."

The others all agreed.

The sun was shining quite strongly now, and all signs of the recent thunderstorm had gone. The sultriness of the atmosphere had changed, too; there was now a cooling breeze, and the evening promised to be clear and fine. The thunderstorm had completely cleared the air.

The raiders approached the River House School from the meadows, and they reached the playing fields first. There was not a soul in sight. The playing fields were quite deserted.

"Come on!" said Nipper. "They must be indoors."

"Are we going to march straight in?" asked Castleton.

"Yes."

"Supposing we meet old Wragg, the master of the Fourth?"

"Well, he can't do anything, can he?" said Nipper. "Brewster & Co. can have visitors, I suppose?"

Castleton grinned.

"But you know what old Wragg is," he said. "Something like Pycraft, of St. Frank's. He's an interfering, unpleasant sort of beast."

"We can't bother about Wragg!" said Handforth gruffly. "The chances are that he'll be out, anyhow. It's a half-holiday, and it's not usual for the masters

to be about. We've got to chance it."

This was the general opinion.

Having reached the main courtyard, they still saw no evidences of the enemy. The big main door was standing wide open, so, with Nipper leading, the Remove force marched straight in. There was nobody to impede their entry. It was the quiet, lazy hour of the afternoon, and if any of the masters were at home they were probably napping, or taking things easily in their own quarters.

The invaders marched to the Fourth Form passage, and halted at Study No. 1. Nipper opened the door, and grunted. Brewster & Co. were not at home.

"They don't seem to be here!" said Handforth indignantly. "There's not a sound, either!"

They looked into Study No. 2, which was usually occupied by Kingswood and Norton

GOING TO THE DOGS.

Who's going to the dogs? Gore-Pearce & Co. ! They've been going to the dogs for terms, as Edward Oswald Handforth bluntly puts it, but this time they're going in a different sense. For a greyhound racing track has been opened in Bannington, and naturally Gore-Pearce & Co. are interested, for here is a chance to indulge their weakness for betting.

The grand new series which starts next week with the story entitled :

"GOING TO THE DOGS!"

will interest all readers for many reasons. It prominently features Willy Handforth and his new pet greyhound, Lightning, which he secures in dramatic circumstances. It has a footballing interest—good old footer!—and Nipper and Vivian Travers are in the limelight, too. Oh, yes, this is a series that readers of all tastes will enjoy. Look out for the opening story in next Wednesday's issue of the

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and Robinson; but they drew a blank here, too. Then they examined the other studies, with exactly the same results. The Fourth Form passage was deserted. They went to the Common-room, and the Common-room was remarkable only for its emptiness.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper, scratching his head. "They're all out!"

"Of course, they would be!" growled Handforth. "But they needn't think that they can dodge us——"

"They've probably gone to the old mill!" said Nipper, with a nod. "Yes, that's it! They've gone to release us, and——"

"Well, let's buzz off, before anybody comes along and asks any questions," suggested Reggie Pitt briskly. "It'll be a lot better for us to catch those River House chaps at the mill. We can have a good old scrap there, without anybody butting in and making inquiries."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's hurry off!"

It was an obvious conclusion. Since none of the River House Fourth-Formers were here, it stood to reason that they had gone to the old mill, to release their victims. But as the invaders were about to make their exit from the enemy's camp, Nipper called a halt. At last, he had heard voices—the echoing of laughter, in fact.

"Wait a minute!" he said, in a low voice. "Easy, you chaps! There's somebody here, after all!"

"Shush!" went up the warning.

Nipper cautiously passed down another corridor, and the sounds of laughter became more distinct.

"They're in the Visitors' Room!" murmured Nipper, turning to the others. "Goodness knows what they're doing there, but——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "That's Wellborne's voice! And Gadsby's—and Hammond's. There's only Honourables. We don't want to bother with them!"

Nipper, who was quite near to the door of the Visitors' Room, suddenly started. An alert expression sprang into his eyes, and he again held up his hand for silence.

"Just a minute!" he whispered. "By Jove! I believe—— Quiet, you asses!"

Some of the others crept nearer, and they stood listening. A few words that Nipper had overheard made him quite comfortable; he knew that they were justified in this act of eavesdropping.

"Yes, I suppose we'd better be ringing up now!" came Wellborne's cackling voice. "Poor beggars! They've had enough!"

"Oh, give them another hour!" laughed Delaney. "It'll do 'em good to be bottled up in that cellar for the whole afternoon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the silly fools believe that Brewster did it!" yelled one of the other Honourables. "I say, what a joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, but the cream of it is, the pitiful idiots will probably go for those Commoners

bald-headed!" came Wellborne's amused voice. "I don't suppose they'll ask any questions, but simply smash 'em."

And there was another yell of laughter.

Nipper and the other Removites near him exchanged glances. They were startled glances. In that moment they understood the exact truth.

"'Nuff said!" murmured Nipper. "Now we understand!"



CHAPTER 12.

The Punishment!

NIPPER was angry with himself for not having guessed the truth earlier. For that piece of trickery at

the old water mill had been so obviously the type of thing that Wellborne & Co. would indulge in. And it was so contrary to the sporting spirit of the Commoners.

Not many of the raiders knew what was in the wind, however, and, after Nipper had signalled a withdrawal, they gathered near the Common-room, looking puzzled and impatient.

"What's all this whispering about?" asked Doyle, of the West House. "What's the mystery?"

"There's no mystery," replied Nipper. "But we've been labouring under a little misapprehension. It wasn't Brewster & Co. who locked us in that cellar—but the Honourables."

"Wellborne and his set?" asked Potts, in surprise.

"Yes."

"But that's impossible!" put in Russell. "We heard Brewster's voice."

"That was mere trickery," said Nipper. "We were asses, of course, not to jump to the truth. We ought to have guessed that that job was done by the Honourables, and that they tried to make us believe that Brewster and his men were the real culprits."

"Well, well!" said Travers. "So that's how the land lies? Taking all the circumstances into consideration, dear old fellows, we needn't blame ourselves much. We had a good deal to think about in that cellar—without puzzling our heads over such details. All the same, I'm relieved."

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth, in a satisfied tone. "I thought it was rummy that Hal Brewster should get up to such a rotten dodge. But, of course, it's just what Wellborne & Co. would do."

Nipper nodded.

"But even Wellborne & Co. didn't mean to shut us up in a flooded cellar," he pointed out. "It was only an ill-natured practical joke of theirs. They were talking about 'phoning St. Frank's up, so that we should be released, and that, in itself, proves that they

had no idea of the danger they had subjected us to."

"Empty-headed idiots!" said Reggie Pitt angrily. "I hope we're going to smash them, Nipper?"

"By the time we've finished with them," said Nipper cheerfully, "they won't know their own reflections in the mirror!"

"Good!" said Handforth heartily. "Come on! Let's make a sudden rush!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with the Honourables!"

All the St. Frank's fellows were mightily pleased. Their suspicions against Brewster & Co. were unfounded, and it was a great relief to know that the Commoners had taken no part in that ill-natured trick. Moreover, there would be altogether more enjoyment in the task of "wiping up" the Hon. Aubrey and his questionable pals.

Nipper and Handforth were the first at the Visitors' Room door. They were about to open it when they heard Gadsby's voice from inside the room.

"Leave 'em in the cellar for another hour, I say," Gadsby was remarking. "It'll do 'em good! They think the Commoners did it——"

"Sorry! But that's where you're wrong!" said Nipper, as he opened the door.

There came a chorus of startled exclamations, and the sound of chairs being pushed hurriedly back across the floor. The ten or twelve Honourables in the room were on their feet, startled and alarmed.

"St. Frank's chaps!" gasped Delaney. "Here, keep 'em out——"

"Too late, you rotters!" roared Handforth.

The two dozen Removites piled into the room, and Handforth would have gone for the enemy bald-headed, only Nipper laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Just a minute!" he said grimly. "Wellborne, I only want to tell you one thing."

The Hon. Aubrey, who had partially recovered his composure, glared in defiance.

"So you got out, did you?" he sneered.

"Then you admit that you're responsible?"

"What's the good of denyin' it?" asked Wellborne contemptuously. "It seems that you fellows were listenin' at the keyhole——"

"We came here to find Brewster & Co.," said Nipper, his voice becoming hard. "But you were so careless with your voices that we couldn't help overhearing your cackles and your remarks. Yes, we know that you tricked us, and bottled us up in that cellar."

"Well, you're free now," retorted the Hon. Aubrey. "What are you grumblin' about?"

"Quite apart from the trick being a particularly caddish one, Wellborne, it was dangerous, too," said Nipper. "And I rather think that it's our duty to teach you a sharp lesson."

"Dangerous be hanged!" said Carstairs. "We were going to 'phone up St. Frank's in about half an hour, and send somebody along to have you released."

"If we had waited for that, we should have been dead by now!" replied Nipper.

"Dead!" echoed the Honourables, aghast.

"Yes, dead!" snorted Handforth. "You rotters! You reckless cads! That cellar became flooded, and if some of our fellows hadn't come along, we should have been drowned!"

"What rot!" jeered Wellborne. "You can't fool me with this yarn——"

"It happens to be true!" said Nipper angrily. "The water rose to within an inch or two of the ceiling, and that cellar door was only just opened in the nick of time. We know that you fellows didn't mean to do any harm, but you nearly killed the lot of us."

There was such earnestness in Nipper's tone that the Honourables knew that he was not bluffing. They went rather pale.

"Great gad!" muttered Wellborne.

"But—but it wasn't our fault!" protested Delaney. "We didn't mean to harm you——"

"All the same, it was an unsporting, contemptible sort of practical joke!" said Nipper. "Naturally, we haven't said a word about the flooding episode, and we're not going to. But, by Jove, we mean to put you fellows through the hoop!"

"Yes, by George!" roared Handforth. "Put up your hands, you cads!"

Crash!

Handforth sailed in with a will, and Delaney and Gadsby went rolling over, howling. But there was not much of a fight. The Honourables were overwhelmed, and within a couple of minutes they were all held firmly, and the Visitors' Room was a somewhat extraordinary sight. Wellborne & Co. were on the floor, with two or three St. Frank's Removites on each.

Then the punishment commenced.

Ink was obtained from the big inkwells on the table, and soot was scraped down from the chimney. A fearsome mixture of ink and soot and ginger-beer was made up, and then the puddingy mass was liberally plastered over the features of the Honourables.

Their jackets and waistcoats were turned inside out, and their hands were tied behind their backs.

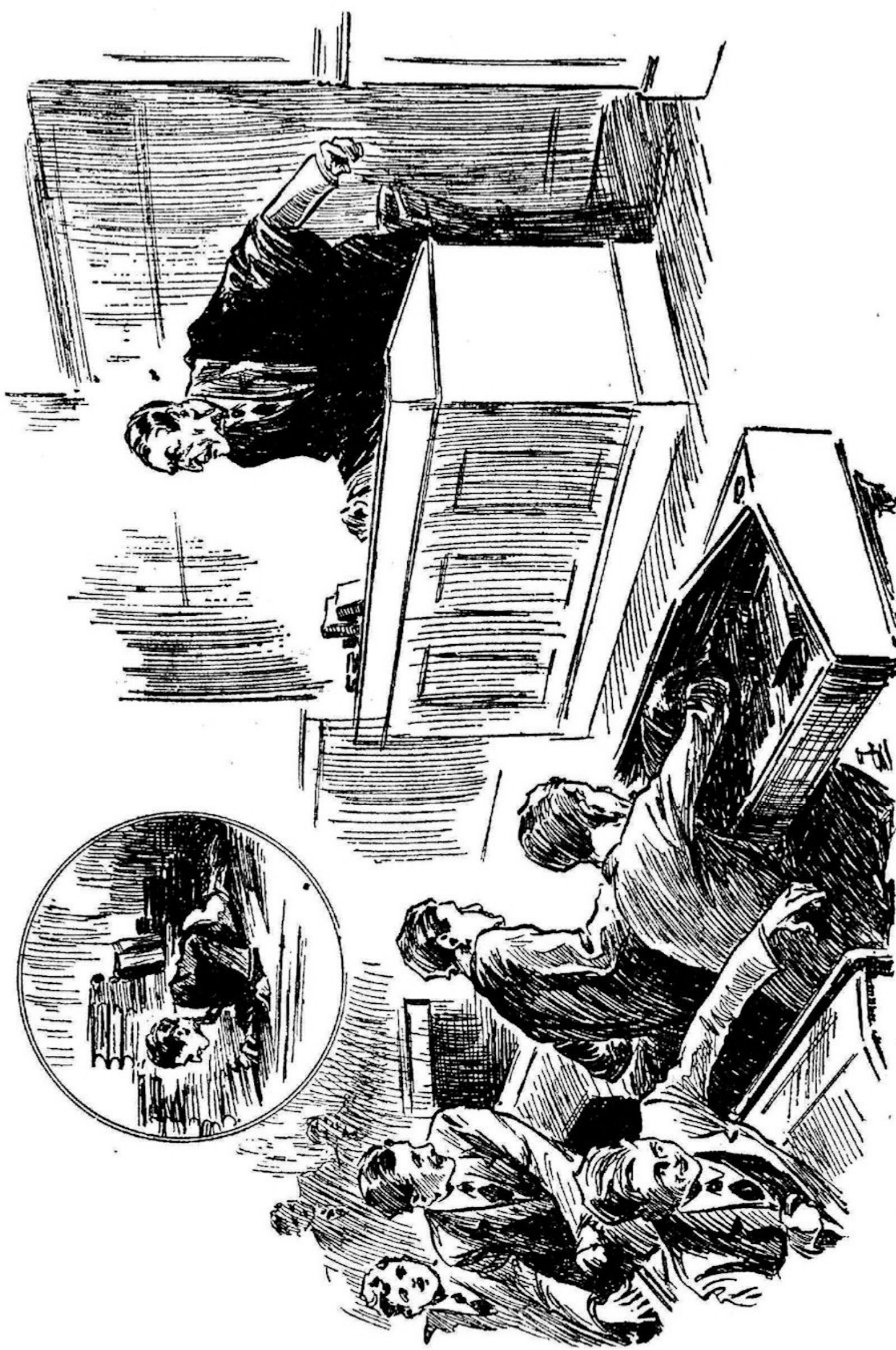
"We're going to leave you here, my sons!" said Nipper contentedly. "We're going to bind your feet, and put gags over your mouths."

"You rotters!" panted Wellborne thickly. "By gad! Just you wait! We'll have an awful revenge for this——"

"Bring the gags!" said Nipper briskly. "Their own handkerchiefs will do, though. After we've gagged 'em, we'll prop them all in a row, and——"

"Cave!" gasped one of the raiders. "Somebody's coming!"

A tramp of feet sounded out in the corridor, and before anybody could reach the door, it was suddenly burst open.



“You may dismiss!” came Mr. Wragg’s voice. All the boys leapt up, and they closed their books with a series of cannon-like bangs. Mr. Wragg jumped into the air in amazement. He hadn’t said those words, although he had heard them. But then, he and the other juniors didn’t know that Nick Trotwood, the ventriloquist, was hiding behind a number of books on the cupboard!

In the doorway stood Hal Brewster and a crowd of other Commoners!



CHAPTER 13.

A Slight Mistake!

HAL BREWSTER stared in amazement for the first moment or two; then a dark frown overshadowed his sunny, good-natured face.

"We're raided!" he ejaculated, in a voice of alarm.

"Great Scott!"

"St. Frank's bounders!"

"Buck up, the Fourth!"

Brewster and Glynn and Ascott and two or three more crowded into the Visitors' Room. One glance at Wellborne & Co. was sufficient. The Honourables were in a dreadful state; their faces were inky, and a good deal of the soot had gone on to their clothing. The face decorations had not been executed without a certain amount of artistry. Wide rings of untouched skin had been left round their eyes and their mouths. The unfortunate cads looked rather like nigger minstrels.

"You rotters!" said Brewster, glaring at the Removites.

"Now then, Brewster, old man!" said Nipper soothingly. "You mustn't jump to conclusions——"

"It's a dirty trick!" broke in Hal hotly. "I'm surprised at you fellows for doing a thing like this!"

It was clear that Brewster and the other Commoners had made a mistake. They did not realise the true position. Indeed, how could they, since they knew nothing of the facts? They had been to Caistowe for a football match, and had only just returned. They had known nothing of the Removites' presence until they had heard some shouts coming from the Visitors' Room, and they had promptly investigated.

"Pax!" said Nipper earnestly. "A couple of words, Brewster——"

"Pax be blown!" roared Hal. "We're not going to have it! Are we, you chaps?"

"Not likely!" roared the other Commoners.

"All right, then!" bellowed Handforth, clenching his fists. "If you want a fight, we'll give you one!"

"Steady, Handy!" urged Nipper. "We don't want any trouble with Brewster. We can soon explain——"

"I'd like to know how!" said Brewster tartly. "We go out for the afternoon, and when we come back, what do we find? A whole horde of you St. Frank's fellows mauling these Honourables about. I call it a dirty trick!"

"Yes, but listen to me——"

"It's not playing the game!" shouted Brewster furiously. "These Honourables aren't in the feud at all! So why the dickens should you come here and make a mess of them?"

"Let's kick them out!" shouted Kingswood excitedly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

"On the ball, you chaps!"

Nipper tried to get in a few words of



"You may dismiss!" came Mr. Wragg's series of cannon-like bangs. Mr. Wragg jumped although he had heard them. But then, he and Quist, was hiding behind

explanation, but it was impossible. He knew that if he could tell Brewster of the paper chase episode, there would be no trouble. The Commoners would commend them, in fact, for what they had done to the Honourables.

But, as it was, Nipper found it impossible

to say those few words. He was far too busy, seeing that Hal Brewster had hurled himself at him.

This was the signal for a general assault. Kingswood and Driscoll and Mann and Lacey and Grant and Littlewood were all scrapping. Other Commoners were pushing their way into the already congested Visitors' Room. The place became a rocking, swaying mass of excited humanity.

But if Brewster & Co. thought that they could throw the Removites out, they were mistaken. Handforth was fighting enthusiastically, and Nipper was just as energetic.



s leapt up, and they closed their books with a r in amazement. He hadn't said those words, rs didn't know that Nick Trotwood, the ventrilo- books on the cupboard!

In fact, the whole affair was becoming thoroughly enjoyable.

And at this interesting point (of course!) Mr. Bernard Wragg put in an appearance.

Mr. Bernard Wragg, who was master of the Fourth Form, saw no real reason why all this commotion should be going on in the

Visitors' Room, which was, strictly speaking, out of bounds for the juniors.

Fortunately, he was spotted before he actually turned into the corridor. The fight was now in progress, not only in the Visitors' Room, but in the passage as well. There were overflow scraps in all sorts of odd corners.

"Cave!" came a sudden shout.

"Bolt, you fellows! It's Wragg!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

The fight ceased abruptly. St. Frank's fellows scooted for the windows, and escaped. Others went tearing down the passage.

Nipper found himself, together with Nick Trotwood, in a little blind alley. They had sought a means of escape through a narrow passage, only to find that it was merely a deep recess.

"Hold still, Nick!" breathed Nipper. "We may not be spotted."

"No such luck!" murmured Nick Trotwood. "Old Wragg is famous for his eyesight!"

However, they were in a better position than some of the others. Handforth, of course, had remained until it was too late, which was characteristic of him. And Church and McClure had remained because they did not want to desert their leader.

When Mr. Wragg arrived, shouting at the top of his voice, he found Handforth & Co. and Archie Glen-thorne and Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts. Just these six. All the others had successfully vanished.

But the Commoners were still there in force, and so were the Honourables. The latter could not help themselves, since they were bound hand and foot.

"It's no good, you fellows!" panted Brewster. "We can't escape now, he's spotted us. Even if we did get away, he'd only collar us later. Better face it out."

"Rats to him!" muttered Georgie Glynn. "I thought he was out!"

All the Commoners, in fact, had thought that Mr. Wragg was out. Otherwise, they would not, perhaps, have entered into this fight so wholeheartedly. His abrupt appearance took them completely by surprise.

"What is all this?" shouted Mr. Wragg hotly, as he pranced up. "Good heavens! You young rascals! What have you been doing?"

"It's a raid, sir!" panted Delaney. "These cads from St. Frank's came in and set on us."

"Look at us, sir!" roared the Hon. Aubrey. "Look what they've done, sir!"

Mr. Wragg was looking, and he was horrified.

"This—this is outrageous!" he stormed. "Boy!" he added, twirling upon Handforth. "Are you responsible for this?"

"Partly!" replied Handforth, in no way disconcerted. "We all had a hand in it, as a matter of fact. The trouble is, we didn't have time to finish the job. We were going to make them smart a lot more!"

"You—you insolent young ruffian!" said Mr. Wragg hotly. "How dare you enter this school and cause such damage?"

"Come on, you chaps—we'd better go!" said Jimmy Potts carelessly.

"Precisely what I was thinking, dear old fellows," rodded Travers. "Ready, Archie?"

"What ho! Absolutely!" replied Archie. "A somewhat speedy trickle is indicated."

"Halt!" thundered Mr. Wragg.

The St. Frank's fellows halted.

"Stay where you are!" commanded the Form-master. "How dare you talk about leaving? Do you imagine, for one moment, that I am going to let you depart in this way?"

"But we don't belong to this school, sir," said Travers, in surprise.

"Possibly not—indeed, I am thankful that such is the case!" snapped Mr. Wragg. "However, I intend to see that you are all adequately punished for this unprecedented outrage!"

Hal Brewster stepped forward.

"It's hardly as bad as that, sir," he said. "It's only a bit of a raid, and if these fellows have done any damage, I dare say they'll be willing to pay——"

"Silence, Brewster!" commanded Mr. Wragg. "I am perfectly well aware of the fact that there is, at present, a ridiculous feud in progress. You boys and the St. Frank's boys are engaged in this mock warfare. It is high time that it ceased! In fact, I shall make it my business to have the whole matter officially stopped."

And Mr. Wragg gave orders for all the Commoners to stand exactly where they were, and he paced up and down, his brow black, his eyes gleaming with anger.

The situation was not particularly bright!



CHAPTER 14.

The Chopper!

H

AL BREWSTER & CO. felt angry and exasperated.

Yet they could not exactly blame the St. Frank's fellows for this disaster. They had

made the error of believing that Mr. Wragg was out, and they had gone "bald-headed" for the invaders. But for that noisy move, Mr. Wragg would probably have known nothing of their presence.

So the Commoners felt, in a way, that they were to blame for the whole situation. Yet they could not exonerate Nipper & Co. entirely. And it was exasperating, too, to realise that the majority of the raiders had escaped.

"A most disgraceful affair!" said Mr. Wragg nastily. "Brewster! Driscoll! Littlewood! Untie these unfortunate boys at once! Come along—and a few more of you, too!"

A number of the Commoners made haste to release Wellborne & Co.

"Must we remain, sir?" asked Travers politely.

"Yes, you must!" rapped out Mr. Wragg.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "Such is life!"

Mr. Wragg gave him a sharp glance, but made no comment. He stood in the doorway of the Visitors' Room, and he gazed sympathetically upon his favourites. For Mr. Wragg was something of a toady, and because Wellborne & Co. were rich and highly connected, he allowed them all sorts of privileges. It worried him now to see them in such a predicament.

"You may rest assured, Wellborne, that all these boys will be punished for their scandalous conduct!" he said, altering the tone of his voice. "Do not worry, my boys. I will see that everything is put right."

"Thank you, sir!" said Delaney.

"We know you'll punish everybody properly, sir!" remarked Carstairs.

"Unfortunately, I am not in a position to punish these St. Frank's boys," said Mr. Wragg, with regret. "However, I shall certainly make it my business to communicate with their Housemaster, and to inform him of the disgraceful facts. I have no doubt that they will be summarily dealt with."

Nipper, who had heard all this, compressed his lips. He could well understand that Handforth and all the other Removites were fairly itching to tell Mr. Wragg the truth. But, naturally, their lips were sealed. It was impossible for them to sneak.

But, undoubtedly, if Mr. Wragg had known of the dangerous trick that Wellborne had performed, he would have hesitated before making any reports. For he would have known, in spite of his liking for the Honourables, that they had well deserved the punishment they had received.

Mr. Wragg, however, was left in ignorance of this important detail. He naturally believed that the St. Frank's fellows had made an ordinary raid. Brewster & Co., too, were under the same impression. And there was still no opportunity for explanations.

"There, that is better!" said Mr. Wragg, after all the Honourables had been released. "My poor boys! I can well understand that you are very angry and very upset. Go

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upstairs at once, and wash yourselves and change. And rest assured that I shall take the necessary steps to secure the punishment of these young ruffians."

"Thank you, sir," said the Hon. Aubrey coolly. "We know you'll make them smart."

The Honourables vanished, exchanging vindictive glances.

"As for you!" said Mr. Wragg sternly, as he turned to Brewster and the other Commoners. "I am surprised at you all! I am astounded! In fact, I am shocked!"

"I don't see why you should be, sir!" said Hal bluntly.

"No?" barked Mr. Wragg. "Then let me tell you, Brewster, that I do not want your opinion—or your comments, either. I come into the House, and I find a great crowd of you fighting like animals in the Visitors' Room. I know, of course, that it was your object to expel these St. Frank's raiders. But nothing can excuse your hooliganism."

"Here, I say, sir!" protested Kingswood indignantly.

"Yes! It's a bit thick to call us hooligans!" shouted Handforth. "You don't know the facts, Mr. Wragg! We didn't give Wellborne & Co. half enough!"

Mr. Wragg spun round on him.

"I will deal with you presently!" he said unpleasantly. "As for the rest of you—go at once to the Form-room."

The Commoners looked startled.

"The Form-room, sir?" repeated Ascott blankly.

"Yes!" rapped out Mr. Wragg. "All of you! Go to the Form-room, and remain there until I come! I intend to give you two hours' extra lesson—as a punishment for your part in this disgraceful affair."

"Two hours' extra lessons, sir!" ejaculated Brewster. "But—but it's tea-time!"

"There will be no tea-time to-day, Brewster!" snapped Mr. Wragg.

Nipper, deep in the recess, suddenly grasped Nick Trotwood's arm.

"Did you hear that, Nick?" he breathed.

"I'm not deaf, you fathead!" replied the West House junior.

"Quick, old man!" said Nipper, with a grin. "Bunk to the Form-room, and hide yourself!"

"But what on earth——"

"Here's a chance to jape the Commoners!" chuckled Nipper. "Yes, and it's a chance to make old Wragg sit up, too! If you can only get there first, you'll be on velvet!"

Nipper's brain had worked like lightning, and Nick Trotwood, too, rapidly saw the possibilities. He grinned all over his innocent-looking face.

"By jingo!" he muttered. "You mean—do a bit of ventriloquising?"

"Exactly!" whispered Nipper. "You're a nib at the game, Nick! Best ventriloquist I ever heard."

"How much do you want to borrow?" chuckled Nick Trotwood.

"Shut up, and buzz off!" urged Nipper. "Quick! If you don't go now, you'll never get the chance. There's a bit of a commotion, so you'll probably be able to slip out unseen."

The recess was very dark, and Nick Trotwood wormed his way out and slithered along the corridor behind Handforth and the other St. Frank's fellows. Nipper came partially out of the recess, in order to conceal Nick's movements, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the West House junior dodge round into a neighbouring doorway. Nobody else had noticed the swift incident.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wragg had noticed Nipper.

"Ha!" he said sharply. "Who is that over there—in that dark corner? Boy! Come out!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Nipper, in a startled voice.

"Hallo!" said Handforth, turning round. "I thought you'd escaped!"

"No such luck!" said Nipper gloomily. "How did you expect me to escape with Mr. Wragg here?"

But Nipper was feeling very elated. Nicodemus had done the trick—he had managed to get off to the Fourth Form-room in advance of the Commoners. Nipper could foresee a lively half-hour for Mr. Bernard Wragg when that extra lesson started!



CHAPTER 15.

Trouble in the Air!

MR. WRAGG regarded Nipper sourly.

"Ah!" he said. "I am glad that you are here, young man! I think that you are the ringleader in this disgraceful affair?"

"I'm the ringleader, sir—but it's not disgraceful!" replied Nipper humbly.

"Do not bandy words with me, boy!" snapped Mr. Wragg. "I shall see that you are punished more severely than any of the other boys."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Wragg gave Nipper a suspicious look, and then he glared at the Commoners once more.

"Didn't you hear me?" he rasped. "To the Form-room—all of you! And wait for me. If I hear any noise as I approach, I shall increase your detention to three hours! Go!"

The Commoners went—very crestfallen and very furious inwardly.

Mr. Wragg was left alone with the seven St. Frank's juniors.

"As for you boys, you will come with me!" he said. "You will come to my study."

I intend to ring up your Housemaster at once."

"But look here, sir——" began Handforth.

"I shall not look there!"

"I don't see why you should be so wild with us," went on Handforth recklessly. "Wellborne and his gang are only a lot of cads——"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Wragg, scandalised to hear his favourites being referred to so disparagingly. "Handforth, I do not want to hear another word from you!"

Handforth breathed hard, but he managed to hold himself in check. After all, it wouldn't do to cheek Mr. Wragg. The Fourth Form-master had no authority over him, it was true—but he could easily secure a severe punishment for Handforth by reporting him to St. Frank's.

Mr. Wragg was quite in his element now. He was not such an out-and-out "beast" as Mr. Horace Pycraft, of the St. Frank's Fourth, but he was certainly an unpleasant man to cross.

In triumph, Mr. Wragg led the despondent raiders to his study. Then he lined them all up in front of the fireplace, and sat down at his desk. He reached for the telephone.

"I am sorry that I am compelled to take this action," he said coldly. "It gives me no pleasure, I can assure you, to make complaints to your Housemaster."

"You don't look particularly grieved, sir!" said Travers coolly.

"I regard this task as a duty—an unpleasant duty!" replied Mr. Wragg. "You boys have committed a very outrageous act this afternoon, and I cannot possibly condone it."

With set lips, Mr. Wragg lifted the receiver from its hook, and barked a number into the transmitter. There was a brief pause, and then Mr. Wragg became alert.

"Hallo!" he said. "Is that St. Frank's?"

"Yes," came a reply.

"I should like, if possible, to speak to Mr. Lee, of the Ancient House," said Mr. Wragg. "This is Mr. Wragg, of the River House School."

"Ah, good-afternoon, Mr. Wragg!" came Nelson Lee's voice. "You have got the very man you require."

"I am sorry to ring you up in this manner, Mr. Lee, but it is my duty to inform you that some of your boys have been to this school on a most outrageous errand!" said Mr. Wragg, with a triumphant glance at



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the culprits. "I have them here before me now. Hamilton, Handforth, Church, McClure, Glen—What is your name, young man?" he interjected, glaring at Archie.

"Eh? What?" said Archie. "Oh, I see what you mean! My name? Oh, rather!"

"What is your name?" repeated Mr. Wragg.

"Archibald," said Archie cheerfully. "Absolutely! Known to all and sundry as Archie."

"I want to know your surname, you foolish boy!"

"Good gad! Of course!" nodded Archie. "How frightfully awk! Glenthorne, sir."

"Of course," said Mr. Wragg. "Why couldn't I think of it before? Are you there, Mr. Lee?"

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Wragg?" came Nelson Lee's surprised voice. "You appear to be very excited—"

"I have reason to be excited, sir!" hooted Mr. Wragg coldly. "There are one or two other boys here, too. I'll give you their names in a moment."

He secured their names, and gave them.

"In addition, a large number of boys escaped," continued Mr. Wragg. "They were all members of the Remove Form, although a good many, I believe, belonged to the West House."

"They are not within my jurisdiction, I am afraid."

"But perhaps you will be able to communicate with the Housemaster of the West House, and see that they are duly punished?" asked Mr. Wragg. "I had better explain that they came here and grossly assaulted Wellborne and several other boys."

"In what way did they assault them?" came Nelson Lee's voice, now rather grim.

Mr. Wragg explained. He went into all details. With considerable relish he described how he had found Wellborne & Co. If this was a painful duty for him, then he was bearing his pain very stoically.

"Unfortunately, I only managed to capture these few boys," concluded Mr. Wragg. "But I can give you the names of several of the others—"

"You need not trouble, Mr. Wragg," came the stern voice from St. Frank's. "I will make all inquiries when these boys reach me. But you may rest assured that they, at least, will be dealt with very severely."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Lee," replied Mr. Wragg. "I think the time has come when the young rascals should be taught a very sharp lesson."

He listened, and his eyes glowed with satisfaction.

"I quite agree, Mr. Lee!" he said, as the culprits listened. "A six-hander each, you say? Splendid!"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Church, in dismay.

"Oh, yes—quite!" said Mr. Wragg. "But do you consider that it will be adequate, Mr.

Lee? You will confine them to gates for one week?"

The juniors listened in dire consternation.

"Yes, a very good idea!" said Mr. Wragg, grinning. "An excellent suggestion, Mr. Lee! I will tell them. Thank you—thank you! Of course, you will realise that I do not like this task, but—Yes, yes, of course! Good-bye, Mr. Lee!"

A moment later, Mr. Wragg rang off, and he sat back triumphantly in his chair.

"Well, you young rascals, Mr. Lee has asked me to send you back to St. Frank's at once."

"So we gathered, sir," said Nipper grimly.

"You are to receive six cuts of the cane each!" continued Mr. Wragg complacently. "Furthermore, you will all be confined to gates for the period of one week. And if you take longer than ten minutes to get to Mr. Lee's study, you will receive an extra three cuts of the cane each!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Good gad!"

"Did—did Mr. Lee say that, sir?" asked Nipper warmly.

"He did!" retorted Mr. Wragg. "Three extra cuts each—if you take longer than ten minutes. So you had better make haste and go."

He pointed to the door, and the juniors, after giving Mr. Wragg a furious glare, hurried out.

They bolted from the River House School, fuming.



CHAPTER 16.

Not Quite So Bad!

"HE old rotter!" said Handforth thickly.

They had left the River House School behind now, and they

were trotting across the meadows at the double. They did not relish an extra three cuts each, and so they decided to reach Nelson Lee's study in well under the ten minutes. There was nothing like being on the safe side.

"Yes, there was no reason for him to be so jolly nasty about it!" said Nipper. "But I can't quite understand the guv'nor."

"Blow your guv'nor!" growled Handforth. "A six-hander—and gated for a week! And I always thought that Mr. Lee was a sport!"

"It was Wragg's fault!" protested Nipper. "He painted the whole thing as black as he could."

"I was on the point of punching him on the nose!" said Handforth fiercely. "By George! I wish I'd done it now!"

They were all very angry—and very sorry for themselves. This was a sad ending to their adventure! They had set forth to raid the River House fellows, and they had only

got themselves into serious trouble for their pains.

"Well, well!" said Travers resignedly. "It's no good crying over spilt milk, dear old fellows. I dare say we shall get over it."

"And there's one consolation, anyhow," said Nipper. "Old Nick might be able to give Wragg a twisting."

"I dare say old Nick will oblige, later on!" nodded Travers.

"I mean Nick Trotwood, you ass!" said Nipper, with a grin. "He's left behind—at the River House."

"Oh, is he?" said Handforth, in surprise. "What did the ass want to stop there for?"

Nipper explained, and the others were slightly consoled. But they could not help reverting back to their own troubles. The immediate prospect of a "six-hander" was not very cheering—and it was thoroughly annoying to realise that they would be gated for the next week.

On the top of all their other troubles that afternoon, it was really the limit. Yet it was impossible for them to explain. It was no good hoping for any reprieve. When Nelson Lee questioned them, they would have to confess that they had treated Wellborne & Co. as Mr. Wragg had described. And they would not be able to explain the reason for their drastic treatment.

They arrived in the Triangle within eight minutes, and they went hurrying across to the Ancient House. On the steps a lanky, elegant figure lounged. It was that of William Napoleon Browne, the genial skipper of the Fifth.

"Ah, brothers!" he said kindly. "Forgive me if I am wrong, but do I detect indications of distress? Do I observe a light of sadness in your eyes?"

"Cheese it, Browne!" said Nipper. "We're in a bit of a hurry."

"Is it permissible to inquire your objective?" said Browne politely.

"Oh, dry up, you long-winded ass!" said Handforth. "Let's get past! It's urgent!"

"Yes, Browne!" said Nipper. "We've got to get to Mr. Lee's study. He's waiting for us."

"Indeed?" said Browne, in astonishment. "Surely, Brother Nipper, there is some slight mistake here?"

"There's no mistake," growled Nipper.

"I will not presume to argue," said Browne gracefully. "Yet, brothers, the fact remains that Mr. Lee ventured forth in his car not five minutes ago. How, therefore, can he be waiting for you in his study?"

All the Removites looked at Browne in astonishment.

"Mr. Lee left—five minutes ago?" said Church.

"With my own eyes, I saw him!" replied Browne. "And I would remind you that my eyes are exceptionally acute. They have never been known to miss anything of importance."

"But Mr. Lee's waiting for us!" said Handforth. "He's going to give us a six-hander each!"

Browne elevated his eyebrows.

"And you are hurrying to receive this chastisement?" he inquired, in astonishment.

"We've got to hurry!" said McClure. "If we don't, we shall get three swishes extra each!"

"Alas!" sighed Browne. "These masters! Are they not exasperating? However, brothers, let me relieve your minds. Let me assure you that there is no punishment awaiting you."

"Do you know anything about this affair, Browne?" asked Nipper curiously.

"A great deal," replied Browne, with a kindly smile. "I very much fear that our mutual friend, Brother Wragg, has been grossly deceived. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he has been spoofed considerably above the eyelids."

"Spoofed!" yelled the Removites.

"In this uncertain world, it is always unwise to take everything for granted," replied Browne, nodding. "For example, here is this Brother Wragg of ours. He rings up St. Frank's, and a refined, educated voice replies. Brother Wragg immediately assumes that this refined, educated voice belongs to Brother Lee. But in that he was mistaken. He is, indeed, falling feet foremost into a colossal bloomer."

"You—you mean——" ejaculated Nipper, staring.

"Exactly!" murmured Browne. "Behold, brothers, the one who did this thing."

"But—but I don't understand!" said Handforth, in astonishment.

"Neither do I!" said one or two of the others.

"By pure chance, I happened to be in Brother Lee's study when the telephone-bell rang," said William Napoleon Browne. "I had wandered into that apartment with certain examination papers——"

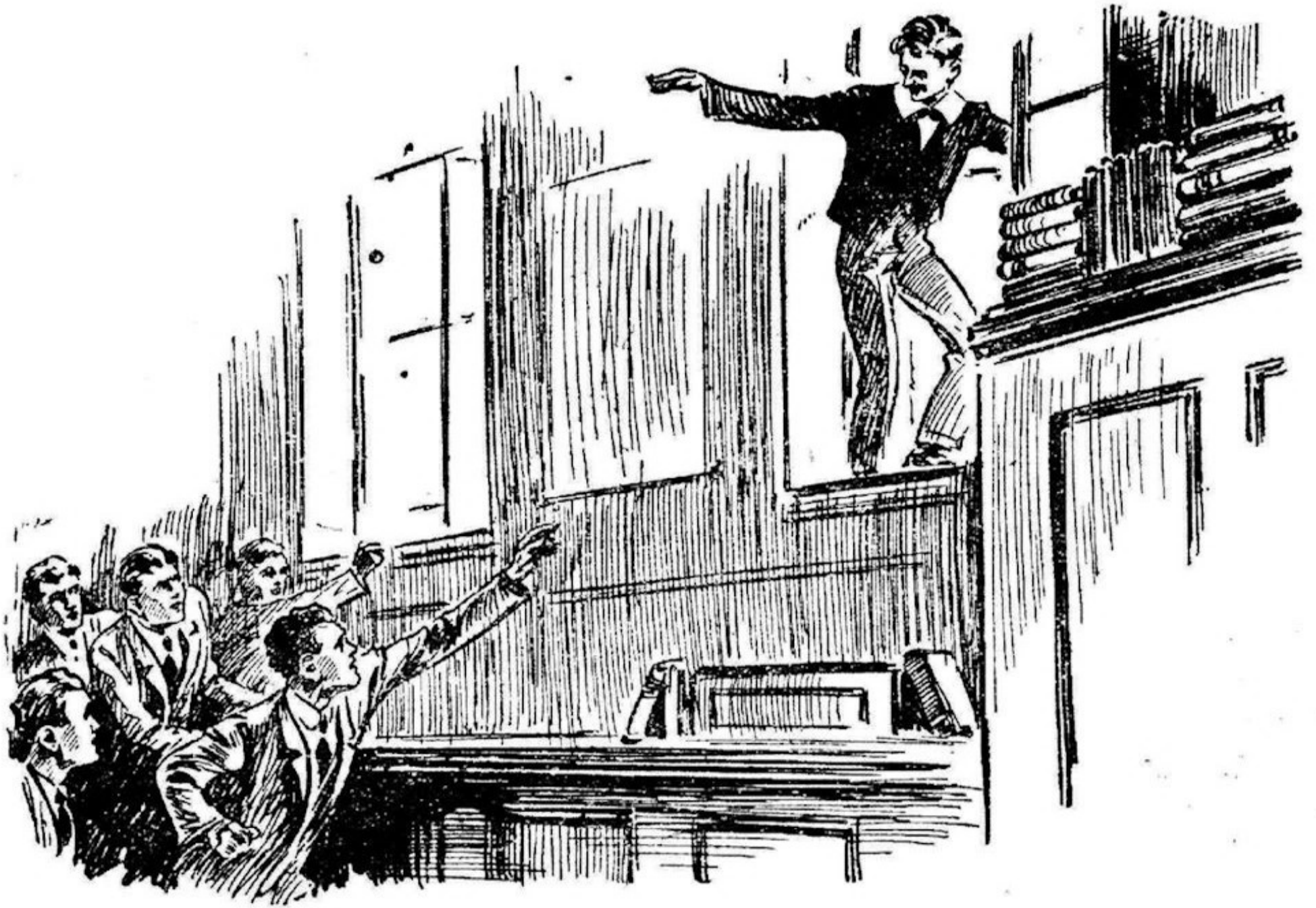
"Never mind about that!" said Nipper breathlessly. "Tell us what happened."

"Since I was the only occupant of the room, I naturally answered the telephone," said Browne calmly. "I listened with much interest to Mr. Wragg's complaint, and I rather fancy that I imitated Brother Lee's voice with consummate success. As you may know, cleverness runs very deeply in the Browne family."

"What!" yelled Handforth. "Then—then old Wragg didn't speak to Mr. Lee at all?"

"You have scored a bull's-eye, Brother Handforth," nodded Browne. "It was I who answered Mr. Wragg. Let me hasten to assure you that I am appalled at your conduct. The way in which you treated Brothers Wellborne & Co. was entirely inadequate. Why did you not rub their faces in the flower-beds while you were engaged in this excellent task? Why did you not carry them to the nearest ditch?"

"Good old Browne!" said Nipper enthusiastically. "By Jove, you chaps, we're saved!"



"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Nick Trotwood loudly, as he stepped down from the cupboard on to the window ledge. The Commoners turned round as they heard that laugh, and they saw Trotwood framed in the window. He was grinning and waving to them. "After him!" roared Brewster. "He's spoofed us again!"

"Absolutely!" chuckled Archie. "I rather think, laddies, that Browne is a priceless chappie, what?"

Their relief was enormous.

"Thanks awfully, Browne!" said Handforth heartily. "By George! You're a brick!"

"Brothers, pray do not mention it," said Browne, with a kindly smile. "Whenever the opportunity arises, you can rely upon me to remove you, with speed and vim, from the oxtail. I imagine that you were immersed in the liquid up to your necks."

"Pretty well!" grinned Nipper. "But, thanks to you, old chap, we're safe now."

Browne merely waved his hand, and strolled down the Ancient House steps.

"Kindly forget it, brothers!" he said. "And always remember that Brother Browne is with you, heart and soul. I would remind you, however, that if there are any inquiries over this matter, names need not be mentioned."

They all chuckled, and Browne went his way. The situation wasn't so bad, after all.

At all events, there was no punishment, and Nipper & Co. joined the other Removites, and there were many loud chuckles when the facts were known.

There was a particularly loud chuckle when the juniors heard about Nick Trot-

wood. Incidentally, it was decided that tea could wait for a bit.

There was something of even greater interest to be looked into!

CHAPTER 17.

Extra Lesson For the Commoners!



"SILENCE!"

Mr. Bernard Wragg rapped his desk irritably

The Commoners were in extra lesson, and they were not feeling very pleased with themselves. They were feeling still less pleased with Mr. Wragg. How he could find pleasure in keeping them here, in this Form-room, was beyond their understanding.

For one thing, it was tea-time, and Mr. Wragg presumably enjoyed his tea just as much as they enjoyed theirs. Yet he was depriving himself of this meal in order to preside over them during the detention. It struck the River House fellows that this was not merely a curious mental condition, but a doubtful one. Although, if it came to that, they had long since had their own ideas about Mr. Wragg's mental condition.

The Form-master's enjoyment took a peculiar form. He was certainly very irritable; yet, at the same time, he took a sort of vicious pleasure in visiting his irritation upon his victims. They had made him go without his tea, and so they should suffer. This appeared to be Mr. Wragg's policy.

The Commoners were lounging at their desks, pretending to work. Their books were open, and now and again their pens scratched. But they had no enthusiasm for this task. Their very presence in the Form-room seemed a gross act of injustice.

What had they done?

Nothing! At least, they had only attempted to hurl the St. Frank's invaders off the premises. And for this they were condemned.

"Let's hope he relents after a bit!" murmured Ascott hopefully. "In about an hour's time he might excuse us."

"The roof might fall in on us—but I don't think it will!" replied Brewster gruffly. "No, my sons, we're here for two hours. I know old Wragg!"

"So do I, worse luck!" grunted Ascott.

"We'll take it out of those St. Frank's chaps for this!" breathed Kingswood, from behind. "It was bad enough for them to come and smash into Wellborne's crowd, but they're the cause of us being in extra lesson—"

Crack!

Mr. Wragg's cane descended sharply across his desk with a noise like a rifle-shot.

"Cease this talking!" he commanded.

"Brewster! Kingswood! Stand up!"

The two unfortunates stood up.

"You were talking!" shouted Mr. Wragg.

"Yes, sir!" admitted the culprits.

"You will each write me fifty lines," said Mr. Wragg sourly. "Sit down, and do not let me hear any more of this chattering. You may think that I shall relent, and that I shall soon release you. If so, let me disillusion you," he added, with a certain relish. "I intend to keep you at work for the full two hours."

"Oh!" groaned the Commoners.

"Do not make that ridiculous noise!" barked Mr. Wragg. "You may as well know at once that your liberty for this evening is entirely sacrificed. When you leave this Form-room, you will go at once to call-over, and, after that, you will attend prep. Now! If there is any more talking, I shall get really angry."

The Commoners sighed, and applied themselves resignedly to their work. And Mr. Wragg, with a glance of triumph at the unfortunates, pulled a thrilling detective novel out of his drawer, and turned to the page that had a corner folded over. It was one of Mr. Wragg's weaknesses to devour melodramatic fiction in the class-room, while he was supposed to be hard at work.

When he had found his place, he adjusted his glasses, and then took another look at the Form.

"Boys!" he said loudly. "I have changed my mind. You may dismiss!"

Brewster & Co. jumped in their seats. Then, with glad cries, they threw their books down, scrambled to their feet, and prepared to make a dash for the door. They were quite bewildered by this sudden change; it was, moreover, so unlike Mr. Wragg.

As for Mr. Wragg, he sat at his desk, looking utterly blank. But as he saw what the fellows were up to, he leapt to his feet, his face red with anger.

"Sit down!" he thundered. "Boys! How dare you act in this ridiculous fashion?"

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



The Commoners halted, rooted to the floor with astonishment. What was the matter with the man? He had just told them to dismiss, and now he was countermanding the order.

"But—but you just told us to go, sir!" protested Brewster.

"I told you nothing of the sort!" roared Mr. Wragg. "Go back to your places—every one of you! What nonsense!"

The puzzled Commoners returned to their seats, and opened their books again.

Nicodemus Trotwood, safely ensconced on the top of the big cupboard, chuckled inwardly.

He had been rather uncertain about that first bit of ventriloquism. It had been more or less a test, and, apparently, it had passed muster. Nick had watched his opportunity,

and he was gratified by the result of that initial effort.

Nobody in the room had the slightest inkling that he was there. He had found it comparatively easy to climb to the top of the big cupboard, and to seek cover in the rear of some big piles of books. Crouching there at full length, Nick was able to peer between the piles, and he could see most of the Commoners. Furthermore, he could see Mr. Wragg, which was most important.

As soon as the Commoners had settled down again, Nick thought that it was time to recommence the operations. Mr. Wragg

"GOING TO THE DOGS!"

A greyhound racing track has been opened in Bannington, much to the joy of Claude Gore-Pearce & Co., the cads of Study A, and to the indignation of young Willy Handforth. Willy is a passionate lover of dogs and, wrongly or rightly, he is against greyhound racing.

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was sitting back, looking at his victims with a puzzled frown on his brow. He had distinctly heard that voice—his own voice. Yet he could have sworn that he had not uttered a word. He was rather worried about it.

"Brewster!" came Mr. Wragg's voice suddenly.

Brewster stood up.

"Yes, sir?" he replied.

"Eh? Sit down, Brewster!" said Mr. Wragg.

"But you just called me, sir."

"I did nothing of the kind," denied Mr. Wragg, with a gulp.

"But you did, sir!" insisted Brewster, staring. "And it didn't sound quite like your ordinary voice, either. It was a bit muffled, as though—"

"Sit down, Brewster!" thundered Mr. Wragg.

Brewster sat down, and all the others looked on in astonishment. Nick Trotwood, on the top of the cupboard, told himself that he would have to do better. Still, he needn't have chided himself. His imitation of Mr. Wragg's voice was startlingly good. And who could ever suspect that it was not really Mr. Wragg's voice—since it certainly appeared to come from Mr. Wragg's mouth?

"It is atrociously hot in here!" came the voice again. "Brewster! Ascott! Open all the windows!"

This time the Commoners were staggered. It was a well-known fact that Mr. Wragg revelled in stuffiness. If ever a Form-room window was opened, it was done because the heat was really oppressive; and it was turning quite chilly now, on this autumn day.

Brewster and two or three other juniors rose to their feet, and started moving towards the windows. Mr. Wragg, who had, of course, heard the order, was sitting back in his chair, dumbfounded.

"This—this is extraordinary!" he muttered, startled. "I said nothing, and yet—and yet— Oh, it is preposterous! Boys! Return to your seats!"

"But you told us to open the windows, sir!" gasped Ascott, amazed.

"I did not!" shouted Mr. Wragg. "At least, I don't think I did. And if I did, I didn't mean to! So you can leave the windows alone!"

Nick chuckled to himself again. He was getting Mr. Wragg into a fine old stew—as he had intended.

And, as yet, the game had only just commenced!



CHAPTER 18.

Off His Rocker!

MR. WRAGG was flustered and worried. He had half an idea that he, himself, had been uttering the contradictory orders. What else was there for him to think? There was certainly nobody else in the room with him—nobody, that is, near the desk. And that voice had undoubtedly come from his own mouth. Yet he could not remember having framed the words with his lips. Mr. Wragg was becoming not merely startled, but alarmed.

"Kingswood! Don't stare at me like that!" came Mr. Wragg's voice, in acid tones. "I do not like your face! It reminds me of a poached egg!"

Mr. Wragg reeled, knowing full well that he had not uttered those words. Kingswood turned red, and stood up. The rest of the Commoners chuckled.

"Here, I say, sir!" protested Kingswood.

"Sit down!" thundered Mr. Wragg's voice. "You're a silly fathead, Kingswood!"

"Wha-a-at!" babbled Kingswood.

"I—I—" Mr. Wragg paused, and it was really his own voice this time. "Boys, I—I don't think I am feeling quite well. Did—did you hear me saying anything to Kingswood a moment ago?"

"Yes, sir!" shouted the Commoners, in one voice.

"And what did I say?" asked Mr. Wragg hoarsely.

"You called him a fathead, sir," said Norton cheerfully.

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Wragg. "Kingswood, I—I must withdraw that remark. I cannot imagine what made me give utterance to it. Sit down. We'll continue with our work."

The Commoners came to the conclusion that Mr. Wragg had suddenly gone off his rocker. He was certainly acting in a very strange manner.

The Form-master sat at his desk, breathing hard. There was rather a wild light in his eyes. What was the explanation of this uncanny phenomenon? Why was it that he kept speaking, and yet had no knowledge of the words that he was about to say? Why did he not feel his vocal chords in operation? It was as though he had been stricken by some strange malady. At one moment he was normal, and the next moment he was saying things involuntarily, without the command of his will.

He shifted in his seat, and his elbow sent his books tumbling over the edge of the desk. Nick seized upon the opportunity in a flash. Crash!

The books thudded to the floor, and Mr. Wragg bent down to recover them, with a muttered exclamation of annoyance. But then came something else.

"Rats!" said Mr. Wragg's voice. "Blow the rotten books!"

Mr. Wragg sat bolt upright like a Jack-in-the-box, and the Commoners stared at him open-eyed.

"That's right!" roared Mr. Wragg's voice. "Stare at me, you young chumps! My only sainted aunt! You look like a lot of half-cooked sheep's heads!"

"Great Scott!" breathed Brewster.

"He's—he's mad!" said Ascott, in alarm.

Mr. Wragg was on his feet again, and he seemed to be fighting for breath. He had heard those words—in his own voice. He looked round, bewildered, half expecting to see somebody near him. He even peered under his desk.

Nick Trotwood was tempted to throw his voice into another corner of the room, making it appear that one of the juniors had spoken. But he checked himself. Perhaps it would be better to confine the joke to Mr. Wragg himself.

"I—I am not feeling well!" said Mr. Wragg desperately.

"You look a bit off colour, sir," remarked Littlewood, who was hoping to be released.

"I think it must be your faces!" said Mr. Wragg's voice. "They're so ugly that

— Eh?" he went on. "I—I didn't say that! This—this is appalling!"

He tried to hide his confusion, and he paced up and down in front of his desk. He convinced himself that there was nothing really the matter with him. He felt perfectly sound. His mind was quite clear, except for the bewilderment of this remarkable phenomenon. He suddenly faced the juniors.

"Get on with your work!" he said gruffly.

"Yes, sir!" said the Commoners, in disappointed tones.

"On second thoughts," came Mr. Wragg's voice, "you may dismiss!"

All the boys jumped up, and they closed their books again with a series of cannon-like bangs. Mr. Wragg leapt into the air, and gulped.

"Boys!" he gasped. "What—what are you doing?"

"You told us to dismiss, sir," said Ascott.

"I did not!" shrieked Mr. Wragg. "What is this nonsense? I did not tell you to dismiss!"

"But we heard you, sir!" roared Kingswood.

"Then you'll now hear me tell you to get on with your work!" raved Mr. Wragg wildly. "There is some trickery here! One of you boys is imitating my voice!"

"But that's impossible, sir!" protested Hal. "You're a long way from us, and you've been speaking all the time! You've been telling us—"

"Never mind what I have been telling you!" interrupted Mr. Wragg. "I'll have no more of this disturbance."

He went back to his desk, and sat down limply in the chair. As he did so a wailing squeal sounded immediately beneath him. The unfortunate master leapt to his feet.

"What—what was that?" he gasped.

"I think you sat on something, sir," said Brewster. "It sounded like a cat."

"Shall we search for the cat, sir?" asked Ascott eagerly.

"No, you will not!" hooted Mr. Wragg. "You will keep to your places!"

He looked under the chair, under the desk, but there was no sign of any animal. Yet he had certainly heard that plaintive squeal.

"Remarkable—most remarkable!" muttered Mr. Wragg, bewildered. "This is becoming positively alarming!"

He sat down again, very gingerly. This time there was no unusual sound. Mr. Wragg took out a handkerchief, and mopped his brow. But he was an obstinate man, and he had no intention of allowing his victims to escape.

Not that Nick Trotwood was discouraged.

There was still plenty of time. The Commoners had not been in detention for more than twenty minutes so far, and Nick had mentally decided to get them released within the first half-hour. So he had another ten minutes left.



CHAPTER 19.

Off To See the Fun!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH came to a sudden halt on the Ancient House steps, and stared

across the Triangle.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said blankly. "Trotwood's back!"

"What!" said Nipper. "Then he must have failed!"

"That's what comes of leaving things to these West House fatheads!" said Handforth bitterly. "Now, if I had been left behind, things would have been different. I'm a bit of a ventriloquist——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites chuckled. There were a good few of them, including Reggie Pitt and a number of other West House stalwarts. They had all decided to go back to the River House School. They weren't gated now, as they had believed, and there was no reason why they shouldn't go along and see the fun. Or, at least, if they couldn't see it, they might be able to get a word with Brewster, and explain things. If Nick Trotwood was successful, the Commoners would soon be out of detention.

But here was Trotwood in the Triangle, looking rather forlorn.

Handforth strode over to him, and grabbed him by the arm.

"Well, what about that jape?" he demanded. "I thought you were going to——"

"Really, my dear Handforth, is it necessary to be so rough?" complained Trotwood mildly. "I must request you to release your grip."

Handforth stared, and then he suddenly grinned.

"Why, it isn't Nick at all!" he said. "It's that silly ass, Corny!"

"Yes, I've just noticed it!" said Nipper, as he came up. "All right, Corny, old man. We don't want you. You can wander off where you please."

Cornelius Trotwood, Nick's twin brother, beamed benevolently upon the Removites. The Trotwood twins were as alike as two peas—in appearance. But they were alike in nothing else. For, while Nicodemus was alert and shrewd and mischievous, Cornelius was one of the mildest fellows under the sun. His innocence was sometimes pathetic.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked wonderingly. "Perhaps you can tell me where I can find my dear brother, Nicodemus?"

"Yes, we can tell you that!" grinned Handforth. "He's at the River House School."

"Indeed?" said Cornelius. "How interesting! I am much obliged to you, my dear Handforth. It is most important that I should see my dear brother without delay."

"Do you want to borrow something from him?" asked Church.

"Indeed, no," said Cornelius. "I do not approve of the habit of borrowing. But a letter has come from our parents, and there is a very important message for Nicodemus, dealing with certain articles of winter underwear."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Corny!" grinned Nipper. "That'll do later on, old son. I dare say you'll see Nick before long."

They dismissed the harmless Cornelius from their minds. But, as it happened, Nick's twin brother wandered serenely away towards the River House School. Such things as feuds did not enter into Cornelius' world. It did not occur to him that there might be danger if he appeared at the River House School alone.

"Well, are you fellows ready?" asked Reggie Pitt, after Cornelius had gone. "We're going along to see how things have progressed, aren't we? Besides, we want to get a word with Brewster, so that we can put this thing straight."

"Yes," said Nipper. "Let's be going."

Within a few minutes the Removites were ready. They included Nipper & Co., Handforth and his chums, Reggie Pitt, Travers, Fullwood, and quite a number of other prominent fellows.

"Of course, we shall have to be pretty careful," said Nipper, as they started off. "We mustn't let old Wragg spot us."

"Why not?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Why not?" repeated Nipper. "Really, my dear Watson, your mind is singularly dull this evening!"

"Ass!" said Tommy.

"Wragg believes that he rang up Mr. Lee, and that Mr. Lee swished us and gated us," said Nipper. "So if he spots us at the River House School, he'll smell a rat. Then he'll make inquiries, and the fat will be in the fire. As it is now, Wragg is probably serenely contented in the knowledge—or labouring under the delusion—that we are summarily subdued."

"Oh, well, we can go easy!" said Watson. "I suppose it would be a bit risky to let Wragg see us."

While the Remove fellows were on their way to the River House School, matters were progressing very satisfactorily in the Fourth Form-room.

At least, they were progressing satisfactorily for Nick Trotwood. Mr. Bernard Wragg did not consider that the position was satisfactory in any way. And the Commoners were so puzzled and bewildered that they hardly knew what to think.

Nick had given his victim a rest for some minutes, and Mr. Wragg had been able to recover some of his composure. As far as he knew, there was no lunacy in his family, but it was certainly disconcerting to hear himself saying all manner of outrageous things that his will had not bidden him utter.

Twenty-five minutes had elapsed since the Commoners had come in for extra lesson.

According to the usual turn of the day, it was just a little after the usual tea-time. Brewster & Co. and the other Commoners were feeling an empty void beneath their waistcoats. Tea was generally the most enjoyable meal of all, since the juniors were permitted to indulge their individual fancies. In nine cases out of ten, these individual fancies were weird and wonderful and grotesque. Still, it was quite good fun.

Extra lesson was bad enough at any time, but when it butted into the tea hour, it was a sheer outrage.

Mr. Wragg eyed his juniors cautiously, and saw, to his satisfaction, that they were settling down to work again. He leaned back in his chair, and yawned.

It was a silent yawn, but a most extraordinary sound appeared to come from Mr. Wragg's open mouth.

"Yee—ow—aaaaah!"

It was certainly a yawn—a most rude, ill-mannered yawn. Mr. Wragg sat upright with an additional gulp of his own, which only made matters worse. He found Brewster & Co. eyeing him severely.

"I—I— Well, what are you looking at?" he said hastily.

"We thought you were ill, sir!" said Ascott.

"Nonsense!" retorted Mr. Wragg. "I—I am better."

He paused for a moment, and Nick seized his chance.

"At least, I think I'm better," Mr. Wragg appeared to say. "Actually, of course, I'm off my onion."

"Wha—a—at!" gasped the Commoners.

"I am barmy!" came Mr. Wragg's voice, quite firmly. "In other words, completely up the pole!"

Mr. Wragg staggered dazedly to his feet.

"Boys—boys!" he said hoarsely. "Did—I did I address you a second ago?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Kingswood promptly.

"What—what did I say?"

"You told us that you were barmy, sir," replied Kingswood, with relish. "You said that you were up the pole."

"Good heavens!" panted Mr. Wragg. "I didn't! How dare you, Kingswood! I said nothing of the sort!"

"But—but we all heard you, sir!" put in Mann.

Mr. Wragg pressed his brow.

"You can all dismiss!" he croaked.

Once again the Commoners jumped to their feet.

"Do you mean it this time, sir?" asked Brewster cautiously.

"Mean what?" said Mr. Wragg dully.

"You just told us to dismiss, sir—"

"I did nothing of the sort!" declared Mr. Wragg. "I don't know what you are talking about, Brewster!"

"But, sir—"

"You can dismiss!" came Mr. Wragg's roaring voice. "Don't argue with me! Get out of this room at once!"

"Right you are, sir!" said half a dozen voices.

"No! Sit down!"

The Commoners were at a complete loss. And Nick Trotwood grinned happily. Mr. Wragg was now on the point of exhaustion.

"Yes, I am ill!" he said huskily. "There is no other explanation for it. Boys, you can go—I—I think I will go and lie down!"

These were his own words, and he went dizzily to the door, opened it, and passed out.

The half-hour was just up, and the Commoners were freed from their detention.

Upon the whole, Nick felt that he had done exceedingly well.



CHAPTER 20.

The Culprit!

"MAD as a hatter!" said Kingswood breathlessly.

"Poor old Wragg!"

"He'll probably

go into a lunatic asylum now!"

"He'll be carried away within the hour!"

The Commoners were all talking at once, and a number of them were crowding towards the door, in order to get off into their studies. But Hal Brewster pushed his way through them all, and placed his back against the door.

"Just a minute, you fellows!" he said grimly. "There's no hurry."

They all looked at Hal in wonder.

"But we're free!" protested Palmer.

"There's no need for us to stay here—"

"Yes, there is!" said Brewster. "We've been spoofed!"

"Spoofed!"

"Yes!" said Brewster, in an ominous voice. "We—the Commoners! I'm about the only chap who has spotted the wheeze."

"But—but you're dotty!" said Ascott, staring. "Old Wragg has gone off his rocker—"

"Old Wragg is as sane as I am!" retorted Brewster.

"Well, that's not saying much," murmured Glynn.

"As sane as I am!" roared Brewster. "And he was spoofed in just the same way.

In fact, he was spoofed most of all! And, to make matters worse, all this has been done by one of those fatheaded St. Frank's rotters! Don't you understand, my sons? We, the River House Fourth, have been japed, in our own Form-room, by a solitary St. Frank's raider! Naturally, there's got to be slaughter!"

Kingswood shook his head sadly.

"This lunacy appears to be catching!" he said. "Poor old Brewster! He's even worse than Wragg!"

Hal Brewster remained quite calm.

"One of the fellows who played that dirty trick on the Honourables was Nick Trot-

wood!" he said deliberately. "And there's not much secret about the fact that Nick Trotwood is a pretty clever ventriloquist."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You—you mean——"

"Exactly!" said Brewster. "For a St. Frank's chap, Nick isn't at all bad. He can throw his voice anywhere he likes!"

"Yes; he's spoofed us before now!" growled Ascott.

"Well, he's in this room!" said Brewster, looking round. "We can't see him, of course—but he's here! He *must* be here! And it's ten to one he's in the cupboard."

"The cheeky ass!"

"Let's rout him out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He made old Wragg say all sorts of things," continued Brewster grimly. "Naturally, we've got to collar him and reduce him to mincemeat. It's the just punishment for a St. Frank's chap who raids the River House singlehanded. For that's what it really amounts to."

"Oh, crumbs!" came Nick Trotwood's voice. "Go easy, you chaps! It's only a jape, you know!"

All the Commoners shouted at once. Brewster had been right. There was a rush to the far corner of the Form-room, where the voice had come from.

But this was merely another of Nick's pleasant little tricks. He had been making

one or two swift calculations, and he reckoned that he would easily be able to escape if he was given sufficient time.

But if the Commoners came over to the cupboard, there would not be much chance for him. So he sent them crowding off to the other corner of the room.

Then, standing up, he judged the distance from the top of the cupboard to the nearest windowsill. The windows of the Form-room were very high—so high, indeed, that none of the pupils could look out, during their work. Even the window ledges were at least six feet from the floor.

Consequently, it was only a mere step from the top of the cupboard to the ledge of the nearest window. And Nick could see that the catch was quite easy to work.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cackled loudly.

He took the step, reached the window-ledge, and opened the casement. The Commoners all swung round as they heard that laugh, and they saw Nick Trotwood framed in the window. He was grinning and waving to them.

"So long!" he chuckled. "See you later, my sons!"

"After him!" roared Brewster. "He's spoofed us again!"

"My only aunt!"

"Grab him!"

There was a rush, but it was too late.

(Continued on page 36.)

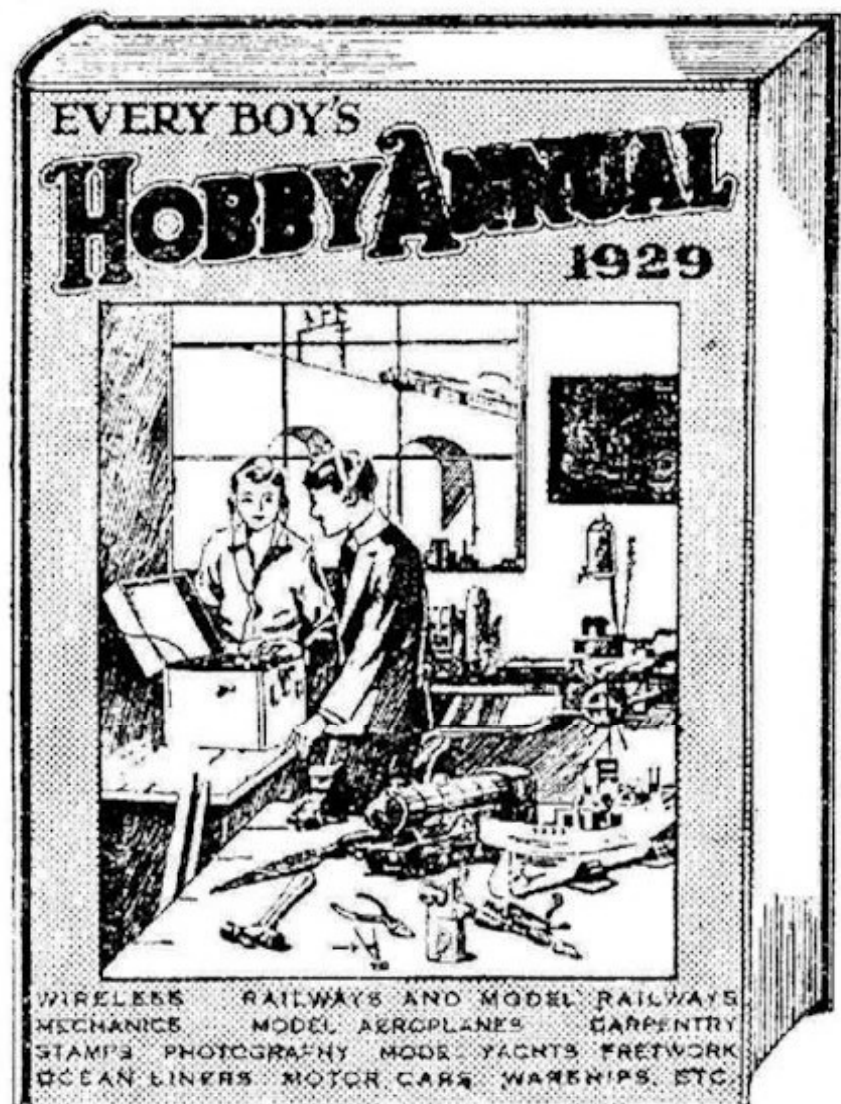
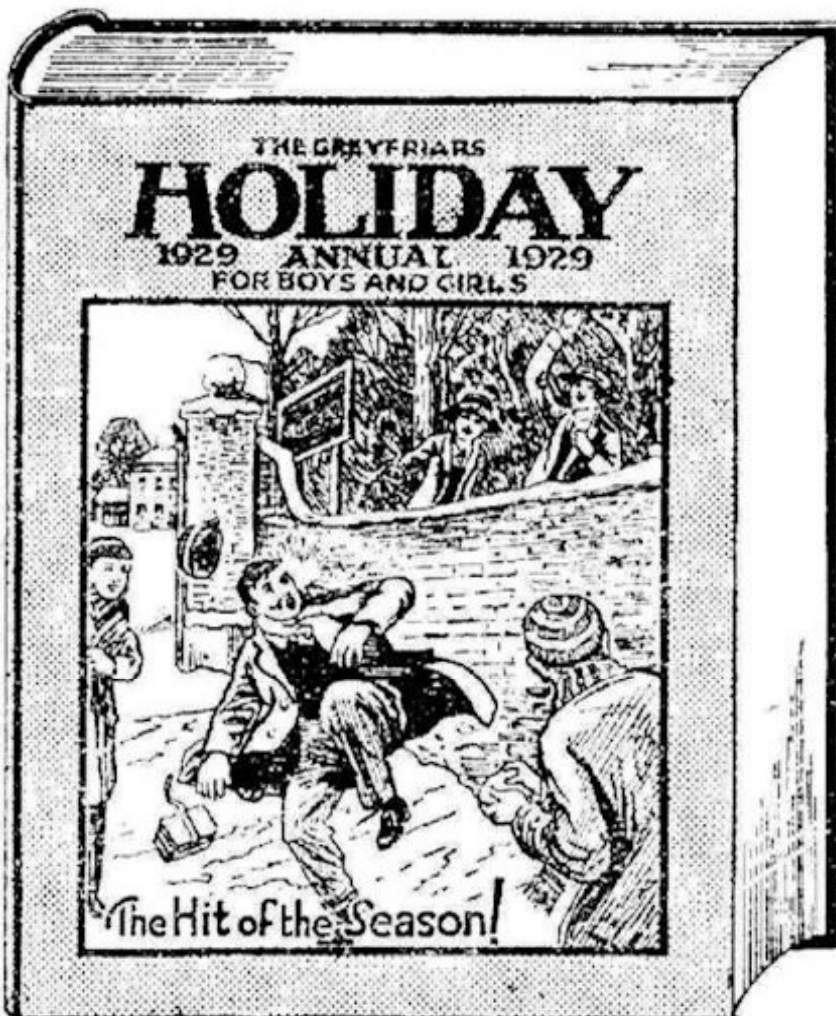
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Nick had vanished, making a flying leap through the window. He landed in the big courtyard, and he was delighted to see that nobody was in sight. He streaked off like an arrow.

Brewster & Co., shouting with indignation, rushed to the door and went pouring out. Those windows were so high that a good deal of time would be wasted if they tried to climb through; moreover, it would be a most reckless proceeding. If the Head happened to spot them, it would mean trouble.

They went pouring out into the passage, and then through the main hall and out of the big entrance. It had been bad enough for this solitary St. Frank's junior to spoof them in the form-room, but it was far worse for him coolly to escape.

"There he is!" yelled Ascott excitedly.

"Hurrah!"

The Commoners were somewhat astonished. Nick Trotwood was apparently in no hurry; he was wandering about aimlessly, and, indeed, as he heard the shouts, he turned and actually came towards the juniors.

Brewster & Co. were far too excited to realise that this figure was not Nick Trotwood at all—but his twin brother, Cornelius. Even if they hadn't been excited, it is doubtful if they would have detected any difference. For both the Trotwoods were attired in Etons, and they looked amazingly alike.

"Ah, my dear fellows—" began Corny. "I was just looking for somebody—"

It was evident that he had found somebody. He was bowled over, and it seemed to him that an earthquake had happened. He went flat on his back, and about eight or nine River House juniors swarmed over him.

"Now!" gasped Hal Brewster. "You rotter! We've got you!"

"Really, my dear Brewster!" gurgled Cornelius. "This—this is most unseemly! Where am I? What has happened? Why are you treating me so roughly and so brutally?"

"Drag him to his feet!" said Brewster grimly. "He's spoofing again! He's pretending to be innocent! But by Jove, we'll show him something!"

"What about showing him the ditch?" suggested Pringle.

"We'll do more than show it to him!" nodded Brewster. "After this rain, it'll be nicely full. Come on! We don't want to waste any time over a job like this!"

They didn't give themselves time to think; or, perhaps, they might have guessed, from the prisoner's way of speaking, that he was Cornelius. But they had seen Nick escape from the window, and they had rushed out to the courtyard—to find Cornelius there. The mistake was not unforgivable.

The startled Cornelius was dragged away like a lamb to the slaughter. His protests were ignored.

"Just a minute!" said Brewster. "We'll be on the safe side!"

He whipped out Cornelius' own handkerchief, and then bound it round the unfortu-

nate junior's mouth. It made an excellent gag.

"Now then, my son!" grinned Brewster. "That's bottled you up, hasn't it? Now try to ventriloquise!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll have his work cut out!" laughed Ascott.

Cornelius was whirled away, and within a few moments the ditch was reached. It was a big one, bordering the further side of the courtyard, beyond the dividing hedge.

"Now, all together!" said Brewster crisply. "Got him? Good! One—two—"

Cornelius was swung through the air, and his plight was an unenviable one.

"Stop!"

The voice came from behind the Commoners—the stern, cold voice of Dr. Molyneux Hogge, the Head!



CHAPTER 21.

All Serene!

BREWSTER & CO. released their hold of Cornelius so abruptly that the unfortunate St. Frank's junior bumped to the ground with fearful force.

"What is all this unseemly noise?" demanded Dr. Hogge angrily. "I am amazed! Every boy here will stand perfectly still!"

Brewster & Co. gulped, and turned round to face the Head.

But the Head wasn't there!

"Why, what the— How the—" began Hal Brewster.

"Dished again, my sons!" grinned Nick Trotwood, appearing from behind a neighbouring bush.

There was a tremendous roar.

"Then—then the Head isn't here?" gasped Kingswood.

"And now there are two of 'em!" said Ascott dazedly. "Oh, my hat! I think we're all going dotty!"

"Rats!" said Nick, as he came coolly forward. "You all know jolly well that this is my twin brother, Corny. What's the idea of mauling him about like this?"

"We thought he was you!" said Brewster, breathing hard.

"Well, I only just saved him in time," said Nick. "It's a pity you couldn't make certain before you tried to duck him in the ditch."

He bent over Cornelius, released the handkerchief, and helped him to his feet.

"My dear Nicodemus, this is most distressing!" murmured Corny. "I have been most roughly treated—"

"That's all right, old son!" said Nick. "You'll get over it."

Hal Brewster recovered his composure.

"Well, it was jolly decent of you to save

your brother, my son—but you've delivered yourself into the hands of the enemy!" he said pleasantly. "I suppose you know that you're surrounded? And I suppose you know that we're going to grab you, and chuck you into that ditch?"

"I don't know anything of the sort," replied Nicodemus. "Is this what you call gratitude?"

"Gratitude!" echoed the Commoners.

"Yes, gratitude!" said Nicodemus severely. "I'm surprised at you! I do you a friendly service, and you want to chuck me in the ditch for it!"

"A—a friendly service!" stuttered Brewster. "But, you rotter, you spoofed us——"

"I spoofed old Wragg!" replied Nick coolly. "If it hadn't been for me, you would have been stewing in extra lesson for a couple of hours!"

"By Jove! That's true!" admitted Brewster, with a start.

"You were out of the Form-room in half an hour, and during that time you thoroughly enjoyed yourselves!" went on Nick indignantly. "Now you're talking about slaughtering me! They say that it's an unjust world, but——"

"All right, my son—you win!" grinned Brewster. "Of course he does, you chaps!" he added, turning to the other Commoners. "Why didn't we think of this before? Nick Trotwood has saved us!"

Then, to make matters thoroughly cheery and bright, Nipper & Co. appeared.

They seemed to materialise from the surrounding hedges and bushes, and they surrounded the Commoners before any of the latter could prepare themselves for a scrap.

"Look out!" gasped Ascott. "We're raided again!"

"Pax!" said Nipper, grinning.

"Pax be dashed!" roared Handforth. "Now we've got the chance, we'll smash these River House fatheads——"

"Cheese it, Handy!" said Nipper. "This is a time for general explanations—not for battle."

"Well, I don't agree with it!" said Handforth gruffly.

"Sorry, old man, but, whether you agree or not, it's pax!" said Nipper. "It's a friendly call, Brewster."

Hal Brewster frowned.

"I'm not so sure that I want to be friendly!" he said bluntly. "I don't like the way you fellows piled in here during our absence, and it was pretty rotten the way you went for those Honourables. They're not in the feud at all——"

"Just a minute!" said Nipper. "You're inclined to be hasty, Hal, my son."

Without further ado, he explained exactly

why the picked force of Removites had come to the River House School. The Commoners listened in amazement and consternation when they heard of the cellar episode during the thunderstorm, and their consternation turned to anger when it was revealed that the tricksters had attempted to fix the blame on them—the Commoners.

"Of course, when we found that Wellborne & Co. were at the bottom of it all, we could have kicked ourselves," said Nipper. "We might have guessed it all along. Naturally, we went for them bald-headed, and——"

"I rather think that's enough, old man!" said Brewster quietly. "The trouble is, you didn't give them half what they deserved!"

"But—but this is serious!" protested Ascott. "The Head ought to be told—and blow sneaking! Those cads might have killed the lot of you! It was a criminal thing to bottle you up in that cellar——"

"It wasn't criminal, Ascott, old scout," interrupted Nipper. "It was just vindictive. We're quite certain that Wellborne & Co. had no idea that the cellar would get flooded. We've decided that the best thing we can do is to forget it."

"Well, that's jolly sporting of you," said Brewster.

"And I rather think we had better forget this little feud of ours, too," said Nipper, with a grin. "Life is rather too strenuous like this, and there's a lot of football coming along. How about crying quits?"

"Honours even, eh?" said Brewster promptly.

"You took the words out of my mouth," said Nipper, nodding.

"Rot!" burst out Handforth. "What's all this piffle about crying quits? I've got all sorts of ideas for big japes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was pushed aside, and nobody listened to him. The St. Frank's fellows and the River House juniors were equally satisfied at the arrangement. Rivalry was all very well, and a jape now and again was a fine thing to keep the rivalry alive.

It was agreed, in fact, that there should be a jape occasionally. But it was far better to call "Honours Even" now, and settle down to normal life.

So the whole thing was brought to a very satisfactory end, and Brewster & Co. insisted upon entertaining their St. Frank's rivals on the spot.

The day had been a rather sensational one, and it had contained its perils and its excitements. But now the feud was over, and in Hal Brewster's own words, everything was all serene.

THE END.

(And that's the end of that series, chums. Jolly fine set of yarns, too, weren't they? But wait until you read the new series which starts next week with the yarn entitled "Going to the Dogs!" You can take your Editor's word for it that Edwy Searles Brooks has delivered the real "goods" again! And in response to requests from many, many readers Willy Handforth plays a prominent part in these stories. Make sure you order next Wednesday's NELSON LEE in advance—there's sure to be a great demand for it.)



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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.



H. MUNCASTER

YOU mustn't take things for granted—O. M. P. (Liverpool). You may think that there were many points of general interest in your previous letter, but I may have a different opinion. In fact, if there *had* been any such points, I should have replied to them. The mere fact that it contained one or two complaints would certainly not deter me. Rather the other way about. With regard to your hint that I "plug" everything British, I would remind you that I don't run down other nationalities while so doing. But so many British people make a general habit of running down everything British (including our weather, which is the best in the world) that I may sometimes be extra emphatic in the other direction. Other nationalities may beat us in certain ways; but, taking Britain and the British altogether, I think they easily come out on top. And when I say "British" I naturally include all our Dominions and the whole Empire. And I believe I should say the very same even if I wasn't British myself. Don't forget, O. M. P., that the British Empire is the greatest in the world's history.

AN ANNOUNCEMENT
of interest concerning your favourite author, Edwy Searles Brooks, appears on PAGE 13.
—ED.

Thanks for that little sketch map of yours—D. C. Fitzjohn (Norwich). I quite agree with you. As a matter of fact, I realised—when it was too late—that I had got things a bit mixed. But I don't think it matters much, does it? Yes, I know Suffolk very well indeed—almost as well as I know Essex and Norfolk. I'm an East Anglian myself, so it would be a pity if I *didn't* know these counties. I'm not going to say they're the best in England, because, if I did, I might get hosts of letters from indignant readers in Shropshire and Somerset and Lancashire and goodness knows where else. England is all right all over, so we'll let it go at that. After all, each county has its own particular attractions. It is only rash people who say that *their* county is the best. And he is

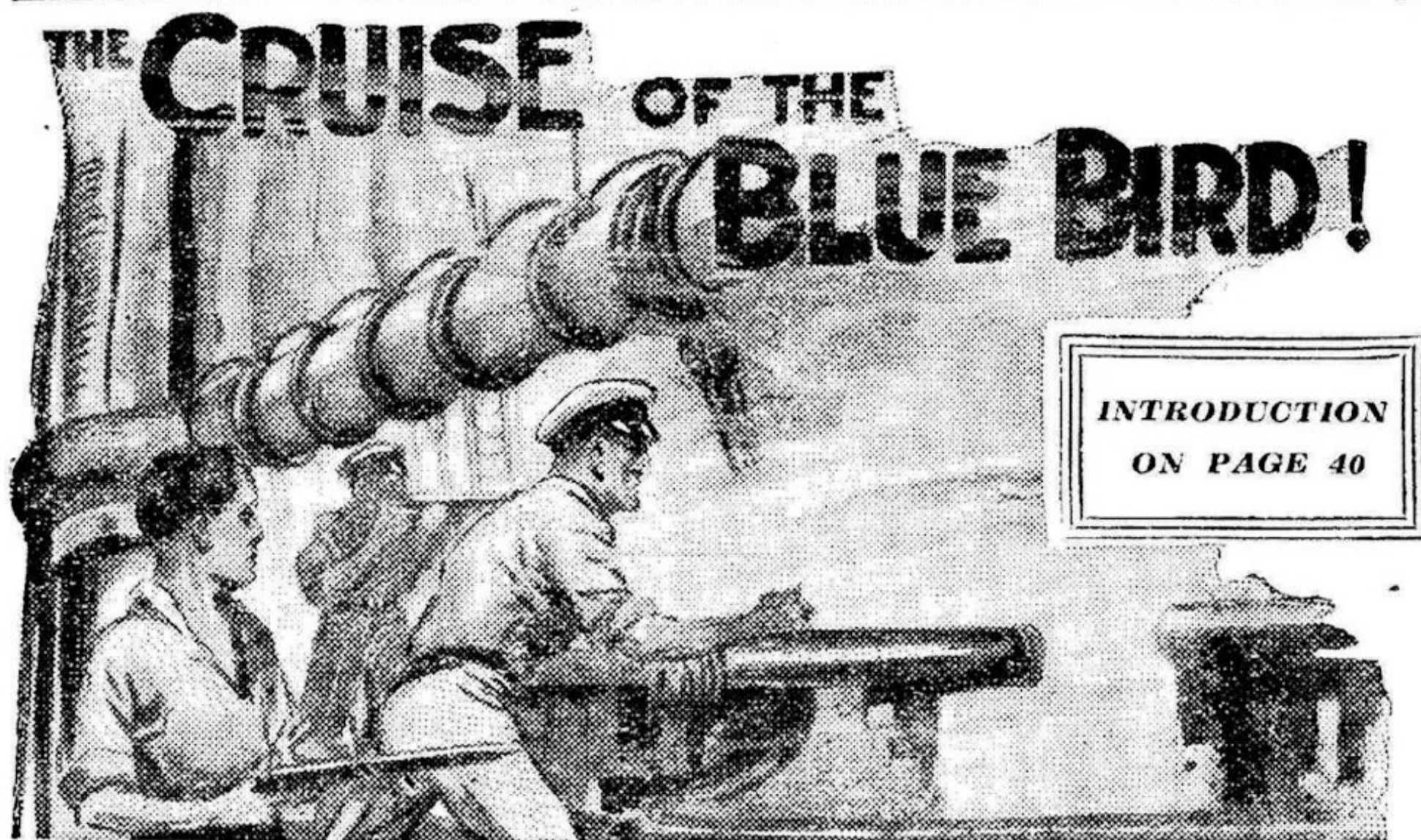
doubly rash if he puts himself into print with such a statement!

Nipper's little dog, Boz, is still as frisky as ever—George S. Hunnable (Mistley)—and he is still at St. Frank's. But, naturally, I don't mention him in the stories unless there is a special reason for doing so. In just the same way, a dozen stories might come out without a single mention of Mr. Stockdale or Josh Cuttle or Jerry Dodd's pony, Bud. But they're there all the time, and you must take their presence for granted. Yes, I'd like to see that painting of a dog that you have perpetrated. You said you'd send it along, but it hasn't arrived yet. And thanks, also, for your weekly letters. Keep it up, old man! I'll bet you'll get tired before I shall.

Your question about the League Application Forms—P. Raghavendra Bhat (Calicut, India)—is really one for the Editor. But I may as well answer

it. There is really no need for the Forms to appear every week; but you will find that they are published occasionally. I am expecting to get some criticism from you regarding my India series; but as I haven't touched your own particular part of that great country perhaps I shall be excused. However, if I have made any mistakes, please buck up and write to me about them. You know, we can sometimes only correct our mistakes by having them pointed out to us. If they're *not* pointed out, we are liable to go serenely through life, thinking that we are right.

THIS FINE SERIAL GETS MORE AND MORE EXCITING EACH WEEK!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

Mr. Sinclair, the mate, may be a prisoner on board the Blue Bird, which is now in the hands of the scoundrelly French convicts, but, for all that, he finds ways and means of helping Captain Manby, who is making preparations to recapture the schooner.

The Prisoner!

MR. SINCLAIR was a man of varied experiences. He had been afloat since early boyhood, had been twice wrecked, had once made a three-weeks' voyage in an open boat with two other survivors of a storm, one of whom had gone mad and jumped overboard, to be taken by a shark before his eyes. He had served in a destroyer during the Great War, and had come through with only a flesh wound, though he had been in a score of fights, big and little, with good luck and bad.

But perhaps the worst of all his experiences was coming to his senses in the hold of the Blue Bird, after he had been knocked out by a treacherous blow from behind, and realising exactly what had happened to the ship.

He was absolutely helpless, for he had been tied up expertly, but the sound of firing on the deck and the howls of the convicts gave him some notion of what was going on. He heard the thundering roar of the signal cannon, the crackling of the

rifles of Manby and his men, the captain's voice, then the crashing explosion of the dynamite cartridge and the triumphant yells of the convicts as the attacking boat retreated.

He was, of course, so far, ignorant of what these Frenchmen really were, but that was not for long. Benoist came down into the hold with a couple of men, and he was taken on deck and into the deck cabin. Benoist no longer troubled to look benevolent and simple. His face had fallen back into the crafty, implacable expression of a man who was in truth only better than a tiger because he had infinitely more cunning.

"What does all this mean?" cried Sinclair. "You're a pirate, are you? I might have known it."

"You will be civil, you hound!" snarled Benoist, and hit him over the mouth. "Yes, I am a pirate. You may know now what we are. We were all going to Noumea, to spend our lives there, but we had good fortune. We mutinied in a storm and killed everybody on the ship. She was wrecked here, but that had its good side

since now we are going away in your ship, with all the fine shells and the pearls which you have been good enough to gather for us. We shall be rich for life. And if you are but wise, you shall have your share. You shall navigate the ship for us, and you shall have enough to make you rich."

A hot reply rose to Sinclair's lips, but stayed there. To refuse outright would simply mean death, without bringing any advantage to Captain Manby. Moreover, as these men were no sailors, they would in all probability lose the ship, and with it the last chance of restoring the captain's fortunes. But once in charge of the vessel, he could sail into frequented waters, perhaps within reach of a war vessel, which would promptly capture the whole gang. He knew that Benoist was lying and that he would be murdered as soon as he had done his part, but there was always a sporting chance that something might turn up to help him. With an effort, he curbed his tongue.

"So that's the game, is it?" he replied. "Well, I'm on, if you'll make my share a good one. There's enough for all, so you needn't be stingy about it."

"You are a wise man. You shall have a share, half what I take myself, eh? I take the biggest, so it will not be a small one for you."

"Very well. D'you want to take the ship out now?"

"No. We need water. And there is a bit of dirty weather. We will wait a bit. And you, my friend, you shall wait here. I will not put you to a great temptation. When we are outside, then you shall be let loose."

So all day and all the following night Sinclair had lain in bonds. Food and drink were brought to him, but he was not loosed, while a man kept watch over him to see that he didn't succeed in freeing himself.

Morning came, and with it the seaplane. He heard the roar of the motor and identified the sound, heard the excited cries of the convicts, the patter of feet, Benoist's voice giving orders, then the sudden crack of a rifle, a grunt and the fall of Benoist, as Ned's bullet crashed through his head. There followed more firing, more yelling.

And then he heard the thudding of the schooner's motor, the clatter of the winch and the rattle of the chain cable, and felt the vessel under way. He clawed and rolled out of the berth in which he had lain, managed to get upon his legs and, leaning against the table, shuffled on bound feet to the port, in time to see that the schooner was being taken through the lagoon gateway out to sea.

Then a heave of the ship, as she met the first of the waves, threw him down. He heard the shooting that accompanied Manby's pursuit—indeed, a bullet thudded against the cabin wall—but it quickly ceased and he guessed the reason. The sea outside was running too heavily to allow a boat to get alongside easily.

Presently a man came into the cabin. His head was bound with a bloodstained bandage, and he carried a knife. For a moment, Sinclair thought that his last moment had come, and that he was to be murdered in cold blood. Instead, the man bent over him and cut his fastenings.

"You sail sheep," he said. "Tak' 'way. No treck, or you shotted."

"Right you are!" growled Sinclair. "But where's Benoist?"

"He deaded. I captain."

"Then there's one scoundrel the less," thought Sinclair, as he got upon hands and knees and attempted to rise to his feet.

But his legs were numbed with long inaction and the pressure of the ropes that had bound them, and for a few minutes he had to sit rubbing them. Then he shuffled out and, holding on to the cabin door jamb, surveyed the deck.

He growled disgustedly. There were sacks filled with shell piled against the rails astern and on the quarters. Bullets had penetrated some of these, and there was a litter of broken shell upon the planking. Also, there were bloodstains where two men lay upon their faces beside the signal gun, just as they had fallen during the attack on the previous day. A third was crouched against a sack, a dreadful grin on his dead face, while just abaft the cabin door lay the body of the originator of the whole dastardly scheme—Papa Benoist himself.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is bound for the Malea atolls, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and his nephew

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys.

From a native Captain Manby has learned that in these atolls is an uncharted island—supposed to be practically inaccessible—the lagoon of which is full of pearl shell. The captain is successful in finding this unknown island; and to his surprise discovers that it is inhabited by a number of French castaways. At first they are 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, and Mr. Sinclair, the mate, is made a prisoner. Two friends of the captain's named Trotter and Coombes arrive in a seaplane. The 'plane gets damaged, and they set about repairing it. In the meantime the volcano on the island is in a state of eruption. At last the seaplane is repaired, and the two airmen, with Captain Manby and Jack, set out in it to try and recapture the Blue Bird, which is now sailing among the reefs off the island.

(Now read on.)

Mr. Sinclair's spirits rose at the sight. With their leader gone, these villains would be easier to deal with. Meantime, he would take care of the ship. He strode to the wheel, took it from the man who was steering.

"Get aloft and keep an eye open for reefs," he ordered.

The man shook his head. The fellow who had brought Sinclair from the cabin understood, however, and translated; and, very unwillingly, with many a scowl and grunt, he man went aloft clumsily.

So far there was little need for his services, however, the sea being fairly clear near the island and stretching for some miles in the direction from which the schooner had come to the island.

"The circus'll start when we get right out into the middle of the stoneyard," thought Sinclair. "But that's just where I'll get the chance to waste a bit of time. I wonder what became of the seaplane and the boys in her? If they could only come after us in that, these blighters would sing small. Gosh, I might even have a chance of getting 'em all below! I say, you, why don't you clear decks a bit? You'll have those sacks sliding about all over the ship. And fasten up that gun, or it'll be taking charge and smashing things."

The man understood this as much from Sinclair's nods and gestures as from the words. He shouted to some of the gang, who were rummaging about in the fo'cs'le. They came aft, and in the most callous manner possible, disposed of the dead men by shoving them over the rail. Papa Benoist, the last to go, went over to the accompaniment of laughter. Evidently, though he had been obeyed, he hadn't been loved.

The gun was secured, the sacks of shell tipped into the hold. And that reminded Sinclair of the unsecured cargo below. If the squall continued or strengthened into a gale, the ship would be in peril. If the shell started to shift, it might easily put the schooner on her beam ends, or, at the very least, so spoil her trim that she would not obey the helm.

But, fortunately, the wind showed signs of moderating. Later in the day, Sinclair entrusted the helm to a man who seemed



A shutter that closed a barred ventilator over the door slipped back, and Sinclair let drive a pistol bullet that clipped the Frenchman's ear. Durand sprang back with an oath.

to understand a little about seamanship, and, going aloft, shook out the fore top-sail and got the jib set by dint of a lot of bawling and signs. Then he had the motor stopped.

"We must keep it for later on," he explained.

Under sail, he spent the remainder of the day in making short tacks which took the schooner very little farther from the island. By night the wind had fallen away almost to a calm, and Sinclair turned into the captain's cabin with the assurance that nothing could go wrong during the night, since he had plenty of sea-room.

"But to-morrow those ducks will start wanting to know why we aren't getting on," he thought. "But mebbe if the calm holds the captain will have another try. And I'll be here to help him."

The cabin hadn't so far been searched. Seizing his chance while he was alone, Sinclair opened a locker and took out Manby's automatic and some clips of cartridges. He bound the weapon under his left arm, where his coat would conceal it, and felt a good deal happier. If the worst came to the worst he could at least sell his life at a high rate!

The Ship of Death!

AS Sinclair had anticipated, there was a good deal of clamour next morning when the gang discovered that they were still in sight of the island, in spite of all the sailing of the previous after-

noon. They wanted to get on, to get away. Sinclair got out the chart which he and Manby had made when coming in, and made them understand that it wasn't all plain sailing, and that they must save petrol for the time when they were amidst the tangle of reefs further on. His reasoning seemed to carry conviction, the more so as the men now saw the beginnings of the eruption which was giving Captain Manby so much anxiety.

Soon the peak of the volcano was blotted out in smoke, and the convicts capered about in the belief that the whole island was doomed. Then the smoke pall was creeping across the sea, and presently the Blue Bird was enveloped in it. No more argument was necessary. Even the stupidest of the gang could understand that progress was impossible till it should clear.

There was one way in which to pass the time. They could indulge in a feast. Already they had sampled the contents of the store-room. Now they prepared for a really square meal. Two of them invaded Ah Moy's galley, and soon savoury smells crept about the deck, prevailing above the sulphurous stench of the smoke, while others discovered the ship's small store of rum and dealt out rations all round.

Sinclair hoped that they might all get drunk, in which case he would soon have had them all in irons, or tied up; but the man who spoke English—whose name was Durand—had seen the danger and prevented it by locking the spirits up and standing guard over the locker.

Durand, too, and three others whom he picked out, remained aft beside Sinclair, watching him keenly. They all five fed together on a tin of beef and some ship's biscuit, washed down with water.

The Frenchmen talked together. Evidently they were making plans for the future. Once Durand spoke to Sinclair.

"Thees sheep go Sud Amerique," he said. "You can tak'?"

"Yes, I can take her there," replied Sinclair. "Only we'll have to put in for provisions and water somewhere. Some small island where they won't ask questions—eh? And I'm to have my share, remember!"

Durand smiled enigmatically, and nodded, but said no more.

"That fellow means to do me in as soon as he thinks he can manage without me," thought Sinclair. "Well, we'll see about that, my buckoo!"

The feast proceeded with a lot of noise. The men squatted around the galley, gobbling up the food passed out to them. They ate greedily. After a while they began to grow drowsy.

By this time the sky was black as night, though it was but mid afternoon. It was dead calm. Occasionally the ship heaved to a long swell, but most of the day she merely rocked gently. Sinclair was puzzled, how-

ever, by sundry strange sounds like the breaking of wavelets upon rocks; strange because there had been no reefs within miles when the smoke came down and blotted out sky and sea, and there was no current strong enough to have drifted the ship far.

He had had sail taken off the schooner when the calm came. There was, therefore, nothing to account for the plash of waters close aboard. He went forward, picking his way amongst the revellers, who were mostly asleep now, and heaved the lead from the bows. It marked only five fathoms, yet he had expected at least twenty. He called Durand. Together they let go and stoppered the anchor.

"I can't understand it," said the mate. "We should be in deep water, but we aren't. And don't you hear surf?"

"Leetle noise of water break, yess. Over dere. An' dere," agreed the Frenchman. "We are among rock—eh?"

"It seems like it, though I can't account for it. I'm going to turn in. We can do nothing till the smoke clears. I should think they are having a bad time on the island?"

Durand nodded, and grinned mockingly at Sinclair's back as they went aft. The men lying on the deck were stirring uneasily. One of them began to howl as though with intolerable pain. A second, then a third joined in with groans. Durand sneered. He had no sympathy with the gluttons. He set one of his fellows on watch, and went below with the others. Sinclair went into the captain's cabin, secured the door and the ports, and was soon asleep, despite the noises from the men on deck.

He awoke with the first light, opened the door and peered out. The smoke was gone, and he could see the sea about the ship. He rubbed his eyes. When the pall had fallen upon them the schooner had floated in open water with never a reef in sight for miles. Now she lay almost surrounded with weed-covered rocks, newly thrust up from the depths, covered with zoophytes and jelly-fish, weeds and a multitude of bewildered small crabs.

"Well, I'm hanged! It's that blamed eruption, I suppose!" muttered Sinclair. "We're in a pretty pickle. Perhaps there's a way out through that mess, but I don't see it from here. Eh? What is it?"

Durand had glided to his side and touched his arm, pointing forward. The revellers of overnight still lay as they had lain, in odd, contorted attitudes—and they lay very still. They were dead!

Sinclair gaped at them foolishly for a moment. He couldn't understand. Durand's face, pale under the tan, grew suddenly red. He leaped back to the rail where leaned a rifle, shouting something to the three men who had not partaken of the feast. A rifle crashed from aft, a bullet whizzed past Sinclair's cheek. That woke him from his

(Continued on page 44.)



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.

Concerning Edwy Searles Brooks!

BY the time you read this Chat, I expect all of you have seen the announcement on page 13 to the effect that Edwy Searles Brooks is, from now on, writing the stories about the Blue Crusaders in the "Boys' Realm," and so, therefore, I do not propose to say much more about the subject.

Week in and week out I receive letters from readers who enthusiastically declare that Edwy Searles Brooks is their favourite author, and that they would buy any book which contained stories written by him. I don't blame them! Well, now they'll have a chance to prove their words.

The "Boys' Realm," I can assure all my chums, is a ripping paper, and in addition to the stunning story by Mr. Brooks, contains many other fine sporting features. Toddle round to your newsagent now and get a copy; this week's issue is on sale today.

Road Manners!

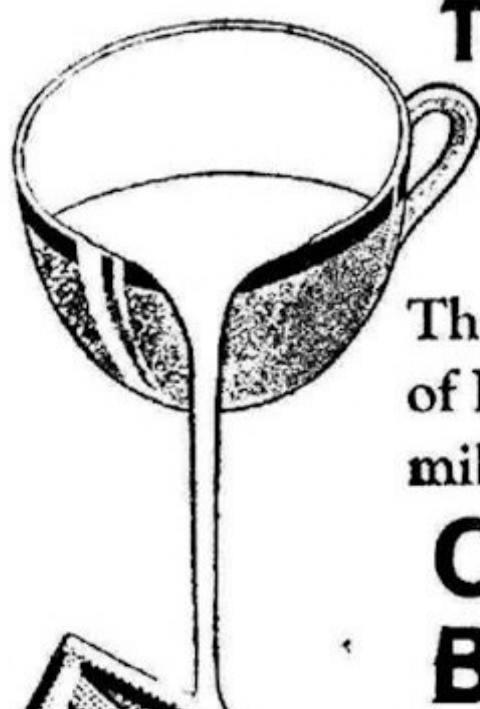
We have had a lot of talk of late about the hard luck of the cyclist on the road, chivvied about from pillar to post by raging motor-cars, and all that sort of thing. But judging from the experience of an ardent pedal cyclist (likewise a keen reader of the N.L.L.) who writes from Tarporley, things are not as plaguey bad as has been made out.

There are hogs on the road, but an infinitely greater number of considerate drivers, who treat the cyclist fairly enough. It is so easy to abuse folks, and though hard words break no bones, they do somehow leave an unpleasant feeling behind them. You can't expect a lot of overdone courtesy on the road with its whirl of ceaseless traffic. On the new arterial highways the pace is killing enough, but even here it is often the slow-moving vehicle which brings about the accidents. If everybody were kept busy saying "Nicely, thanks," and "If you don't mind, please," etc., we should never get on.

But here's a bit of news straight from one who knows. "I have been all over mid

and southern England during the last year, and never once have I met with other than fair play from motorists." Like my chum at Tarporley, I have been up and down the country a good deal on the ordinary bike, and only once did I run the risk of being cut off, and that was at a nasty turn at the Marlborough side of Savernake Forest, where a constant worry from summer flies put me off my guard. Take things all in all, there has been a deal too much condemnation of the motorist and his scornful treatment of the biker, and, anyway, this season we all know there have been more bikes on the road than ever.

ATHLETES TRAIN ON IT



There is half a cup
of English full cream
milk in every

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THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD!

(Continued from page 42.)

stupor. Abruptly he perceived that he was being held accountable for the death of these men, that Durand and the others meant to kill him in revenge.

Durand had grabbed the rifle, he was turning, raising it to his shoulder. Sinclair ducked, dived back into the cabin and slammed the heavy door just as a bullet smashed into it.

He was safe for the moment. When the schooner had been built, Captain Manby had had this cabin reinforced with steel sheeting between teak panels. He had proposed to trade with far-off islands where the savage inhabitants sometimes tried to rush ships. He had it in mind that this cabin would be a refuge in such an emergency, a citadel where the crew might defend themselves. Never till now had it been needed.

An axe thundered on the door. The outer panel of teak split, revealing the steel beneath, and Durand desisted. A shutter that closed a barred ventilator over the door

slipped back inside, and Sinclair let drive a pistol bullet that clipped the Frenchman's ear. Durand sprang back out of line with an oath, and, picking up his rifle, fired it at Sinclair's head as it showed in the ventilator slit. He was a fraction too late. The mate, guessing his intentions, had slipped back the shutter and ducked. The bullet passed through the shutter and sped harmlessly across the cabin to embed itself in the wall. Durand, with an oath, fired again, this time at one of the ports. The thick, toughened glass was starred on the surface, but held.

And then, as the report died away, there came another sound—the drumming hum of a plane! Durand turned, saw it, and knew that retribution was upon him. Spluttering oaths, he dived below. At least, he would baulk the hated English of their spoils!

(Captain Manby has arrived, all right, but even now it seems that there is a possibility of the scoundrelly Frenchman triumphing. Next week's grand instalment is as exciting as ever, boys, so don't miss it.)

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Ellis Gregg, Glantawe Chambers, 41, Wind Street, Swansea, wishes to hear from St. Frank's League Member No. 1.

Frederick G. Parker, 6, Glamville Road, Strood, Kent, would like to correspond with readers in Australia, and on the Continent.



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