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PLAYING THE PROFESSIONALS!

An exciting incident from the magnificent long complete schoolboy football and adventure yarn inside, featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's,

New Series No. 129.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 20th, 1928.



The bookmaker bent down and snatched up the greyhound, causing the animal to whimper with pain. "You brute!" shouted Willy Handforth passionately, and threw himself upon Mr. Brice. The man whirled his fist round. Crash! Willy caught the blow on the side of the head, and he reeled over, half stunned.

Football Thrills and Schoolboy Fun!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

The St. Frank's Junior Eleven v. Bannington Town Reserves! On the surface the thing would seem to be farcical, for what chance do a team of schoolboys stand against a team of professional footballers? But Nipper & Co. are far from being duffers; and they possess lots of determination and enthusiasm.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

An Important Fixture!

"TO-DAY," said John Busterfield Boots, "is Tuesday!"

"Go hon!" remarked Bray.

"Wonderful!" said Denny.

The chums of Study No. 6, in the Modern House at St. Frank's, were standing in the lobby. Afternoon lessons were just over, and Boots was looking particularly energetic.

At all times he was a forceful sort of fellow, although of late the Fourth Form had been more or less in the background. The doings of the redoubtable Remove had claimed most attention, and Buster Boots, who was the skipper of the Fourth, felt that this was all wrong.

"To-day," repeated Boots, "is Tuesday."

"You silly ass——"

"And to-morrow," continued Boots steadily, "is Wednesday."

Percy Bray and Walter Denny looked at him in wonder.

"How do you do it, Boots, old man?" asked Bray admiringly. "What a brain you must have beneath that ginger crop of yours——"

"You leave my hair alone!" interrupted Boots gruffly. "It's like your nerve to say I'm ginger——"

"Ahem! Sorry!" said Bray solemnly. "I meant to say auburn!"

"All right, then," said Boots, mollified. "We'll drop the subject."

He did not observe the wink that passed between his two study-mates. Buster Boots' hair was fiery red, but he hated to be called "ginger."

"You were saying something about to-morrow being Wednesday?" observed Denny politely. "It's awfully kind of you to give us that piece of information——"

"Don't rot!" interrupted Boots. "To-morrow, the St. Frank's Junior Eleven is going to play the Bannington Town Reserves—and it's about time we decided upon some stunts, to attract the public."

"We shall need some pretty big stunts to do that," said Bray, shaking his head. "There's a meeting at the Arena to-morrow afternoon, too!"

"You mean the greyhound races?"

"Yes," said Bray. "It's because of the greyhound races at the Arena that the Bannington Club has been doing so badly this season. The giddy Arena is practically opposite the football ground, and the competition is a bit too stiff."

Buster Boots sniffed.

"If the football was good, the crowds would go!" he said sternly. "But we saw Bannington Town playing last Saturday—at least, they called it playing—and it was really a swindle on the public."

"They lost by five—nil, didn't they?" asked Denny amusedly.

"Something like that," replied Boots. "Anyhow, it was a colossal frost. No wonder the Bannington public is failing to support the club. Well, we've got to alter things."

"What's it got to do with us?" inquired Denny.

"Until last week, nothing," replied Buster Boots promptly. "But this week, everything. The St. Frank's Junior Eleven is going to play the Bannington Town Reserves to-morrow, and if we beat the professionals we're going to meet the First Eleven."

"Travers, of the Remove, fixed it up, didn't he?" grinned Bray. "By Jove! What a nerve that chap has! But I rather thought that Nipper was in charge of the whole affair?" he added innocently. "Isn't Nipper the skipper of the Junior Eleven?"

Buster Boots frowned.

"Very likely, but I'm the publicity expert," he replied. "And I think we'll gather some of the chaps together and go across to the Ancient House for a pow-wow before tea."

"Any old thing you like," said Denny obligingly.

"Go ahead!" remarked Bray.

Ordinarily, John Busterfield Boots was a member of the Junior Eleven, but on the previous evening he had sprained a muscle in his leg at practice, and although he wasn't actually lame he was crooked for playing for at least a week. So he intended to throw himself wholeheartedly into the advertising side of the affair.

Boots & Co. strode into the Fourth Form passage, and barged into Study No. 1. Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke and Charley Talmadge were making preparations for tea.

"Don't trouble to knock," said Bob Christine politely. "Just walk right in, you fellows. I'm afraid you'll have to take pot-luck——"

"We haven't come to tea," said Boots. "We want you chaps to trot over to the Ancient House with us. We're going to hold a meeting about to-morrow's game, and about the publicity, too."

"Good enough!" said Bob. "We're ready. Tea can wait."

Bob Christine was in the Junior Eleven, and he was therefore enthusiastic. Yorke and Talmadge were not quite so keen on postponing tea, but they did not question the decision of their leader. The six juniors marched out and looked into Study No. 2. It was empty.

In Study No. 3, however, Harry Oldfield and Len Clapson and Billy Nation were busy over a football competition.

"Leave that silly stuff alone," said Boots briskly. "Come on, you chaps. We're going over into the Ancient House."

"What for?" asked Oldfield, looking up.

"To have a jaw with Nipper and those other Remove asses about to-morrow's game," said Boots.

"Oh, good!" put in Clapson. "It's about time you did something drastic, Boots."

"What do you mean?"

"There are too many Remove fellows in the Junior Eleven," replied Clapson. "We're always grumbling about it. About eight Removites and only three Fourth-Formers."

"*'Grumbling makes the loaf no larger,'*" murmured Billy Nation, with a grin.

"We're not talking about loaves!" frowned Boots. "And Clapson is right, too. There ought to be more Fourth-Formers in the Eleven. While we're over with Nipper, we might as well thrash this matter out."

"I hope you mean—it!" put in Bob Christine. "It's no good taking half-measures, either."

"*'He that handles a nettle tenderly is soonest stung,'*" said Billy Nation, nodding. "So you had better go about it in a firm way, Boots."

"Have you got any more of your rotten proverbs to trot out?" asked Boots, glaring. "My hat! You can't say a dozen words without shoving a proverb in. I never knew such a chap!"

"Oh, leave him alone!" grinned Clapson. "We lost all patience with him ages ago."

"*'Patience is a stout horse, but it tires at last,'*" said Nation, with a chuckle.

"Well, I'm tired already!" roared Boots. "If I hear any more of your proverbs, I'll dot you on the nose, you silly ass!"

Billy sighed.

"*'He had need rise betimes who would please everybody,'*" he said in a sorrowful voice.

"You—you dotty lunatic!" howled Boots. "Do you think it gives us any pleasure to listen to these mouldy proverbs?"

"*'Consider not pleasures as they come, but as they go,'*" replied Nation firmly.

"You'll go in half a tick!" said Buster Boots darkly. "You'll go through that doorway—on your neck!"

They all piled out, chuckling. Billy Nation was a normal junior in almost every way; but he had an extraordinary number of proverbs on the tip of his tongue, and he generally used a few of them whenever he joined in a conversation. His study-mates

were accustomed to him, but the other juniors were inclined to get fed up.

Two other Fourth-Formers were roped in out in the lobby—Terence O'Grady, the Irish junior, and Herbert Vandyke, from South Africa. They enthusiastically joined the crowd.

Talking loudly and animatedly, they all went out into the wind-swept Triangle—and then a sharp, acid voice from the rear bade them halt!



CHAPTER 2.

Leave It To Boots!

MR. HORACE PYCRAFT, the master of the Fourth Form, came striding into the Triangle after the crowd of juniors. They stood respectfully at attention, but their expressions were eloquent of tiredness. Mr. Pycraft was always interfering, and his boys were kept continually on the jump.

"Where are you going to, Boots, with this—er—motley crowd?" inquired Mr. Pycraft sharply.

"Over into the Ancient House, sir," replied Boots.

"For what purpose?"

"To have a talk with the Remove fellows about the football, sir."

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Pycraft suspiciously.

"Quite sure, sir."

"I trust you are telling me the truth, Boots?" said the Form-master. "There are so many of you that I have a suspicion that you intend to indulge in a—ahem!—rag. And I want you to understand that I do not approve of ragging. So let me give you a warning—"

"It's quite unnecessary, sir," interrupted Boots. "This is going to be a friendly talk with the Remove fellows."

Mr. Pycraft looked disappointed. Seeing so many Fourth-Formers hurrying across to the Ancient House, he had jumped to the conclusion that a raid was about to be made, and as Mr. Pycraft always loved to "butt in," he had promptly investigated. Now he felt somewhat at a loss.

"Very well—very well!" he said curtly. "But remember, if I hear any report that there has been a disturbance in the junior quarters of the Ancient House I shall hold a very rigid inquiry."

He turned, and at that moment a gust of wind lifted his mortar-board and sent it sailing across the Triangle. It was very gusty that October afternoon, and there were indications that a gale was on the way. The chestnuts were being whipped about in the wind, and leaves were flying erratically through the air in all directions.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Pycraft, horrified.

His mortar-board was doing a graceful glide towards the fountain pool. The Fourth-Formers watched with keen enjoyment. And their hopes were not dashed. The mortar-board obligingly performed a nose-dive just as it was over the pool, and splashed into the water.

"How ridiculous!" shouted Mr. Pycraft angrily. "Upon my soul! It is ruined—ruined!"

He ran forward, and another gust of wind lifted his flying gown and sent it billowing over his head like an opening parachute.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers chuckled ecstatically. For Mr. Pycraft's gown, not content with billowing over his head, suddenly doubled and folded itself completely over his face like a pall.

To cap the whole joyous incident, Mr. Pycraft lost his sense of direction in his confusion. It would have been all right if he had come to a halt, but he still stumbled on, trying to free himself from the clinging embrace of the gown.

Before he knew it he bumped against the edge of the fountain pool, lost his balance, and dived headfirst into the cold water.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was really excruciatingly funny. Mr. Pycraft dived in quite gracefully, and then his legs beat the air wildly. He sagged sideways, and sat down with a bump on the gravel, his gown still about his head, now soaking wet and clinging closely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers discreetly vanished, yelling with laughter. When Mr. Pycraft finally got straightened out, the Triangle was completely deserted. He grabbed his mortar-board, gave a hasty glance round him, and flew indoors.

"Well, that's that!" grinned Boots, from the Ancient House lobby. "Serve him right, too!"

"The old busybody!" said Christine. "It's a pity he can't mind his own affairs."

"Some are always busy, and never do anything," remarked Billy Nation sagely.

"Here, look out, Boots!" he added in alarm.

"Mind what you're doing with your fist!"

"What did I tell you about those fat-headed proverbs?" roared Boots.

"My dear chap, he can't help it," grinned Oldfield. "He spouts out these proverbs and maxims without even knowing it."

Buster Boots grunted, and led the way to Study C. But that celebrated apartment was empty. The equally celebrated Study D was also empty. The Remove passage, indeed, appeared to be deserted.

However, the Fourth-Formers obtained a clue when they heard a subdued din coming from the direction of the Junior Common-room. So they marched along in a body, and entered.

"Look out!" sang out somebody. "Fourth-Formers!"

"Cheese it!" said Boots. "We've come here to talk about football."

The Common-room was fairly crowded. All the prominent Remove fellows were there, including Reggie Pitt and his stalwarts from the West House.

"You've just come at the right time, Boots, old man," said Nipper heartily. "We're talking about to-morrow's match against the professionals."

"It's a pity you didn't think of inviting me to the discussion!" said Boots severely.

"My dear ass, Tommy Watson was just coming across for you," replied the Junior captain. "As you're more or less crooked, we want you to take charge of the advertising."

"That's why I'm here," replied Boots. "Have you fixed anything up yet?"

"No."

"Then don't bother," nodded Buster. "You can leave it to me."

He spoke confidently—which was characteristic of him. John Busterfield Boots was a masterful sort of junior, and he had often been heard to complain—bitterly—that there was never enough for him to do. The Fourth Form at St. Frank's seemed to be right in the background. Everything noteworthy was done by the Remove.

Nipper's invariable answer to this question was quite pointed. He reminded the Fourth-Formers, gently but firmly, that it was all a question of initiative. The Fourth was generally left out in the cold because it was, as a Form, far behind the Remove. There were one or two fellows in it—Boots and Christine, for example—who were just as enterprising, and just as pushful, as any of the Removites, but the rank and file of the Fourth remained indifferent, and Buster Boots was generally compelled to admit that this argument was sound.

"Wait a minute, you chaps—wait a minute!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D, spoke in a chilly voice. But as nobody took any notice of him the effect was somewhat wasted. Nipper continued to chat with Boots, and Christine & Co. were having a little discussion with Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. Oldfield & Co. had joined up with Vivian Travers and Sir Jimmy Potts.

"Hi!" bellowed Handforth aggressively.

The assembly could hardly ignore that bellow.

"What's the matter, Handy?" asked Nipper, turning.

"Everything's the matter!" retorted Handforth. "Did you tell Boots, just now, that he could take charge of the publicity?"

"Yes."

"Then you're dotty!" said Handforth. "I've already decided to advertise to-morrow's football match."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites and the Fourth-Formers laughed at the joke.

"We don't want any of these silly Fourth Form asses in the game!" went on Handforth loudly. "Of course, I don't mind so

much if they'll place themselves in my charge. As long as they'll take orders from me, I shall be satisfied."

Buster Boots looked round, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, we don't want any fuss!" he said gruffly. "If that's the way you look at it, Handforth, we'd better knuckle under!"

"What!" said Handforth, startled by this ready surrender.

"We'll take your orders, old man," said Boots, nodding. "So that's settled. Life's too short for arguments!"

And the other Fourth-Formers opened their mouths in sheer wonder.



CHAPTER 3.

The Publicity Expert!

EDWARD OSWALD beamed.

"By George, I didn't believe you had so much sense, Boots!" he said heartily.

"No?" said Buster Boots. "Well, we live and learn, you know."

Bob Christine grabbed Boots by the arm.

"Look here, you silly, fatheaded ass!" he roared. "You can speak for yourself! But I'm blessed if I'm going to take any orders from this Remove cuckoo!"

"This Remove what?" demanded Handforth, preparing to remove his jacket.

"Easy—easy!" said Boots soothingly. "Don't forget what old Pycraft said. We don't want any rows here."

"Great Scott!" gasped Christine. "Have you knuckled under to Handforth because of that beast, Pycraft?"

"Well, no," admitted Boots. "But why get excited? Handforth says that he wants to give us orders, and I'm perfectly willing to take the orders."

"Well, I'm not!" retorted Bob Christine.

"Neither am I!" said Clapson.

Handforth waved his hand.

"You fellows don't count!" he remarked. "Boots is the skipper of the Fourth—and his word goes."

"Of course it does!" agreed Buster Boots, nodding. "And don't you fellows forget it! When I tell you that we've got to take orders from Handforth, the matter is ended."

"Why, you lopsided ass——" began Christine.

"Ended!" repeated Boots firmly. "If it pleases Handforth to give us orders, why should we stop him? Look at the time it saves. We all like to amuse ourselves in one way or another."

"Amuse ourselves?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Exactly," nodded Boots. "Apparently it's going to give you some pleasure to give us your orders. Well, go ahead, old man! Give them! We'll take them like a shot."

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily. "Well, to begin with——"

"Of course," added Boots, in a thoughtful voice, "we shan't obey the orders."

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"My dear chap, you can't expect too much," said Boots kindly. "You can give your orders, and we'll take them—but as for obeying them, that's another matter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites and the Fourth-Formers yelled. They had jumped to it now. Buster Boots had merely been pulling Handforth's leg.

"We'll take all the orders you like to give us, Handy," said Boots, grinning. "We'll take them, forget them as quickly as we possibly can, and then carry on with our own stunts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's face was a study.

"You—you spoofing rotters!" he ejaculated at last. "You silly Fourth Form asses! When you take orders from me, you'll have to carry them out."

"We'll carry them out all right," said Boots, nodding. "We'll carry them out and dump them over the nearest wall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you—you——"

Handforth became incoherent.

"Steady, old man," grinned Nipper. "There's no need to get excited. Boots is taking charge of the publicity side. He's a bit of an expert in such things——"

"I'm an expert, too!" broke in Handforth.

"Yes; but you're in the team," said Nipper gently. "You're our goalie."

"What difference does that make?"

"A lot of difference," said Nipper. "We can't have any members of the team devoting their energies to the advertising stunts. And you least of all."

"Why me least of all?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"My dear old chap!" protested Nipper. "Haven't I already explained that you're our goalie? Where should we be if something happened to you? You mustn't forget that we're going to play a professional team to-morrow, and we naturally want the services of the finest goalkeeper in the Junior School."

Handforth cooled down slightly.

"Well, of course, that's true enough," he admitted, while everybody else grinned. "But I don't see why I can't take charge of the publicity business. As for playing the professionals, there's nothing in that. They're all a lot of duffers!"

Nipper shook his head.

"They may be duffers when playing against professionals—but I'll bet they'll give us a pretty hot game," he said. "We don't want to pretend to be anything we're not. We're schoolboys—and the Bannington Town Reserves are men; professional footballers."

"Don't you think we shall beat them?" asked Reggie Pitt curiously.

"Yes, I rather think we shall," replied Nipper. "But if we do, it'll only be because we shall take the professionals by surprise. If we don't seize our chances in the first half hour, we shall get a sound thrashing."

"Right on the mark, dear old fellow," said Travers. "The Town Reserves will regard us as a set of cheeky, conceited upstarts. They'll be kind to us at first, and they'll probably be careless, too. So we shall have to shoot off our fireworks at the beginning of the game—before they've had time to discover that we're not beneath their contempt, as they now believe."

This was a pretty sound argument, as most of the sensible members of the Junior Eleven knew.

It was Vivian Travers who had coolly asked Mr. Billings, the secretary-manager of the Bannington Club, for a game. Rather to Travers' own surprise, Mr. Billings had agreed. He had furthermore promised that if the St. Frank's juniors beat the Reserves, a game would be fixed up for them against the First Eleven. Mr. Billings was obviously of the opinion that there would be no more than one match.

Truth to tell, the St. Frank's fellows were rather sorry for Mr. Billings. Things had been going very badly for Bannington Town. It was a club in the Third Division of the English League, and, so far, not a single match had been won this season. Bannington Town stood at the bottom of the table, having gained not a single point—for they had not even scraped through with a draw. Every match had been lost.

And the Town's supporters had deserted the club. The "gates" had got smaller and smaller at every match; indeed, the previous Saturday, when Bannington Town had played Croydon, there had been only about twelve hundred spectators in the enclosure. Yet, in previous seasons, it had been quite usual to see fifteen or sixteen thousand people on the terraces and in the grand-stand.

In all probability the support would have been much better if it had not been for the new Arena.

The Arena was devoted to greyhound racing, and there was generally a meeting on the Saturday afternoon—and on the Wednesday afternoon, too. Consequently, the crowds deserted the footballers in favour of the race-course. Nowadays, everybody was "going to the dogs."

Things were in a very bad state with Bannington Town Club. Finances were low; and, with such poor gates, the club was drifting towards bankruptcy. It was a pity, because there were some very splendid players in the team, and, with a little luck, the present situation could be easily remedied.

If Bannington could only win one or two games, the supporters would come flocking back. It was encouragement that the players needed; and, just lately, they had received

nothing but discouragement. The whole team had got into a despondent state; they felt that they could do nothing right. When they started a game they were nervous—jumpy. It invariably happened that the opposing side scored a goal or two before Bannington had pulled itself together, and then it was too late. Thus, game after game had been lost.

The St. Frank's fellows thought they might be able to help, and it gave them a sort of personal interest in the whole business now that they had fixed up a match against the Town reserves.

Everybody in the Junior School was looking forward with keen interest to the morrow's game. Everybody believed that Nipper and his merry men would succeed in winning the match.

But they wanted to have a good crowd of spectators to watch; and so certain publicity stunts were essential.

John Busterfield Boots was undoubtedly the man for the job!



CHAPTER 4.

Willy's New Pet!

"IT'S all rot!" said Handforth coldly.

"What's all rot?" asked Nipper.

"Why, Boots being the publicity expert," said Handforth. "I've told you that I'm willing to take on this job, and you ought to be jolly pleased."

Nipper coughed.

"Well, the fact is, old scout, it's jolly decent of you to offer your services," he said. "But you're a member of the team—and, of course, you'll have to be with the rest of us on the field some time before the game begins."

"Why go on the field so early?" asked Handforth, staring.

"We thought we'd have a bit of a knock-about," explained Nipper. "It's just as well to get familiar with the field, you know, and I don't suppose Mr. Billings will mind. Well, while the team is engaged on the job, the publicity men will be hard at it. And, although you're a bit of a marvel, Handy, you can't be in two places at once!"

Handforth grunted.

"You can leave me out of it!" he said. "There's no reason why I should get familiar with the goal, is there? I'm different from you other fellows——"

"No; we shall all have to be on the field together," insisted Nipper.

"Then that definitely means that I'm not wanted for the advertising programme?"

"Well, yes——"

"In that case, I might just as well go to my study and have tea!" said Handforth coldly. "Come on, Mac! Come on, Churchy! We'll clear out of here!"

A few chuckles went up as Handforth & Co. strode out of the Common-room. Handforth closed the door with unnecessary violence, and Church and McClure were feeling rather relieved. Strangely enough, Handforth, too, was looking contented.

"That'll teach 'em a lesson!" he said gruffly.

"Eh?" said Church, puzzled.

"I've taken them at their word, and I've cleared out!" said Handforth. "By George! Directly after tea they'll come round for me—asking me to give them the benefit of my advice."

Church and McClure did not think it necessary to disillusion Handforth on this point. If Nipper or Boots came to him for advice, the skies would probably fall during the next minute.

But it was far better for Handforth to find these things out for himself. Even if his chums told him now, he wouldn't believe them. He had an extraordinary idea that no scheme could succeed unless he was in full charge.

"Yes!" he repeated, as he led the way out of the Ancient House. "This ought to teach them a sharp lesson. And when they come to me, asking for my advice, I've a good mind not to give it to them!"

"That's right: be firm!" said Church. "But weren't we going to Study D for tea, Handy?"

"Never mind about tea," said Handforth gruffly. "We'll go for a walk round first."

His chums hadn't the faintest idea why a walk round was necessary. Handforth himself hadn't any idea, either. But to argue with him would be fatal, since he would probably keep on walking for a few hours. Left alone, however, he might decide to go indoors within the next five minutes.

They went round the Ancient House, and then wandered through the West Gate, and so on to Little Side.

"Instead of messing about in the Common-room, and wasting time, we might just as well be having a kick-about," said Handforth, contemplating the deserted field. "I never knew such chaps for frittering their time away."

"Isn't it too windy, old man?" asked Church.

"Rot!" replied Handforth. "You don't call this windy, do you? It's only a breeze, and—— Hallo! Who's that over there?"

He halted again, and stared across the playing fields towards a smallish figure which had appeared from behind a hedge. Accompanying the figure was a lithe, sleek greyhound.

"Who's that?" repeated Handforth severely.

He knew perfectly well that the figure belonged to his minor, Willy Handforth of the Third, so Church and McClure saw no reason why they should answer.

"It's my minor!" said Handforth, at length. "And he's got that dog with him. By



Mr. Pycraft, running forward to retrieve his mortar-board from the fountain, suddenly found himself enveloped in the folds of his gown. He stumbled on, bumped against the side of the pool, lost his balance, and dived headfirst into the cold water. A yell of laughter went up from the onlooking juniors.

George! He seems to be fairly steady on his pins."

"Willy—or the dog?" asked Church politely.

"The dog, of course, you ass!" said Handforth. "Come on! We'll go and have a closer look. There's something rummy about this, you know. Only on Saturday that dog was as good as dead. Now he's trotting about as though he had never been run over."

"It's the result of your minor's treatment," said McClure. "Willy has a kind of magic when it comes to animals!"

Handforth grunted, but made no comment. The chums of Study D advanced across the playing fields towards Willy and the greyhound.

"My minor's treatment, eh?" said Handforth suddenly. "By George! Don't make me laugh! If Willy would only take some advice from me, the dog would get well in half the time."

"Well, he hasn't done so badly, by the look of things," remarked Church.

It was obvious that the greyhound was not well, however. Willy was walking very slowly, and the dog was barely able to trot beside him. There was something just a little pathetic in the animal's movements; he was trying so hard, but it was clearly an effort.

It was only a few days since Willy had rescued him from the ditch on the Banning-

ton road. Willy and his chums of the Third had seen the unfortunate dog run over, and apparently killed.

His owner, a bookmaker named Bill Brice, had left the dog for dead. Callously and brutally he had kicked the "carcase" into the ditch, leaving it there amid the dead leaves and ferns. It must be admitted that Mr. Brice was nearly off his head with anger and worry at the time; and the dog had been so smothered in dust and blood that the man could be partially excused for believing that life was extinct. But there could be no excuse for his action in leaving the dog in the ditch. The least he could have done would have been to give the animal a decent burial.

Willy had come along, and had found that a spark of life still existed in that battered body. And Willy had carried the greyhound to St. Frank's, had nursed him throughout the evening and the following night.

Tenderly, lovingly, Willy had devoted himself wholeheartedly to the task of restoring the animal's life, and success had rewarded his efforts. After a tremendous fight, Willy had won the battle; the crisis was over, and now the greyhound was convalescent.

During the last day or two, Lightning—as Willy had named the dog—had progressed with extraordinary speed. On the Sunday he had not been able to walk at all, and on the Monday he had just managed to stand on

his legs. And now, to-day, he was walking—even trotting!

Those fellows who took the trouble to notice saw that Willy had a remarkable influence over the dog. Lightning had attached himself very devotedly to his new master. Not that there was anything unusual about this; all animals loved Willy. Instinctively, they knew that he was their friend. And Willy's power over animals was well known at St. Frank's.

All the same, this present case was unusual.

Even Willy had surpassed himself. He had brought the dog back from the dead—for that life had nearly ebbed away, and only in the nick of time had Willy snatched it back. Now, by all moral right, the dog was his.

Its former owner had left it for dead, and Willy had reclaimed the life. It was his dog—and woe betide anybody who attempted to take the animal away from him!



CHAPTER 5.

Sound Advice!

HANDFORTH came to a halt, and looked down at Lightning with a critical eye.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be particularly sprightly," he said bluntly.

Willy gave his major a cold look.

"Not sprightly, eh?" he said. "I don't like to call you an ass, Ted, but you *are* an ass. A great, hulking fatheaded ass!"

"Why, you cheeky young fathead—"

"Two days ago, Lightning couldn't even walk!" said Willy indignantly. "And now to-day—look at him! He's getting absolutely frisky! Why, he's making a marvellous recovery."

"I don't call it marvellous," said Handforth.

"You can call it what you like," growled Willy. "I met Mr. Lee ten minutes ago, and he could hardly believe his eyes. Said I had done wonders. He congratulated me like the dickens. And Mr. Lee knows a good bit about medicine and surgery, too. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"I don't smoke!" said Handforth severely. "You know that as well as I do, you silly young chump!"

He turned to the dog, and made curious sucking noises with his mouth. Lightning looked at him rather suspiciously, but made no move. He stood there, his eyes expressive of pain. It was quite obvious that the dog was far from being himself.

"All right, old man—all right!" murmured Willy, bending down and fondling the greyhound's head. "You mustn't take any notice

of my major. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

A faint wag from Lightning indicated that he thoroughly agreed.

"Give me another week with him," continued Willy, glancing up. "I shall be teaching him tricks by then. He's wonderfully intelligent, and I'll soon have him doing all sorts of clever things."

"But he's a racing greyhound, isn't he?" asked Church.

"All greyhounds are racers, if it comes to that," put in Handforth. "Not that this one will ever be able to race again. He's crooked. He won't even be able to trot—unless, of course, Willy takes my advice."

"I want him to live, thanks!" said Willy briefly.

"You cheeky young bounder!" said Handforth, frowning. "Are you suggesting that my treatment would kill him? I'll tell you exactly what to do with that dog—if you want him to get well rapidly."

"Oh?" said Willy, with interest.

"Yes," continued Handforth. "But, first of all, are you sure that the dog is yours?"

"I'd like to see anybody take him away from me!" retorted the cheery young skipper of the Third.

"It's all very well to talk in a highhanded way like that, but the law is the law," said Handforth argumentatively. "And you can't get away from the fact that the dog really belongs to that chap Price, or whatever his name is."

"Brice," said Willy.

"Brice, then," went on Handforth. "This greyhound belongs to Brice—"

"Rot!" interrupted the fag. "How can Lightning belong to that brute when he left it for dead in the ditch?"

"Of course, he's morally yours," agreed Handforth, nodding. "I'm not denying that. But legally he still belongs to Brice."

"I'm not interested in legal matters," said Willy coldly. "And possession is nine points of the law, anyhow."

"But you'd better have your eye on that tenth point, too," said Handforth warningly. "Brice left the dog for dead, and you saved him. That doesn't make it your dog legally. If the man gets to know anything about it, he'll probably come along and claim the animal. So the best thing you can do is to hide it away."

"Rats!" said Willy coolly. "Also piffle! Likewise rot! This dog is mine. If I hadn't pulled him out of the ditch he would have been dead within an hour, so how the dickens can it now belong to Brice?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to dye him," said Handforth, with a thoughtful frown. "I can recommend a jolly good dye, you know. It's a patent stuff of my own—guaranteed not to come off. It's a kind of blue-black colour—"

"Thanks all the same, but I'm not keen on having a blue-black greyhound," said Willy coldly. "And I don't see any reason why I should disguise him, either. If Brice comes for this dog, he'll get the length of my tongue instead. Why, the man wouldn't have the nerve to come and claim him—after leaving him so callously in the ditch."

"Well, I wouldn't be too sure—so you'd better be on the look-out!" said Handforth, with quite unusual shrewdness. "Greyhounds are valuable nowadays, as you ought to know. Plenty of these dogs are fetching as much as five or ten pounds."

"Good racers are worth five hundred pounds!" said Church, with a grin.

"Well, we needn't discuss the matter," said Handforth. "This dog isn't worth two-pence—not as a racer, anyhow. He may be all right as a pet, but he'll never be able to race again. Look at him! He hasn't got enough energy to jump over a match-stick!"

"Wait until I've finished with him!" said Willy.

"Of course, if you'll only take my advice, he'll soon recover his old pep," continued Handforth. "What you want to do, Willy, is to feed him up well. Look how thin he is!"

"My dear, poor ass!" said Willy kindly. "All greyhounds are slim like this. It's the way they're built."

"He's thin!" insisted Handforth, giving the greyhound a critical inspection. "I tell you he needs feeding up. You ought to give him a good diet of condensed milk."

"Oh?" said Willy, with interest. "Anything else?"

"Yes—cocoa," said Handforth firmly. "Cocoa is a jolly fine body-builder. You give him two or three doses of condensed milk and cocoa every day, and you'll see a wonderful difference. Then he ought to have some embrocation and liniment."

"I don't think he'd like it," said Willy, shaking his head. "Besides, it might not mix very well with the condensed milk and cocoa."

"You young ass!" frowned Handforth. "I mean, you ought to use the embrocation and liniment for rubbing him with."

"Oh, I see!" nodded Willy. "He needs rubbing, does he?"

"All his joints are stiff!" said Handforth. "He needs a jolly good massage two or three times a day. Now, I can recommend a jolly good embrocation, and the more you rub him with it the better he'll be."

"I'll think about it," said Willy. "Let me see. Embrocation, liniment, condensed milk, and cocoa. Anything else?"

"He ought to go on a regular diet," said Handforth promptly. "Condensed milk and cocoa won't be sufficient. Now I suggest a course of fruit. Everybody knows that fruit is full of vitamins, and this dog needs vitamins more than anything else. He ought to have at least two apples a day—"

"An apple a day keeps the vet away, sort of thing?" asked Willy brightly.

"Two apples a day and one orange," continued Handforth. "It's most important that he should have the orange. Or, better still, a lemon."

"Upon the whole, you seem to know quite a lot about it," remarked Willy cheerfully. "But you've forgotten one thing, Ted, old man. Condensed milk and cocoa and liniment and embrocation cost money. And you can't buy apples and oranges and lemons without cash, either. Thanks awfully for the suggestions, old son. And now you can whack out five bob."

"What!" said Handforth, with a start.

"How can I buy condensed milk and stuff without any money?" asked Willy coolly.

"Why, you young— H'm! Perhaps you're right, though," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "Here you are, then, here's ten bob. I didn't expect you to be so sensible, kid. As you've agreed to adopt my suggestions, I don't mind whacking out this half-quid."

Willy took the money and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Ted, you may have faults, but nobody can call you mean," he said calmly. "Thanks, old man."

"And you'll put the dog on the diet I suggested?"

"My hat, no!" said Willy. "I didn't undertake to do that."

"What!" roared Handforth indignantly. "But—but I just gave you that money so that you could buy condensed milk and cocoa—"

"Exactly!" said Willy. "We need condensed milk and cocoa for our study. But you needn't worry, Ted. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and I are awfully fond of cocoa with condensed milk, and we're keen on apples and oranges, too."

Handforth turned red.

"You—you young spoofer!" he ejaculated indignantly. "You burglar! You distinctly promised me that you would—"

"Think again!" interrupted Willy. "I didn't promise you anything. I just listened to your advice, and I said that you couldn't buy all those things without money. Thanks awfully for the ten bob. Come on, Lightning."

And Willy strolled away with his new pet, leaving Edward Oswald bubbling and seething like an angry geyser.



CHAPTER 6.

Gore-Pearce in Trouble !

A U D E G O R E - P E A R C E, of the R e m o v e, kicked irritably at a tuft of grass as he strolled

along the towing-path beside the River Stowe.

"Hang it!" he said savagely. "I didn't think Brice would be so confoundedly hot on his money!"

Gulliver and Bell, who shared Study A in the Ancient House with him, looked every bit as glum as their leader.

"If you ask me," said Gulliver, "this greyhound racing is a frost."

"It's a wash-out," said Bell bitterly. "We went to that meeting last Saturday, and I had thirty bob in my pocket to start with. When I came out I had nothing!"

"Same here!" said Gulliver, "It's a bookies' game. It's even worse than betting on the gee-gees. You never know what these rotten greyhounds are going to do!"

Gore-Pearce grunted.

"Oh, don't keep croaking!" he said. "We're new to the game, that's all. As soon as we get to know the form of the various dogs we shall be able to skin the bookies and get our money back. Just at present we're mugs—raw recruits, as it were. But later on we shall win—and keep on winning."

Gore-Pearce & Co. had been very enthusiastic about the opening of the Arena, and although the place was strictly out of bounds for the St. Frank's fellows, they had attended more than one race meeting at the greyhound track. To their disgust, however, they had lost heavily.

A few other "sports" of St. Frank's had indulged in the pastime, too. Kenmore and Sinclair, of the Sixth, had been to the Arena, and so had Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth. Not that these seniors had mixed with the Remove fellows. Gore-Pearce & Co. had kept to themselves.

"But I didn't think Brice would do a thing like this," continued Gore-Pearce grumpily. "Fancy sending me a letter, demanding that ten quid!"

"All bookies are the same!" growled Gulliver. "Besides, you owe him the tenner, don't you?"

"Yes; but he needn't grumble—he needn't think that I shall fail to pay up," said Gore-Pearce. "He won all the money I had—a good few quids, too. Then he let me carry on."

"Because he knew you'd lose," said Bell, nodding.

This was true, although Gore-Pearce didn't like to hear it. Mr. Bill Brice, the bookmaker, had been very obliging during that previous visit. Gore-Pearce had believed that he could recover his losses on the last race of the meeting, but instead of that he had placed himself in Mr. Brice's debt to the amount of ten pounds.

And now Mr. Brice had written, reminding his young client of the debt.

"He says he wants it to-morrow, doesn't he?" asked Bell.

"Yes; he's told me not to forget to bring the money," replied Gore-Pearce savagely. "Of course, I promised it for to-day, but

that's no reason why he should doubt my word."

"Well, you've got a tenner, so you needn't worry," remarked Gulliver.

Claude Gore-Pearce was the son of a millionaire, and he was generally able to get hold of large sums of money, and ten pounds for a junior schoolboy was certainly a very large sum. But even a millionaire's son is restricted. Gore-Pearce was not able to get hold of unlimited amounts.

"Why should I let him have this tenner?" argued the cad of the Remove. "It's all the money I've got, and I want to use it on to-morrow's races. And this blighter of a Brice says that unless I pay up he won't let me have any more bets."

"There are plenty of other bookies," said Bell hopefully.

"Yes, but they're all in a kind of ring," objected Gore-Pearce. "Brice tells me that unless I pay up no other bookie will take my commissions. They work together, the rotters!"

"They do it to protect themselves, I suppose," said Bell.

"Well, I'm jolly wild about it," said Gore-Pearce. "If I pay up, I dare say Brice will allow me a bit more credit, though."

"Of course he will," said Gulliver. "So it amounts to the same thing. You pay him his tenner and then make some more bets and win and he'll have to whack out. So there's nothing to worry about, unless your dogs go down. Then, of course, you'll be in the cart again."

Gulliver and Bell were able to speak in a disinterested way. They had no more money, and so they would not be able to make any bets on the following afternoon. And having no money, they were inclined to be bored by the whole business.

As they had found out for themselves, greyhound racing was not much to look at. At least, they hadn't obtained many thrills at this Bannington track. Although the Bannington track was not much to judge by, since it was run by a very questionable syndicate, and was not under the G.R.A. rules. In the opinion of many people who were able to judge, the Bannington Arena was more or less crooked.

Gore-Pearce & Co. had discovered that, as a spectacle, the racing was a washout. Just a few seconds of mild excitement while the electric hare shot down the course with the greyhounds in full pursuit, and then another long wait until the next race commenced.

Jostling crowds, shouting bookmakers, and a general atmosphere of raucous noise.

"I don't see any reason why Gully and I should come to-morrow," said Bell, as they approached the playing fields across the meadow. "We've got no money, so why should we be jammed in that crowd?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Gulliver. "Besides, think of the risk!"

"What risk?" asked Gore-Pearce, glaring. "Well, the Arena is out of bounds—"

"Are you afraid of breaking bounds now?" sneered the millionaire's son.

"Hang it, why take risks for nothing?" retorted Gulliver. "If we're spotted in the Arena we shall be hauled before the Head, and at the very least we shall get a flogging. And it might mean the sack. We'd risk it if there was something to risk it for—but there's nothing."

"Well, you can confoundedly well stay behind!" said Gore-Pearce unpleasantly. "Do you think I care? Even when you do come you're only a nuisance."

"Here, I say—"

"A rotten nuisance!" continued Gore-Pearce, with relish. "I've never known such funks. Every minute you're looking round, afraid of somebody spotting you. You got on my nerves on Saturday."

"Well, we shan't get on your nerves tomorrow!" snapped Bell. "We're not going with you. We've had enough of this rotten greyhound racing. We've lost all the money we had, and we've had our lesson."

"By gad!" said Gore-Pearce, staring. "Didn't I say that you were a couple of funks? You lose a few miserable shillings and you give up hope. The only thing to do is to carry on and get your money back. I dare say Brice will allow you a bit of credit, and you'll soon be able to square things up with him, after you've won on one or two races."

"And supposing we lose?" asked Bell. "We shall be in Brice's debt, too. It's not good enough!"

"No fear!" agreed Gulliver. "I'm not taking the risk, anyhow!"

Claude Gore-Pearce grunted, but he made no comment. Of late he had revealed many rascally characteristics. When he had first come to St. Frank's he had been supercilious and snobbish, but he had not been really vicious. Now he was proving himself to be a worthy leader—or perhaps unworthy leader—of Study A!



CHAPTER 7.

Something Worth Knowing!

TURNING into the playing fields, Gore-Pearce & Co. skirted round a hedge, and they unexpectedly came face to face with Willy and Lightning.

Willy was grinning cheerfully. His major and Church and McClure had just gone, and Willy was congratulating himself over that little cash incident. He was ten shillings the richer, and he rather needed that money, too.

"Hallo!" said Gore-Pearce, staring. "So this is your dog, is it?"

In a vague sort of way, the cads of Study A had heard the story of Willy's recent activities. They knew that Willy had found

a dog, and had restored it to life, but they had not taken the trouble to acquaint themselves with any details. They were not interested in Willy Handforth. Although there had been a good deal of talk in the Remove, Gore-Pearce & Co. had not heeded it.

And now, for the first time, they were seeing the dog that Willy had saved from death.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Gulliver. "It's a greyhound."

"Marvellous!" said Willy, with gentle sarcasm. "You don't say so! I thought it was a scalyham!"

"A greyhound!" said Gore-Pearce, oblivious of Willy's remark. "By gad!"

The three Removites stared somewhat fascinatedly at the dog.

"Never seen a greyhound before?" asked Willy politely.

"But this isn't the dog you saved, is it?" asked Gore-Pearce.

"Yes, it is."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said the millionaire's son. "I'll admit I hadn't given the thing much thought, but I had an idea that your dog was a kind of mongrel."

"Then the sooner you get rid of that idea, the better!" retorted Willy. "Lightning is a first-class dog—and he's mine."

"Oh, he's yours, is he?" said Gore-Pearce. "Just because you found him?"

"Because I restored him to life," replied Willy quietly. "If I had merely found him, I naturally couldn't claim ownership. But Lightning was as good as dead when I picked him up, and I restored his life. So he's mine."

It was a simple logic, and very convincing.

"Of course, he'll never be any good," said Gore-Pearce, as he looked at the greyhound with critical eyes. "He's a crock. He couldn't run twenty yards!"

"Not at the moment, perhaps," agreed Willy. "But wait until I have finished with him. He's getting better every day, and within a fortnight I'll bet he'll be sound again. He's making a fine recovery."

There was a curious light in Gore-Pearce's eyes. He looked thoughtful—puzzled; and all the time he was staring at the greyhound. Lightning, for his part, returned Gore-Pearce's gaze without much show of friendliness. Perhaps he instinctively knew that this fellow was unreliable.

"By gad!" said Gore-Pearce. "You found this dog on the Bannington road, didn't you?"

"Why go over old history?" asked Willy impatiently. "Everybody in the school knows the facts. Of course I found him on the Bannington road."

"In a ditch?"

"Yes."

"Was he run over, or something like that?"

"Cheese it!" protested Willy. "Everybody knows that he was run over, and that his owner kicked him into the ditch for

dead. But why the dickens are you taking such a sudden interest, Gore-Pearce?"

Gore-Pearce started.

"Eh?" he said. "Oh, nothing! Nothing at all! I—I was only wondering, you know."

"What were you wondering?"

"Nothing," said Gore-Pearce hastily.

Willy grinned.

"That's just what I thought!" he said calmly. "Before you can wonder, Gore-Pearce, you've got to have something to wonder with. Well, come along, Lightning. I can see that you don't like the look of these merchants. And you're quite right, old son. They are suspicious characters."

Willy strolled off, the dog trotting by his side—trotting painfully, stiffly.

"Cheeky young rotter!" said Gulliver, frowning. "Why didn't you clip him over the ear, Gore-Pearce?"

But Claude Gore-Pearce made no answer.

He was watching Willy with burning eyes—and watching the dog, too. His face had become flushed, and it was obvious to his chums that he was inwardly excited.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Bell, staring.

Still Gore-Pearce said nothing.

"He's day-dreaming," remarked Gulliver.

"Leave him alone, and sooner or later he may come to himself."

And then, at last, Gore-Pearce found his voice.

"By gad!" he ejaculated tensely. "And that dog has been here since Saturday, and we never guessed!"

"Eh? We never guessed what?" asked Bell.

"But, of course, we didn't even know that he was a greyhound," continued Gore-Pearce. "We heard some talk about a dog, but we took no notice. Why should we interest ourselves in the doings of the fags? But think of it, you fellows! Think what it means! And this confounded young Handforth minor calmly makes out that the dog is his! By gad!"

Gulliver and Bell were completely mystified.

"Have you gone off your rocker?" asked Gulliver impatiently.

"No!" replied Gore-Pearce, turning on him. "Don't you realise what this means? Haven't you any sense? Can't you put two and two together?"

"We have quite enough arithmetic in the Form-room!" replied Gulliver sourly.

"But listen!" continued Gore-Pearce, a cunning light entering his eyes. "Young Handforth found this dog on Saturday afternoon, didn't he? He brought it home, and sat up practically all the night looking after it?"

"He saved its life by doing that," nodded Bell.

"On Saturday afternoon we were at the Bannington Arena!" continued Gore-Pearce, lowering his voice. "And we met Brice, didn't we?"

"Met him!" echoed Bell. "He rooked us of all our cash! If that's what you call meeting him, I agree."

"Do you remember something that Brice told us just before we left?" went on Gore-Pearce. "Do you remember that we told him he wasn't looking particularly happy?"

"I seem to have sort of recollection of it," said Gulliver, "but what on earth does it matter?"

"And Brice told us that he was upset!" said Gore-Pearce. "He told us that he had lost a dog on the way to the Arena. He said that the dog was run over by a car. Domino! Yes, that's the name! Brice said that it was the best dog he had ever owned. As fast as the wind, and a cert winner!"

"Great Scott!" said Bell, staring.

"Well, can't you see what I'm driving at?" demanded Gore-Pearce tensely. "Brice lost that dog on Saturday afternoon—it was run over on the Bannington road."

"And—and young Handforth found a dog on the Bannington road!" said Gulliver, with a whistle. "And it's a greyhound, too!"

Gore-Pearce took a deep breath.

"Of course, there's no coincidence about it," he said, cooling down. "There can't be. That dog—the one we've just seen—is Domino."

"But his name is Lightning!" said Gulliver.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "That's only a name that Handforth minor has given him. His real name is Domino. He belongs to Brice, the bookie!"

"Oh, my aunt!" said Bell breathlessly. "But—but he doesn't belong to Brice now. Handforth minor found him, and saved his life, so——"

"Rot!" broke in Gore-Pearce. "Legally, the dog belongs to Brice, no matter what Handforth minor did. And, my sons, I don't see why we shouldn't make a little capital out of this discovery. It's a piece of information worth knowing!"

"But—but——"

"The thing fits like a glove!" said Gore-Pearce gloatingly. "This dog is Domino—and it belongs to Brice, the bookie. By gad! If we can't wangle something here, we ought to be bumped!"



CHAPTER 3.

The Schemer!

FOUR minutes later Gore-Pearce & Co. were in Study A, in the Ancient House.

They had hurried indoors, Gore-Pearce saying that he wanted to be quiet. They couldn't discuss the subject in the open, with the chance that somebody might overhear them. They would be private in their own study.

So here they were—all of them looking thoroughly excited.

"Of course, there isn't a doubt about it," said Gulliver. "That dog of young Handforth's is Domino, and, naturally, it stands to reason that he really belongs to Brice, the bookie——"

"No need to go all over that again!" interrupted Gore-Pearce, as he sat down on the edge of the table. "We know it. It's settled. Handforth minor has saved Domino's life, and the dog looks like recovering completely, too."

"Hadn't we better tell Brice about it to-morrow?" suggested Bell.

"That's exactly what we're going to do," nodded Claude Gore-Pearce. "But, my son, we're not going to tell him free of charge."

"Eh?"

"We'll make a bit out of this!" continued Gore-Pearce gloatingly. "And a pretty big bit, too! I know something about greyhounds, and they're worth quids and quids. Some dogs are worth anything from a hundred to five hundred pounds."

"Phew!"

"My only hat!"

"Domino, according to Brice, was one of the best dogs he ever had!" said Gore-Pearce. "Of course, he's crocked now, but he's certain to recover. And if he's worth five hundred quids to Brice, I don't see why we shouldn't make a bit of cash."

"But how can we?" asked Gulliver. "Brice won't give us anything for telling him something that he can find out from anybody!"

Gore-Pearce's eyes narrowed.

"That's just it!" he said. "We've got to get a promise from Brice before we trot out the information. He doesn't know that he can hear about his dog from anybody at St. Frank's. We've got to pretend that it's a secret. And, if we work the thing properly, it'll be as easy as losing money on a gee-gee."

"Well, that's easy enough," said Bell feelingly.

"Are you sure it'll work, though?" asked Gulliver, with a doubt in his voice. "You mustn't forget that the dog belongs to young Handforth."

"Rot! It belongs to Brice!"

"But that cheeky fag saved the dog's life, and——"

"That doesn't make any difference at all!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "Legally, the dog still belongs to Brice. If Brice gets to know the facts, he can come along and claim the brute. He can take him away, too. Handforth minor can't possibly keep him here."

Gulliver and Bell did not argue; their leader's reasoning certainly seemed sound enough.

"First of all, we'll tell Brice that we can supply him with some information that will be valuable to him," said Gore-Pearce cunningly. "In fact, we might as well tell him, straight out, that we know for a fact that Domino is not dead, and that we can tell him where the dog is to be found."

"Yes?" said Bell. "And what then?"

"To begin with, I shall tell Brice that that ten-quid debt is to be wiped out," replied Gore-Pearce, with relish.

The others stared.

"Here, chuck it!" said Gulliver. "Brice won't be willing to pay ten quid for the information."

Claude Gore-Pearce laughed.

"And on the top of that, I shall ask him for another twenty quid in cash for myself," he said calmly, "and a tenner each for you fellows."

"By gad!" said Gulliver breathlessly.

"That's—that's fifty quid altogether!" ejaculated Bell, aghast.

"Considering what a duffer you are, Bell, that bit of mental arithmetic isn't so bad," grinned Gore-Pearce. "Exactly! Fifty quid altogether!"

"But it'll never work," said Gulliver. "The thing's impossible! You mustn't count on this, Gore-Pearce——"

"I shan't count on anything," interrupted Gore-Pearce. "But just think of the position. Brice believes that Domino is dead. What's he going to say when we tell him that the dog is really alive, and that we can show him how to lay hands on it?"

"Naturally, he'll be bucked," agreed Bell.

"He'll be so bucked that he'll be willing to pay spot cash for the information," nodded Gore-Pearce. "He told us that the dog is valuable, and he won't be able to get out of it. If the worst comes to the worst, he's certain to whack out a tenner for me, and a fiver each for you fellows. Naturally, he'll believe that the whole thing is a secret, and that the chap who found the dog is keeping him hidden up somewhere."

"But Handforth minor is quite open about it all," said Bell. "He's taking the dog out for walks——"

"We know that!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "And that's why it's necessary for us to be pretty quick on the job. Brice might find it out for himself—and then we shouldn't touch a cent."

"Hadn't we better see him to-day?" asked Gulliver eagerly.

"I'd like to—but I don't think it can be managed," replied Gore-Pearce. "We don't know where he is. He doesn't live in Bannington, you know—he's not a local man. He only comes over when the greyhound races are on. And we don't know his address, either. Still, that's all in our favour, because he isn't likely to make any discoveries. I think we shall be safe until to-morrow afternoon."

It was a very tricky business—not to say dishonest. But this aspect of the matter did not occur to Gore-Pearce & Co. Gulliver and Bell were particularly bucked because their leader had not forgotten them. They were perfectly agreeable to accepting a tenner each—or a fiver, if the "worst came to the worst." Considering that they had done nothing, and were to do nothing, it would be easy money.

Gore-Pearce, to give him his due, was not selfish. He was snobbish and supercilious, and he had the makings of a rascal in him. But where his study-mates were concerned he was generally very generous, and he had not forgotten them in this questionable scheme of his.

The prospect wasn't anything like so doubtful as Gulliver and Bell feared. For Mr. Bill Brice undoubtedly had been exceedingly upset at the loss of his dog, Domingo. When he suddenly learned that the animal was still alive, he would be ready enough to pay for the information that would lead to his recovering his dog.

In the meantime, Willy Handforth was putting Lightning away in a special kennel that had been installed in Willy's study—with the official sanction of the Housemaster. Little did Willy realise that, through the schemings of Claude Gore-Pearce, he would soon be in danger of losing his new pet!



CHAPTER 9.

The Big Parade!

"READY?" asked Buster Boots briskly.

The energetic skipper of the Fourth Form stood at the head of a long double column of juniors. Most of them were Fourth-Formers, but there were a good few Removites, too.

They were all standing down an unfrequented side lane, just off Bannington High Street. It was Wednesday afternoon, and the October sun was shining quite brightly. The high wind of yesterday had gone, having evidently thought better of its threat to turn itself into a gale. The conditions were ideal for football. The air was crisp, the atmosphere was clear.

At the head of the column, the leading juniors were supplied with various musical instruments, on which they were almost certain to produce unmusical sounds.

One had a trombone, another a cornet, and still another a concertina. There were two or three tin whistles, an aged flute, and even a saxophone. Handforth had been all against the inclusion of the saxophone, declaring that this one instrument alone would be sufficient to keep the crowds away. There could be no excuse, declared Handforth, for a saxophone. But Buster Boots, with great daring, had decided to risk it. There were at least three mouth-organs in the band, and there were two drums.

In the rear stretched the column of non-musical juniors, and there were banners flying and flags waving. Altogether, it was quite a brave spectacle.

"Ready?" repeated Boots loudly.

"Of course we are!" said Clapson. "Let's get on with it!"

"Right!" said Boots. "Now then—one, two, three!"

He beat time with his arms, and, at the count of "three," the band did its worst. The noise that split the peaceful air of that side lane was hideous. At least four dogs ran for their lives, with their tails between their legs. Cats scooted in all directions, and a number of horses, grazing peacefully in a near-by field, stampeded.

"Jolly good!" said Boots critically. "I told you to play 'Colonel Bogey March,' but 'Asleep In The Deep' will do just as well, I suppose."

"You silly ass!" roared one of the musicians. "This is 'Colonel Bogey March'!"

"Oh, sorry!" grinned Boots. "My mistake!"

In the High Street, people had halted in their tracks, their faces wearing startled and even alarmed expressions. Tradesmen came running to their doors, apprehensive and nervous. At first, they didn't know whether a menagerie had got loose, or whether all the cats of the district were engaged in a free fight. Then the procession came into sight from the side lane, and the explanation of the mystery was revealed.

"Them dratted schoolboys agin," said one of the local inhabitants, as though that explained everything.

Bannington was generally indulgent towards such "rags." The St. Frank's fellows were invariably well behaved; if they ever indulged in a rag, it was harmless. Seldom, indeed, did the townspeople find it necessary to complain.

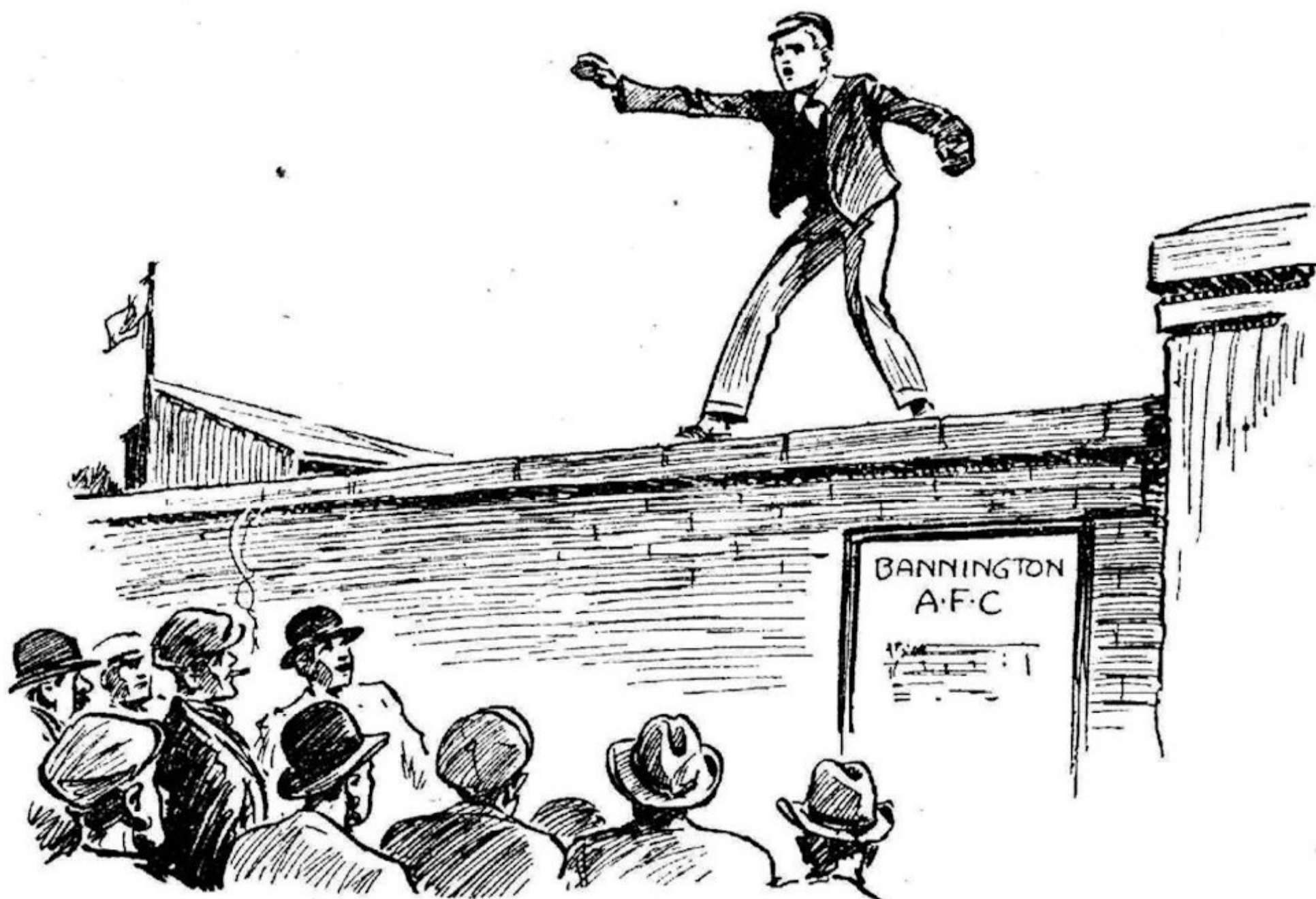
Making more noise than ever, the procession marched down the High Street, and the crowds grew larger and larger. And most of the spectators were compelled to admit that the legends on the banners, if crudely executed, were striking in their appeal.

The first banner, which figured in the procession immediately behind the band, bore the words: "Play up, the Town!"

Then, in the rear, came an assortment of other banners: "Come and See the Schoolboys Play the Professionals!" "The Town Needs Your Encouragement—Not Your Abuse!" "Sportsmen! Rally Round Your Club!" "It's Your Cheers the Town Wants—Not Your Sneers!"

There were a good few Removites in the High Street, waiting to watch the procession go by. They were naturally interested in this parade. The Junior Eleven was there, and Handforth, in particular, was inclined to be critical. In his opinion, the whole thing was wrong. If he had had the organising of this publicity, he would have had all the fellows in football togs, and those in the lead would have been punting a football about.

"Never mind, Handy," said Church, with a grin. "It's jolly good. Boots has done the thing well."



Standing on the high wall that surrounded the Bannington football ground, Busterfield Boofs made his appeal to the people to support the football club. The crowd listened apathetically, and there were one or two catcalls.

"Rats!" scoffed Handforth. "You don't think the townspeople are going to take any notice of this, do you? They'll just laugh at it, and then forget it. They won't come into the enclosure to see the game."

Hal Brewster, of the River House School, pushed his way through the crowds, and he cheerily greeted the St. Frank's fellows.

"Well, here we are—in force!" he remarked, grinning. "We've come along to give you chaps our support."

"Good man!" said Nipper heartily. "That's the spirit!"

Practically the entire Fourth Form of the River House School had turned up. At least, all the "Commoners" were there. The "Honourables," led by Wellborne, would probably go to the greyhound races.

Quite a crowd of fellows from Bannington Grammar School were to be seen, too—and last, but by no means least, the girls of the Moor View School were beginning to arrive in large numbers. If the townspeople supported their own club as well as the school-boys and schoolgirls supported the St. Frank's Remove, then the crowd in the football enclosure would be a considerable one.

It had not been necessary to ask Irene & Co. to come; for as soon as they heard that a match was to be played between the St. Frank's Junior Eleven against the professional reserves, they eagerly volunteered to turn up in force.

"I think it's a splendid idea," said Irene Manners, laughing. "Of course, you won't be able to win the match against these professional footballers, but I'll bet you'll give them a good game."

"Won't beat them?" said Handforth blankly. "Here, I say, Irene! Is that all the faith you have in us?"

"Well, it's a tall order," said the girl.

"We're not afraid of tall orders!" retorted Handforth. "And we're going to show these professionals how football should be played."

"We'll cheer you!" smiled Winnie Pitt. "We couldn't possibly keep away, could we? And I'm sure that my brother will play a topping game for the school."

Reggie Pitt chuckled.

"That's right, sis—give us plenty of encouragement," he said cheerily. "Of course, Handy believes that we shall mop up these professionals without any trouble; but if we win the game we shall deserve medals all round."

"But Bannington can't play!" protested Handforth. "Even the First Eleven is no good. So what price the Reserves?"

"It's more than likely that the Reserves are hotter than the First," said Nipper shrewdly. "And playing against a Junior School Eleven is a bit different from playing against another professional club, old man. So we mustn't delude ourselves. This game is going to be a twister!"

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, of course, it's up to you forwards," he said carelessly. "If you don't score any goals, we can't expect to win. But you can rely upon me not to let Bannington score. If the leather goes into my goal, I'll jolly well eat it!"

"Good old optimist!" chuckled Reggie. "But you needn't worry; we shan't compel you to keep your word."

The procession went by, and Nipper and the other juniors were rather gratified to notice that big crowds were now following. This publicity stunt was having its desired effect. The Bannington people were becoming interested, and large numbers were walking towards the football ground.

The trouble was, nobody knew, yet, whether they were bound for the football enclosure, or whether they were going to the Greyhound Arena.



CHAPTER 10.

Boots Becomes Eloquent!

THIS won't do!" said Buster Boots, frowning.

The procession was over, and the energetic skipper of the Fourth was standing just beyond the main gates of the football enclosure. The road was thronged with people. But, unfortunately, fully seventy-five per cent were passing the turnstiles and continuing on their way towards the Arena. It was as the juniors had feared; the crowds were amused at the idea of the St. Frank's Junior Eleven playing the Bannington Reserves, but they preferred to go to the greyhound races. Those who entered the football enclosure were mainly youngsters, and people who could not afford the higher price of admission to the race-track.

"Well, we've done our best!" said De Valerie of the Remove. "The people know there's a football match on, anyhow. If they don't like to attend it, it's their own fault!"

Boots grunted.

"I don't see why we should lose all these customers," he said gruffly. "Look at this huge crowd now! We ought to do something about it."

The road was packed. There was some little hitch at the Arena, and the people were not being admitted so rapidly. The crowds were collecting so fast that the road was soon crowded from pavement to pavement.

Buster Boots did not hesitate for long. He looked round hastily, and then he turned to two or three of his companions.

"Come on, you fellows!" he said briskly. "Give me a leg-up! I'm going to get to the top of this wall!"

"What on earth for?" asked Clapson, staring.

"Never mind what for—give me a hand!" said Boots.

"Just now you wanted a leg," grinned De Valerie.

But they did not argue with the Fourth Form Skipper. They gave him the necessary assistance, and a few seconds later John Busterfield Boots was standing on the top of the high wall that surrounded the football enclosure. Everybody in the crowd had seen his movements, and they were looking at him amusedly.

"Citizens of Bannington!" shouted Boots at the top of his voice.

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo, kid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were all sorts of cat-calls and shouts, but John Busterfield Boots took no notice. There was a determined light in his eyes, and his jaw was eloquent of a set purpose.

"I don't know whether you are supporters of the Bannington Town Football Club or not!" he shouted. "But I reckon I'm pretty safe in guessing that a good many of you are. Well, I'm talking to you!"

"Play up, the Town!" yelled somebody.

"They can't play up!" called another voice in derision. "They're rotten!"

"They're not worth supporting!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come off your perch, kid!"

"I'll come off when I've said what I've got to say!" retorted Boots aggressively. "This afternoon there's a match between the St. Frank's Junior Team and the Town Reserves. Why don't you come in and support it? Why don't you give your local men some encouragement?"

"It's a waste of time to go in, young 'un!" said one man good-naturedly.

"And if you all say that, and if you all keep away, what's going to happen to the club?" demanded Boots. "Before the end of the season it'll be in bankruptcy, and then there won't be any club at all! Bannington won't be represented in the League!"

There was silence.

"And afterwards you'll be grumbling like the dickens!" continued Boots, warming to his work. "You'll begin to be sorry that you didn't support the club better. Why are the players doing so badly this season? It's your fault, just as much as theirs!"

"Go easy, my lad!" shouted one of the men.

"In fact, it's more your fault!" declared Buster Boots. "Haven't you watched football long enough to know that the players are influenced by the crowds? If a team has a run of good luck, and wins two or three matches right off the reel, the crowds generally roar with enthusiasm at every movement on the field. An outside man

can't take a run without a storm of cheering going up, and an inside man can't take a pot-shot at goal without nearly everybody going off their rockers! That's when the team is doing well!"

The crowd began to listen more attentively.

"But what happens when your favourites are doing badly?" went on Boots, in an accusing voice. "A forward has only got to make a miskick, and you jeer at him. You sneer—you taunt."

"You've got a good deal to say, haven't you, kid?" asked one of the men angrily.

"I'm not saying that you do it, particularly," replied Boots. "I'm talking about football crowds in general. Present company always excepted, you know. I was here last Saturday, when your First Eleven played Croydon. They made a hopeless mess of it, and they were jeered and taunted until they were hardly able to tell whether they were on their heads or their heels. It's the fault of the crowds—not the players!"

There were more murmurs among the listeners.

"And it's always the same at every big football ground—First, Second, or Third Division," said Boots sternly. "A team is doing well, and the supporters cheer to the echo. The same team does badly, and those self-same supporters do their utmost to take the heart out of the players. And so things get worse. The players are nervous, knowing jolly well that they'll get hooted at if they make a miskick. And, as sure as the dickens, they *do* make a miskick. Then, in the end, they feel that they can't do anything right!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The young gent is telling the truth, you fellows!" said one of the crowd. "I hadn't thought of it like this before, but he's right!"

"Your teams have been doing badly!" said Boots quickly. "The First Eleven hasn't won a match yet. Well, now is your time to encourage them. Now is the time the men want your cheers and your shouts. They're all sound fellows—you've seen them playing good games before now. Well, you've only got to put some heart into them, and they'll play as well as ever. If you want some real sport this afternoon, come into the football enclosure and see this match!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought there was a catch in it, young 'un!" grinned one of the men.

Boots bristled.

"A catch!" he roared. "Where is it? Haven't I been telling you to encourage your own men? Well, if you come in and cheer them, it'll be against my own team, won't it?"

"Crikey! The kid's right there!"

"So he is, by gum!"

"I'm impartial about it!" continued Boots. "Let the best team win! Football is sport

—thrilling, clean, inspiring. You pay your money, and you see ninety minutes' continuous sport. You can pay money somewhere else, and see only a few minutes of sport—and not particularly clean sport at that!" he added significantly. "Why not come in this enclosure? The game's just about to start. Come in, and give your own men the cheers they need!"

Buster Boots had spoken with real feeling. He was a thorough sportsman, and it always made him angry when he heard a football crowd jeering at men who were clever players, but who were, perhaps, slightly off form. Why couldn't the crowds make allowances? Why couldn't they be sympathetic?

Boots had spoken with such whole-hearted earnestness that fully fifty per cent of the crowd turned and made for the turnstiles of the football ground. The fever seemed to spread, too. Men were shouting and laughing, and there was a regular stampede towards the turnstiles.

Other crowds, coming up, changed their minds, and instead of going into the greyhound Arena they passed into the football enclosure.

"They're just like a lot of sheep!" said Clapson, under his voice. "You get a few started, and they all follow!"

"Then they can't be like sheep—because they're proving their common sense!" said Boots, as he came down from the wall and joined his companions. "Good luck to 'em!"

"You've done fine, old man!" said De Valerie, with enthusiasm. "My only hat! I never expected to see these crowds piling through the turnstiles."

It was certainly a surprise. Even Buster Boots himself had not expected such success. A wave of excitement seemed to be passing through the throngs, and more and more were entering the football enclosure.

Crowds that had come with the original intention of patronising the Arena now changed their minds, and went in to see the football match. There wasn't the slightest doubt that Buster Boots' publicity efforts were successful.

At all events, the forceful skipper of the Fourth had done his best, and now he entered the enclosure with his lieutenants, feeling that the afternoon was going to be an enjoyable one.

While these little incidents had been happening, a rather interesting conversation was taking place in the greyhound racing enclosure. The crowds there were thick—but not quite so thick as the promoters would have liked. Thanks to Buster Boots, the Arena was robbed of many of its intended patrons that afternoon.

Business had not yet started, and Mr. Bill Brice, the bookmaker, was pleased to greet three of his young clients.

Needless to say, these young clients were Gore-Pearce & Co., of Study A.



CHAPTER 11.

A Surprise for Mr. Brice!

WELL, young gents, let's hope you have a bit more luck to-day!" said Mr. Brice genially. "And before things begin to get busy, what about settling up?"

Gore-Pearce laughed.

"You're hot on that money, aren't you?" he asked. "I suppose you mean that tenner?"

"I do!" nodded the bookmaker.

"Well, can't we postpone it for a bit?" asked Claude Gore-Pearce coolly.

Mr. Brice's manner changed.

"If it's all the same to you, young gent, I'd rather not postpone it," he said gruffly. "A debt is a debt, and there's no sense in letting these things hang on. You got my letter, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I told you plain enough in that letter," continued Mr. Brice. "There's a matter of ten pounds to be settled up, Mr. Gore-Pearce. Unless you can pay up, and clear that debt, I'm afraid I shan't be able to take any further bets. It won't be any good you going to another bookmaker, either—because it won't take me long to pass the tip round."

"What's this—a threat?" asked Gore-Pearce unpleasantly.

"Come, come, young gent," said Mr. Brice. "I don't want to be nasty about it, but you know as well as I do that my game is a risky one. If you win, you expect me to pay out. If I don't pay out, I'm looked upon as a scoundrel. There's no reason why it should be one-sided, is there? Pay up your debts, and I'll allow you some more credit."

Gore-Pearce smiled.

"Well, look here, Mr. Brice, there's something I want to talk to you about," he said genially. "No, I'm not deliberately trying to change the subject. There's a reason for this—as you'll find out later on."

Mr. Brice did not look any too pleased; and Gulliver and Bell stood by, listening and watching. They knew that they were not on in this act. In any case, they could easily leave it to their leader.

"You remember you were telling us something about an accident last Saturday?" asked Gore-Pearce smoothly. "One of your dogs was run over, wasn't he?"

Mr. Brice scowled.

"Yes, Domino," he said. "The best dog I ever had, too. Only a youngster, but, by thunder, he was a caution. Faster than anything I've ever seen on the track!"

"And he's dead?"

"Killed!" nodded Mr. Brice. "Run over by a car."

"What did you do after he was killed?" asked Gore-Pearce politely.

"Do?" said the bookmaker. "Why, I left him there—dead in the ditch. Afterwards, I was rather sorry about it. Maybe I ought to have buried the poor brute. Not that it really matters. I've been trying to find out who those young blighters were who ran over him, but I haven't found a trace of them."

Gore-Pearce was feeling very satisfied. Mr. Brice was quite convinced that Domino was dead, and he hadn't the faintest suspicion that the dog was really alive.

"Was he worth much?" asked Gore-Pearce carelessly.

"If it's all the same to you, Mr. Gore-Pearce, I'd rather not talk about the dog," said Brice bluntly. "It makes me wild to think of him. Now, about this matter of ten pounds——"

"Just a minute!" said the junior. "There's no hurry, Mr. Brice. I'm rather interested in that dog of yours. I dare say he was worth a good bit?"

The bookmaker chewed his cigar end, and then threw it away.

"Worth a bit?" he repeated. "Well, I'd say he was worth a couple of hundred pounds, at least."

"Great Scott!" said Gulliver, startled out of his silence.

"Surprised?" said Mr. Brice, looking at him.

"Well, I—I didn't think a dog would be worth all that!" said Gulliver.

"Two hundred quid isn't much," said the bookmaker. "Why, after another two or three races, Domino would have been worth a thousand! The dog had it in him, too. As fast as an express train! Yes, within a week or two he would have been worth a thousand pounds of anybody's money."

No doubt Mr. Brice exaggerated. Now that the dog was dead—as he thought—a little exaggeration couldn't do any harm. But Claude Gore-Pearce gave his chums a swift, triumphant glance. If this dog was so valuable, there wasn't much doubt that Mr. Brice would be willing to go to extreme lengths to recover him.

"Well, Mr. Brice, I might be able to do you a good turn," said Gore-Pearce coolly.

"Do me a good turn, eh?" said Mr. Brice, staring.

"Yes."

"That's very thoughtful of you, young gent—and very generous, too," said Mr. Brice. "But don't you think you'd better do me a good turn to start with? There isn't much more time before the business commences, and I'd like to have that little debt settled——"

"Confound the debt!" said Gore-Pearce. "Supposing I tell you that your dog, Domino, is alive?"

Mr. Brice stared dumbly.

"Eh? Supposing I tell you that?" repeated Gore-Pearce.

"Then I shall say that you're talking rubbish!" said Mr. Brice unpleasantly. "Look here, my lad, I don't want to hear no more about that dog of mine! The very mention of him makes me wild. See? And I don't want to get wild with you young gents. I've had enough grief over that dog since Saturday!"

"Grief?" repeated Gore-Pearce, in astonishment. "Why, you didn't care for the dog, did you?"

"I don't mean grief in that way!" said the bookmaker, with a frown. "But the money I've lost has nearly turned my hair grey! It wasn't only what Domino was worth, but everything else, too. I was reckoning on making a lot of money out of that dog."

"And there's no reason why your reckoning shouldn't come out right in the long run," said Gore-Pearce easily. "The fact is, Mr. Brice, I wasn't talking out of the back of my neck when I said that Domino is alive. He is alive, and I can prove it."

The bookmaker simply stared.

"Alive, eh?" he repeated in an ominous tone. "Oh! That's very interesting!"

"I know where you can lay your hands on him, too," proceeded the cad of Study A. "And I don't see any reason why we shouldn't make a little business deal of it, Mr. Brice. Just a little transaction between ourselves, eh?"

"Go on!" said the man.

"Well, according to your reckoning, the dog was worth at least a couple of hundred quid, with a distinct prospect of being worth a thousand within a week or two," said Gore-Pearce coolly. "Now, Mr. Brice, look here. I don't want to take advantage of you, but I should think it'll be easily worth a hundred pounds to you to get your dog back, eh?"

"What the thunder——"

"So I'm going to suggest that you should look upon that ten-pound debt as wiped out," said Gore-Pearce nodding. "On the top of that, I want you to pay me fifty quid in cash, and give twenty each to my pals here. That makes ninety pounds in money, and the tenner that I owe you. A hundred quid altogether."

Mr. Brice stared in sheer wonder.

"Is this a joke, young gent?" he asked grimly.

"Of course it isn't——"

"Then I don't think you ought to be allowed out!" said Mr. Brice coldly. "It's high time, young man, that you were put away—in a padded cell. Ninety pounds in cash, eh? What next!"

Mr. Brice spoke heatedly, and Claude Gore-Pearce was rather disappointed. Gulliver and Bell were feeling somewhat alarmed. They hadn't expected the bookmaker to take this attitude. He hadn't expressed the faintest surprise. He hadn't shown any excitement. He was merely grim.

"You don't seem to realise——" began Gore-Pearce.

"Look here, Mr. Gore-Pearce, I've had enough of this!" broke in Bill Brice curtly. "You owe me ten quid, and I haven't any time to waste on you. Are you going to pay up or not?"

"But why should I pay up?" asked Gore-Pearce. "I'm willing to make a deal with you. I can supply you with information that will be valuable to you. I can tell you where you can find your dog, Domino——"

"That's enough about my dog!" interrupted Mr. Brice harshly. "Them tricks won't work with me, my lad! The dog is dead, and I don't want to hear no more about him. Understand? He's dead!"

And Mr. Brice spoke as though the subject was definitely closed.



CHAPTER 12.

The Bargain!

GULLIVER and Bell felt that the whole precious scheme had fallen through; but Gore-Pearce was not giving up hope so easily.

Taking everything into consideration, Mr. Brice's attitude was not altogether unexpected. The man was so convinced that the dog was dead that he took it for granted that these boys were attempting to play a trick on him. So Gore-Pearce remained calm and collected.

There was something rather dramatic in this little situation. The three schoolboys and the bookmaker were standing close together, talking in ordinary voices. Yet they were being jostled by crowds all the time, and their conversation remained private. There was so much noise going on all round them that the very publicity made it a confidential talk.

It was getting near the time for the first race, and the other bookmakers were getting to business. People were pushing to and fro, and the air was full of shouts.

"Look here! I can't waste any more time——" began Mr. Brice.

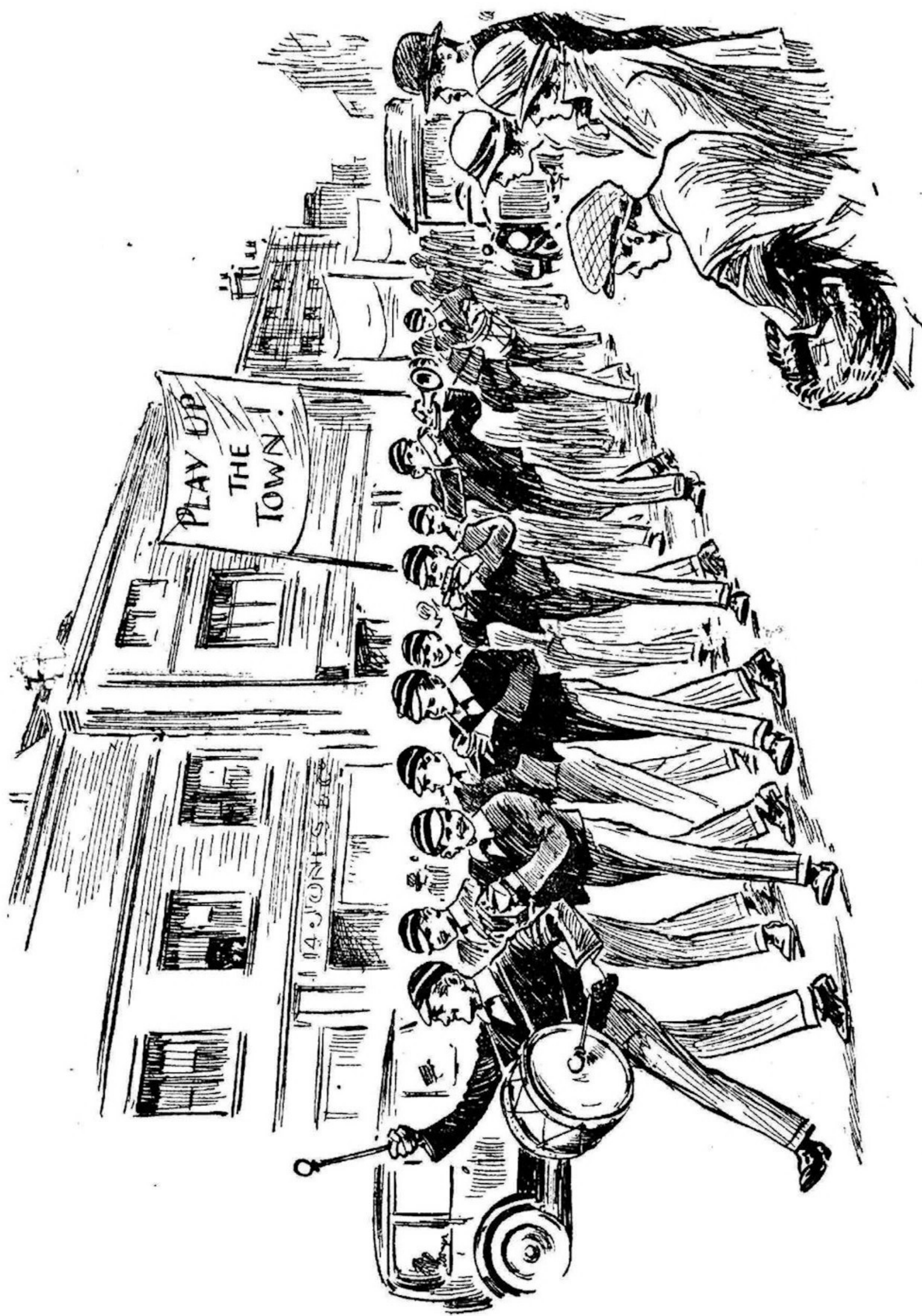
"You're not wasting your time at all," interrupted Gore-Pearce. "You don't believe that Domino is alive, do you?"

"No, I don't!"

"But he is."

"Rubbish!" snapped Mr. Brice. "Gosh! What do you take me for, kid? What sort of a game is this? Do you think I was born yesterday?"

"No; and I am quite prepared to furnish you with proof," said Gore-Pearce. "I don't expect you to take my word, Mr. Brice. You're a businesss man, and I'm here to make a business deal with you. That dog of yours is worth money, and I'm jolly certain that you'll be glad to get him back. I'm prepared to give you the information——"



Led by the band, which consisted of drums, mouth organs, cornets, tin whistles, flutes and a choice variety of other instruments, the procession marched down Bannington High Street. The din was terrific and unmelodious. Shopkeepers came hurrying into the street; huge crowds collected. And that was just what the boys wanted. They were out to attract attention towards Bannington Town Football Club—and they were making a great success of it!

"I've had enough of this!" snapped the bookmaker harshly. "That dog is dead. Didn't I see him in the road myself? My pal was with me, too. The dog was dead, I tell you!"

"Did you examine him yourself?" asked Gore-Pearce quickly.

"I saw him!" growled the bookmaker. "I'm not blind. That dog had no more life in him than a leg of mutton. So you can't come across with this absurd story— Wait a minute!" he added, his eyes gleaming. "As far as I know, you've never seen Domino, and you claim that he is alive. All right, Mr. Gore-Pearce. Describe him to me!"

"With pleasure!" said Gore-Pearce promptly.

And he gave an accurate description of Willy's new pet, Lightning. As Mr. Brice listened, his eyes opened wider. Without doubt, the description fitted in every detail. The colouring, the characteristic details. All fitted.

"But—but it's impossible!" protested Mr. Brice at last. "Domino was dead in the ditch—"

"He wasn't dead!" interrupted Gore-Pearce. "Somebody came along and rescued him and took him away. He found that there weren't any bones broken, and that the dog was only slightly hurt. His new owner has given him a new name, and he's getting ready to train him, too. This chap told me where he found the dog and in what circumstances. I put two and two together, and realised that it must be yours. You made a mistake in leaving the dog in that ditch, Mr. Brice. You ought to have been more certain."

Doubts were beginning to creep into the bookmaker's mind. He recalled that scene when the motor-car had run over his dog. And once again his brow clouded.

"Impossible!" he repeated. "The dog was dead!"

"In that case, how am I able to describe him so accurately?" asked Gore-Pearce. "I've seen him this morning, I tell you. And I'm not asking you to take my word, Mr. Brice. After the races, I'll take you to the place and you can see the dog for yourself."

"Where is he?" demanded Mr. Brice quickly.

Gore-Pearce laughed.

"That would be telling, wouldn't it?" he grinned. "Oh, no! I don't give you any information until you agree to my terms. And I want a statement in writing, too, Mr. Brice. No offence, but this is a business deal."

"You young Shylock—"

"Now don't insult Shylock!" said Gore-Pearce easily. "Shylock, in my opinion, was a thoroughly decent sort of fellow. He was justified in demanding his pound of

flesh. Shakespeare knew what he was writing about—"

"Confound Shakespeare!" snapped Mr. Brice. "I'm not going to give you any written agreement—"

"Then I'm afraid I can't give you any information," said Gore-Pearce. "And don't forget, Mr. Brice, that you won't be able to get the facts from anybody else. I only found them out by accident. But your dog is alive, and if you'll sign a little document



Led by the band, which consisted of drums, morris dances, the procession marched down Bannington hurrying into the street; huge crowds collected attention towards Bannington Town

saying that you'll pay one hundred pounds, I'll tell you everything I know. Of course, you can put a proviso in the agreement that not a penny is to be paid over unless the dog really is Domino. That's fair, isn't it?"

Mr. Brice was compelled to admit that the thing seemed straight.

"I'm hanged if I can understand you, young gent!" he said bluntly. "It seems true enough, the way you say it. But, anyhow, I wouldn't pay a hundred pounds. I'd rather let the dog go for good."

Gore-Pearce stared.

"But didn't you tell me that he was worth a thousand pounds?" he asked.

"No, I didn't!" retorted Mr. Brice. "I said that he might be worth a thousand quid after a few more races. But for all I know, he may be a crock now—even if he is alive."

"Yes, but——"

Gore-Pearce shrugged his shoulders.

"We're all out to do ourselves a bit of good," he said coolly.

"And you the son of a millionaire, too," said Mr. Brice contemptuously.

The cad of Study A flushed.

"We'd better say no more about it, then!" he snapped. "If you don't want this information, Mr. Brice, you needn't have it. That's finished. We'll keep it to ourselves, and you can whistle for your confounded dog!"

Gore-Pearce turned aside and nodded to Gulliver and Bell.

"Come on!" he added. "We'll be going!"

All three of them commenced to push off through the crowds, and Mr. Brice bit his lip. It was obvious that he was uncertain. There were doubts in his mind. He had an idea that his dog really was alive, and he knew quite well that the animal was worth a lot of money.

"Hold on!" he said hastily.

"Yes?" said Gore-Pearce, turning back.

"Look here, my lad," said Mr. Brice thickly. "I'm not agreeing to any hundred quid, but I don't mind going to fifty. Understand? Fifty, but no more!"

Gore-Pearce was quite satisfied, for this was the original amount he had figured on.

"Fifty, eh?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Oh, well, perhaps we'll be satisfied with fifty. That means the wiping off of that ten-quid debt, twenty pounds in cash for me, and a tanner each for these fellows."

"And you'll take my word for it, too!" said Mr. Brice. "I'm not writing anything down."

"But is that quite fair?" asked Gore-Pearce steadily. "Business is business, Mr. Brice. All I want you to write is something like this: 'I agree to pay fifty pounds for information received from Claude Gore-Pearce, providing Domino is alive.' Just something to show that there's no ill-feeling, as it were."

The bookmaker grunted, and pulled his notebook out. He scrawled some words, tore out a page, and handed it to Gore-Pearce.

"There you are—that's all I do!" he snapped.

Gore-Pearce read the words. They were very much as he had said, except that Mr. Brice

had added a proviso to the effect that nothing would be paid unless the dog was alive and fit for further racing. That last bit gave Gore-Pearce a bit of a jolt—for he remembered how groggy the dog had looked when he had seen it—but it couldn't be helped.



, tin whistles, flutes and a choice variety of other instruments. The din was terrific and unmelodious. Shopkeepers came out just what the boys wanted. They were out to attract and they were making a great success of it!

"I don't see why I should pay you anything!" said the bookmaker angrily. "If my dog is alive, he's mine. I'm surprised at you young gents for trying to get money out of me like this. It's a tricky sort of game, and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"Now!" growled the bookie. "Where is this dog?"

"At St. Frank's!" said Gore-Pearce promptly.

"What!"

"He was found by one of our fellows," proceeded the cad of Study A. "Young Handforth minor, of the Third Form. He took the dog home, sat up with him all night, and brought him back to life. He's called him Lightning, and he's made a pet of him. The dog is at St. Frank's now."

Mr. Brice stared.

"But you told me that I couldn't get the information from anybody else!" he ejaculated. "And now you say that the dog is at your school! Why, practically any St. Frank's boy could have told me!"

Gore-Pearce nodded.

"Perhaps so," he murmured. "But does that make any difference, Mr. Brice? You've got the information, and if you go to St. Frank's you'll get the dog. Business is business, you know."

Mr. Brice breathed hard.

"One of these days, young gent, you'll make a first-class crook!" he said feelingly. "And unless you're jolly careful you'll end up in the dock!"



CHAPTER 13.

Ready for the Match!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE was in no way offended. "You will have your little joke, Mr. Brice!" he said pleasantly. "Hang it, there's nothing dishonest in what I've done. And you don't have to pay a penny of that money unless Domino is really alive. So what are you growling at?"

"I don't believe a word of this idiotic story, anyhow!" said Mr. Brice, with a grunt. "Naturally, I'll have a look into it, and prove it one way or the other. But Domino is dead, and you can't fool me!"

Gore-Pearce shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it can easily be settled," he said. "You've only got to come along to St. Frank's after the races, and you'll find the dog with young Handforth, as large as life."

"And who is young Handforth?"

"He's the captain of the Third Form," said Gore-Pearce. "Look here, the best thing

you can do is to come along to St. Frank's by yourself. For goodness' sake don't ask for me, or for Gulliver, or Bell. We mustn't know you!"

"Ashamed of me, eh?"

"It isn't that," said Gore-Pearce. "But you know what the rules are. We're not allowed to have any dealings with bookies, and it might mean the sack for us if we claimed you as a friend. So when you come to St. Frank's you'd better come as a stranger. You must pretend that you heard this news from somebody else. And if you see us, don't speak to us."

"All right—I understand," said Mr. Brice. "I'll come along to the school and ask for this young fellow you have mentioned. What's his name? Handforth minor? I'll make a note of it."

He jotted the name down, and then dismissed the subject altogether. He was late already, and within another two minutes he was hard at work with many clients, and Gore-Pearce & Co. had drifted away. They had decided not to make any bets that day. In fact, Gore-Pearce suggested that they should leave the race track and go across to watch the football match.

"We're not interested in the rotten game, but it'll be safer," he said. "We'll give the races a miss for this afternoon—and I rather think that we shall have done a good day's work by the time this evening comes."

"Do you think he'll pay up?" asked Gulliver dubiously.

"Of course he'll pay up," replied Gore-Pearce.

He was just a bit doubtful, perhaps, regarding that proviso, for he had no means of telling whether Domino was likely to be fit for racing again. Still, he had done the best he could, and now it was up to Mr. Bill Brice. If the worst came to the worst, Gore-Pearce felt certain that he would be relieved of that ten-pounds' debt. So he wouldn't have had his trouble for nothing.

The three cads made their way into the football enclosure, and they received a bit of a surprise. There were fully two thousand people present, which was something like a record gate for a Reserve match—and a friendly, at that.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Gore-Pearce, as he stared at the grand-stand and the terraces. "Look at all the people!"

"They must be dotty!" said Bell. "Fancy coming here to see our chaps playing against the professionals! If you want to know my opinion, the whole thing is a bit rotten. A come-down for St. Frank's, eh?"

"It's worse than a come-down!" said Gulliver sneeringly. "Nipper ought to be ashamed of himself for arranging the match. Fancy our fellows playing against these common professionals!"

Fortunately, there were very few St. Frank's fellows who held these snobbish views. The vast majority of the juniors were wholeheartedly in favour of the match. They believed in this friendly spirit.

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About the only fellow who was thoroughly dissatisfied was John Busterfield Boots.

"Rotten!" he declared, as he viewed the crowds. "Why, hang it, there's only a handful here!"

"If you call about two thousand people a handful, I agree," said Clapson, nodding.

"This ground will hold nearly twenty thousand!" said Boots sternly.

"Yes, but it's only a Reserve match."

"That doesn't matter," said Boots. "I'm not at all pleased. Our publicity stunts have helped a bit, I'll admit, but we shall have to do better. We've undertaken to help the Bannington Club, and I shan't be satisfied until I see this enclosure packed."

Mr. Billings, the secretary-manager, however, was more than delighted.

He was in the grand-stand with Fred Hearne, the captain of the First Eleven, and most of the other First Team players.

"Well, Fred, we've got to admit that these boys are pretty wonderful," said Mr. Billings. "I didn't expect more than five hundred for this match. I'm glad I fixed it up now."

"Yes, it ought to do us some good," said the Bannington centre-forward. "We've had rotten crowds lately. I don't think we shall have much trouble in wiping these schoolboys off the map."

Mr. Billings looked doubtful.

"Don't you be too sure, Fred," he said. "These schoolboys are pretty hot stuff."

"But school football and professional football are two different things," said one of the other players. "They'll be lucky if they get off the field with only six goals on the wrong side. Our chaps will make mince-meat out of them!"

All the Bannington Town professionals thought the same. The First Eleven was decidedly amused. They had all seated themselves in the grand-stand in order to watch. They felt that this was going to be an afternoon of chuckles.

It was like the cheek of these schoolboys to challenge them—them, the First Eleven! But they could only play the First Eleven if they beat the Reserves; and Fred Hearne and his men laughed aloud when they thought of the prospect of these junior schoolboys beating the Reserves. The very idea of it was preposterous. They were all convinced that Nipper and his merry men would be "wiped up." The spectators were thinking the same thing.

"Well, we shall see some goals to-day!" said one of the regular supporters. "I reckon there'll be about a dozen in the first half!"

"Our chaps will be all over these kids!" said another man.

Players and spectators alike were of the same opinion. The schoolboys were going to be demoralised. And the crowds were rather heartened at the thought of seeing a good many goals scored. This season, both the First Eleven and the Reserves had hardly scored any goals at all—and, after all, football crowds like to see goals scored more than

anything else. They enjoy the game, and the finer points of the play, but goal-scoring is the chief attraction. No matter how good a game may be, if the result is 0—0, the crowd feels that it has been done out of something.

Well, there would be no lack of goals in this game! Many of the Bannington Town supporters were of the opinion that the reserves were as good, if not better than the First Eleven. They couldn't possibly be worse. For owing to the many set-backs the First had got into a state of complete despondency, and had not given a convincing display yet.

"Here they come!"

"Hurrah!"

"Play up, the boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two teams came out on to the field—the St. Frank's Juniors first. Perhaps the spectators were rather astonished at the sturdy, businesslike aspect of the St. Frank's Junior Eleven. They weren't such a set of weaklings! In fact, they looked very businesslike as they punted a football over towards one of the goals. The Town Reserves followed, and received encouraging cheers. It was a very different atmosphere to that which usually prevailed.

"Play up, the babies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why not allow the kids three or four extra players?" yelled somebody. "How about letting them have two goalies?"

These and similar pleasantries were shouted from all parts of the enclosure. The Reserves themselves were grinning hugely. They did not feel that this game was undignified, but they were certainly confident that they were going to make a complete hash of their youthful opponents.

But over-confidence is sometimes even worse than lack of confidence!



CHAPTER 14.

Surprising the Natives!

"HEY'RE off!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, the Reserves!"

"Play up, the babies!"

Nipper won the toss, although there was very little in it, since there was practically no wind, and the sun was hidden behind a bank of fleecy clouds.

The referee's whistle had blown, and the game was in progress.

The professionals were playing leisurely, even during this first minute, taking the game in a spirit of fun. They didn't want to be too hard on these schoolboys. Of course, the result was a foregone conclusion:

they could get goals just whenever they liked, and they didn't quite see why they should humiliate their young opponents too heavily. There was plenty of time for goal-scoring. They could take things just as they liked.

And then, in that first minute, the Reserves received a rude, shattering shock.

Castleton, who was playing centre-half for the Junior Eleven, sent out a long pass to Reggie Pitt on the wing. One of the Bannington players tried to intercept it, but he just failed. The next moment Reggie had trapped the ball, and he was off like the wind.

"Go it, Reggie!"

"Steady, old man—steady!"

"Centre—centre!"

Reggie Pitt was an extraordinarily clever winger. He streaked down the touch-line like a flash, and more than one of the Town players were left blank with astonishment. And at the critical moment Reggie Pitt sent over a perfect pass.

Nipper was just out of position, but Vivian Travers leapt forward, gathering the leather in his stride, and took a first-time shot on the run.

It was a perfect piece of work—superbly judged and beautifully executed.

Slam!

The ball hissed through the air from Travers' foot and went towards the corner of the goal, low down and deadly. The Bannington goalie, at the last second, realised that this was a shot that could not be dealt with in a leisurely fashion.

He flung himself full length, but he was too late. The ball struck the back of the net, and rolled out over the line again.

"How's that?" yelled Buster Boots.

"Out!" grinned De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goal!"

The St. Frank's fellows were overjoyed; they cheered and shouted. The Bannington supporters remained silent—completely stunned by this unexpected setback. As for the Reserves themselves, they were entirely dumbfounded.

The juniors had scored—in the first minute!

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Hearne, the Bannington First Eleven skipper.

"Well, what did I tell you?" demanded Mr. Billings. "These boys are hot stuff!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Reggie!"

"Well scored, Travers!"



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The St. Frank's spectators were still shouting—and there were all sorts of enthusiastic calls from the Moor View girls and the River House fellows and the Grammarians. One and all, they were gathered here to see the St. Frank's fellows win; and their enthusiasm was an eye-opener for the milk-and-water local crowd.

The Reserves lined up again, looking thoroughly startled. They had lost their smiles; they had got rid of their amused, tolerant expressions. These schoolboys had scored, and had scored decisively. There had been no fluke about that first goal. It had been worked for deliberately, skilfully. And Travers' shot had been a truly glorious effort.

Every St. Frank's fellow present felt warmed towards Vivian Travers. In many ways he was a questionable sort of fellow; he was not above a dirty trick now and again. But it could not be denied that at sports he was "the goods." He had shown excellent form at the cricket during the summer, and now he was proving his worth as a footballer.

There was something supremely fascinating in Travers' play. He never allowed himself to get flustered; he remained perfectly cool in all circumstances. When he took a shot, that shot was a "scorcher"; and his passes were gems of accuracy.

During the next five minutes of play, Travers aroused further enthusiasm—and even the Bannington supporters began to cheer him. He was soon recognised by the Reserves as a forward to be watched.

Not that Nipper failed in any respect.

Nipper was playing centre-forward, and his own work was excellent, too. He led the whole forward line in a masterly manner, keeping them well together.

The professionals, in accordance with their previous performances, seemed to crack up. That early goal had flustered them considerably, and for a time they were at sixes and sevens. The junior schoolboys had caught them napping, and were taking full advantage of their opportunities.

After five minutes of hard play, during which the game was practically confined to the Reserves' half of the field, Nipper trapped the ball in midfield and streaked for goal. Nobody thought that he was going to make an attempt to score.

"Let Reggie have it!" shouted somebody.

"Pass, Nipper—pass!"

But Nipper did not pass. In a flash he had seen that his forwards were not in good positions to receive the ball. It would be better if he ran through on his own.

Nipper sped down the field with the leather at his feet.

A mighty roar went up. The professional backs seemed to realise the danger at the same moment, and they charged towards Nipper in a frantic flurry. But they were too late.

Nipper was through. He steadied himself, and then kicked. It was a rising shot,

and the leather soared up towards the cross-bar. The goalie leapt, and he just managed to get his hands to the ball in time.

"Oh, well saved!"

"Bravo, goalie!"

Then the shouting died away. The ball had come out into play again, and Nipper, running forward, met the ball with his head.

It was really a splendid header. It shot off at a tangent, and entered the net with the goalkeeper yards away. He hadn't the faintest chance. And, again, it was no fluke. Nipper had headed that ball cleverly—brainily. He had deliberately placed it out of the goalie's reach.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Nipper!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, the babies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were laughs of derision now—not derision against the schoolboys, but against the professionals. Two goals within ten minutes! And the Bannington Reserves hadn't shown the faintest indication of good play yet.

"Buck up, the Reserves!"

"They're all over you!"

"Yah! You're no good!"

Buster Boots bristled as he heard the shouts.

"Give 'em a chance!" he bellowed. "Play up, the Reserves! Pull yourselves together and show your real form! You're not beaten yet!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's the spirit, young 'un!" shouted an elderly man. "By gosh! These kids are real sportsmen!"

Before long the ground was ringing with encouraging shouts. The crowd caught the fever, and instead of sneering at the Reserves they shouted encouragement.

And it was generally acknowledged that these schoolboys were providing the townspeople with the best display of football that had been seen on the field this season.



CHAPTER 15.

The Result!

THAT first half was one long series of thrills.

It was true that the Reserves tried to pull themselves together after the first fifteen minutes, but they were not allowed much rope. The St. Frank's fellows had got into their stride now, and they were at the top of their form. They were up to all the tricks; they proved themselves to be footballers of no mean quality. There was nothing ragged about their work—nothing slipshod.

They played together, as one machine. And the majority of the spectators, who had expected to see a sort of ragtime game, were left breathless.

A third goal was scored before the half-time whistle went. Reggie Pitt was responsible for this one—off his own bat, so to speak. He ran right in, after making a brilliant dash up the touchline, and he sent in a cross-shot which went curving into the goal, completely baffling the custodian.

Three—nil!

And it was the professionals who were nil! These schoolboys, laughed at and scoffed at, had scored three decisive goals in the first half. And the Bannington Reserves had not been able to reply once.

In a way, it was farcical. It was ridiculous. At the same time, it was a very false indication of the professional players' true form. The St. Frank's Junior Eleven would have been very foolish, indeed, if it had jumped to the conclusion that these professionals were inefficient.

"Well done, Nipper!" said Buster Boots heartily, as Nipper led his men in. "By jingo! You've shown the crowd what St. Frank's can do!"

"Never knew such a game!" grinned Handforth. "I had nothing to do. Not a single shot to save!"

"Don't you worry, old man—you'll have plenty of shots to save in the second half," said Nipper cheerfully.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "These Bannington Reserves can't play for toffee!"

"They're hopeless!" said Gresham.

Nipper lost his smile.

"Just a minute, you fellows," he said, gathering the players round him. "I want to give you all a word of warning. For goodness' sake, don't take it for granted that the Bannington Reserves are a wash-out."

"But doesn't the score prove it?" asked Bob Christine.

"You can't judge by the score," replied Nipper. "We took them by surprise. They were over-confident, and they never had a chance to recover. If we fall into the same blunder, we shall probably leave the ground the losers. We've got to fight hard—and keep on fighting—if we're to win this match. You mark my words—these fellows are going to give us a gruelling in the second half. They know that we're not to be sneezed at by now, and they'll go all out to make up the lost ground."

This was wise counsel on Nipper's part, and it proved his braininess as a skipper. A word of warning now was very well timed.

The feeling among the majority of spectators was rather difficult to analyse. Most of the people were pleased at the display of football they had seen; and they gave the schoolboys full credit for their brilliant performance. But how could they continue to encourage the Town Reserves? The men had been absolutely overshadowed by the schoolboys. Weight meant nothing, since

the juniors were so nimble that they were seldom called upon to take a charge.

The Town players were sportsmen—they were clean footballers—and never once had they attempted to take an unfair advantage of their younger, lighter opponents.

In fact, they were inspired by the St. Frank's fellows' display. They realised that this was a real test, and that they would have to look to their laurels in the second half, or they would never be able to hold up their heads again.

They came on to the field after the interval with determined expressions on their faces. They were entirely good-tempered, but they wore no smiles. This was no smiling matter. Their very reputation was at stake.

"Now we're going to see something!" said Irene Manners, who sat in the grand-stand with the other girls, and with a number of the St. Frank's boys. "My goodness! I'll bet those professionals will play like demons in this half!"

"Well, let's hope they don't get too rough," said Winnie, with her eyes on her brother.

"Don't worry!" said Mary Summers. "These men are sportsmen, and I'm sure they'll play cleanly right to the end."

In this statement Mary proved to be a true prophet. The Bannington Town Reserves played an inspired game from the very moment of the whistle.

There was an extraordinary change in them.

The brief respite had enabled them to get over the shock; they had pulled themselves together; and now, instead of taking things easily, they went all out for victory.

Three minutes after the re-start, the Junior Eleven's defence was broken through, and Edward Oswald Handforth, who had complained of having nothing to do, now found himself bombarded.

In brilliant style he saved two deadly shots in quick succession. But even Handforth was human, and when the leather was sent shooting back into the goal, while he was sprawling at full length from a previous save, he could do nothing.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the Reserves!"

That goal was an added inspiration to the professionals. Things were going better now! They were proving to the crowd that they *could* play football if they liked. And they certainly liked now.

Not that Nipper and his merry men did not reply.

They, too, played an extraordinarily swift and clever game. It was a herculean tussle.

The game swept from one end of the field to the other. If the professionals had been in tip-top condition they would certainly have wiped out the deficit, and would probably have won. But the speed was beginning to tell upon them.

After twenty minutes' play they had scored two goals, and things were now looking a



While Nipper looked after the greyhound, the other juniors fell on the rascally bookmaker like a pack of wolves. They rolled him over and over, and within a few moments the man was an absolute wreck.

little better. Three—two. It wasn't such a humiliating score. But just at that critical moment Nipper broke through again and registered another goal for the schoolboys.

By now Bannington had shot its bolt. Try as they would, the Reserves could not organise another winning attack. The schoolboys were too keen on the defence, too agile.

But nobody grumbled. For the first time this season the Bannington players had proved that they could do big things. Thanks to the spectators according them encouragement instead of cat-calls, they had played up with their old-time brilliance in the second half.

And then the end came.

It was a bitter, distasteful pill for the professionals to swallow. They had been beaten by these schoolboys—beaten by two goals to four. But it was not a humiliating defeat. In that second half the Bannington players had re-established themselves in the eyes of their supporters. They had aroused great enthusiasm that was liable to spread and have excellent results.

There was one main cause for the schoolboys' success. They finished the game almost as fresh as they had started. Even during the last minute they were full of energy and enterprise. But their opponents had practically run themselves off their feet during this period of intensive attack.

Mr. Billings, who had watched the game with feverish interest throughout, came to the one obvious conclusion.

These schoolboys were trained and fit; and his own players were stale. Sterner practice, harder training, and there would be nothing much wrong with Bannington Town.

And Mr. Billings felt, deep in his heart, that this was to be the turning point in the fortunes of his club.

Thanks to the St. Frank's Junior Eleven, the period of "dry rot" had been brought to an end.



CHAPTER 16.

Celebrations !

MR. BILLINGS, to tell the truth, was secretly delighted.

He did not let any of his players know that he was so pleased at the result of the game. But he knew very well that this defeat, at the hands of the schoolboys, would put plenty of ginger into his players. It had needed something like this to arouse them from their state of despondency.

Mr. Billings kept his word, too.

He then and there agreed that the St. Frank's Junior Eleven should meet Bannington Town proper on the following Wednesday afternoon. And Mr. Billings was quite certain that Bannington Town would go all out to avenge this defeat upon the Reserves. That forthcoming fixture would be a game worth watching.

The First Eleven would be away on the Saturday, so the local supporters would not have an opportunity of seeing them play until this match against the schoolboys. In the meantime, a good deal of enthusiasm could be worked up, and large crowds could be expected.

Without doubt, the turning point had been reached.

Nipper & Co. went back to St. Frank's, jubilant and happy. They had earned the right to meet the First Eleven, and they were full of optimism. And for this evening they planned various celebrations.

They met with a big reception at St. Frank's. The news had spread, and even the seniors gave them a cheer as they came into the old Triangle. After that the Eleven broke up, and big spreads were held in various junior studies. The celebrations were on a large scale.

Handforth was about the only fellow who seemed disappointed. He couldn't understand how it was that he had been beaten twice. But then Handforth was always the same. He was a first-class goalkeeper, but whenever the leather got into the net he was at a loss to understand the disaster.

"Never mind, Handy, old man," said Nipper cheerfully. "You played a ripping game, and we're all satisfied with you."

"But I'm not satisfied with myself!" replied Handforth. "Personally, I consider that I played rottenly. Those silly professionals oughtn't to have scored at all!"

"Well, perhaps you're right, dear old fellow," said Travers, nodding.

"Eh?"

"I suppose, on the whole, you *did* play rottenly."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"When you come to think of it, the whole thing is ridiculous!" continued Travers coolly. "How on earth did you manage to let the Bannington reserves get the ball past you twice, Handy?"

"Eh? I—I——"

"Explain yourself!" said Travers accusingly. "You have admitted that you played rottenly, and I suppose we had better agree with you."

Handforth went red, and then he glared.

"Are you telling me, Vivian Travers, that I played a rotten game this afternoon?" he demanded ominously.

"No."

"But you just said——"

"Pardon me, dear old fellow—pardon me!" said Travers gently. "It was you who said that you played a rotten game. Don't put words into my mouth that I never used. For the love of Samson! That would be a bit too thick, wouldn't it?"

The others were all chuckling, and Handforth, who was more or less caught in his own trap, hardly knew what to say.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you rotter!" gasped Handforth suddenly. "You've been pulling my leg!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"Have I?" murmured Travers. "Well, I never!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The others grinned, but decided to let the matter drop. Getting into an argument with Handforth was generally a long, tedious business, and it frequently ended in battle.

While the celebrations went on, nobody noticed Gore-Pearce & Co. lounging indolently in the Ancient House doorway. They hadn't had their tea yet, and the meal was indefinitely postponed.

"He can't be long now," said Gore-Pearce, after a while.

The cads of Study A were on the lookout for Mr. Bill Brice. It was practically certain that the bookmaker would turn up very shortly. He would be eager to investigate the story that he had heard.

"I don't see why we should hang about here!" objected Bell. "Even if Brice comes, we can't speak to him. We can't recognise him."

"Of course we can't," said Gulliver. "So why shouldn't we go in and have tea?"

Claude Gore-Pearce frowned.

"Hang tea!" he replied. "We want to make certain that Brice comes. Or, to be more exact, we want to get hold of Brice before he goes. Don't forget that there's some money attached to this game. And I wouldn't trust Brice further than I can see him."

"THE PLOTTERS OF THE REMOVE!"

No doubt Willy Handforth has many strong reasons for regarding Lightning, the greyhound, as his property, but there can be no getting away from the fact that legally it belongs to Bill Brice, the bookmaker. Brice is determined to get that dog, but nevertheless, he is not prepared to break into St. Frank's for the purpose, and that's where Gore-Pearce & Co., the cads of Study A, come in!

Next week, too, The St. Frank's Junior Eleven is playing the Bannington Town First Eleven. How do Nipper and his cheery stalwarts fare?

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ORDER IN ADVANCE!

"Why, do you think he might try to get out of the agreement?" asked Gulliver.

"Try!" said Gore-Pearce. "Unless we nail him down to it, we shan't see a red cent. There are bookmakers *and* bookmakers. By what I've seen of Brice, he's one of the crooked sort."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said Bell thoughtfully.

Gore-Pearce suddenly dodged back into the doorway.

"Look out!" he said tensely. "Here he is. By gad! I thought he wouldn't be long. He's just walked into the Triangle!"

They watched interestedly. Mr. Bill Brice had strode with a determined step through the big gateway, and now he stood looking at the school buildings in a rather uncertain manner. The size and immensity of St.

Frank's surprised him, perhaps. He was wondering how he could find a junior school-boy amidst all this vast expanse of buildings and ground.

As luck would have it, a couple of East House juniors were strolling down the Triangle from the direction of the West Gate. Nobody else was within sight. Mr. Brice approached them, and they, for their part, looked at Mr. Brice without any particular enthusiasm.

"Just a moment, young gents!" said the bookmaker, as he came to a halt.

Armstrong and Griffith, of Study No. 12, in the East House, looked at Mr. Brice critically.

"Perhaps you can tell me where I can find a youngster named Handforth?" asked Brice.

"Handforth of the Remove?" said Griffith. "He's probably in the Ancient House——"

"No, just a minute," said the bookmaker, frowning. "I don't think that's the boy I want. Is he called 'Handforth minor' here?"

"No; Handforth minor is young Willy, of the Third," replied Armstrong, staring. "If you want Willy, you'll find him on Little Side with his dog."

"With his dog, eh?" repeated Mr. Brice quickly. "By thunder! Then I'd better look sharp—— Where did you say I can find him?" he asked, forcing himself to become calm.

"On Little Side—the junior playing fields," said Armstrong, turning and pointing towards the West Gate. "Through there. You can't make a mistake."

"Thanks!" said Mr. Brice, nodding.

He passed on, and the two East House juniors looked at one another, and then Armstrong shrugged his shoulders.

"Runny!" he said. "What on earth does that ugly merchant want with young Handforth?"

"Something about that dog, I suppose," said Griffith. "He looks sort of horsey, or doggy. Perhaps he wants to buy the animal?"

And they dismissed the matter from their minds.

In the meantime, Mr. Brice had passed through the West Gate, and the big expanse of Little Side stretched before him; and there, sure enough, near the pavilion, Willy Handforth was romping about with Lightning, his new pet.

Mr. Bill Brice stood still, staring, hardly able to believe the evidence of his eyes.

Yet in that first moment he knew the truth. Mr. Brice was stunned, but he made haste to pull himself together.

It was true!

His dog, Domino, was not dead!



CHAPTER 17.

Mr. Brice Means Business!

HALLO! What's the matter, old fellow?" Willy Handforth looked at Lightning curiously. Without warning, and without any apparent cause, the greyhound had suddenly lowered his ears, and his tail was drooping. Instead of his former aspect of happiness and contentment he now looked slinking.

"This won't do, old chap!" said Willy, with concern. "You haven't got another pain, have you? I thought you were well on the road to recovery."

The dog gave him an eloquent glance, and then slunk round to his rear. And now his gaze wandered across Little Side towards a solitary figure which stood some distance away.

Willy turned and stared.

"Oh, ho!" he murmured. "So that's it; is it?"

The leader of the Third compressed his lips. In a second he recognised Mr. Brice. And it cannot be denied that Willy's heart gave a leap. For here on the playing fields was the dog's real owner!

Not that Willy regarded this man in such a light. He had seen Brice kick the unconscious and dying dog into the ditch; he had seen the man brutally leave the unfortunate animal for dead. Therefore, in Willy's opinion, the fellow hadn't the faintest claim.

The dog was his—Willy's—since he had restored him to life.

So there was a grin, warlike light in the fag's eyes as he observed the man walking over the turf towards him. Willy was immensely struck by Lightning's attitude. Even at that distance the dog had recognised his former owner. He was slinking away, his eyes eloquent of fear. Willy, who regarded cruelty to animals as a crime of the most fiendish description, steeled himself for the coming tussle.

He and Lightning had become greatly attached during these past few days. A perfect understanding had sprung up between them. In some strange way, Willy exerted an extraordinary influence over dumb animals; he could always win them over to him. Even the most savage brutes became docile and manageable in Willy's care. Perhaps they understood that he was their friend. Whatever the reason, it could not be denied that Willy was unusually gifted where dumb animals were concerned.

"Steady, old man!" he murmured, glancing down at Lightning. "Keep cool—you're not in any danger. Just lie down, and leave this to me."

It really seemed that the dog understood the actual words, for he at once settled himself down at Willy's feet, and remained motionless. But his gaze was fixed on the approaching figure, and his ears were flat down.

"What's your name, young man?" demanded Mr. Brice, as he came to a halt.

"Willy Handforth," replied the leader of the Third promptly. "What's yours?"

"Never mind that!" said the man. "So you're young Handforth, are you? Well, you're the boy I want."

"We might as well be sociable," said Willy, his voice cool and steady. "If I don't know your name, I might get calling you Mr. Smith, or Mr. Jones—"

"My name is Brice," said the bookmaker, fixing his gaze upon the dog. "Oh! So here he is, then?"

"My dog?" said Willy.

"Is this your dog?"

"Yes, he's mine, Mr. Brice," said Willy. "He's not quite himself just yet. Convalescent, you know."

"By gosh! You've got a nerve, haven't you?" said Mr. Brice curtly. "What the thunder do you mean by telling me that this dog is yours? You know very well that he's not!"

"I know very well that he is!"

"Don't be a young fool!" said Mr. Brice angrily. "This dog is mine! Do you think I don't know my own property? How did you get hold of him?"

"I don't see that that matters," replied Willy, his voice still steady. "But he's mine, and you'd better not start any monkey tricks, Mr. Brice. Lightning and I are good pals—"

"Lightning, eh?" interrupted Mr. Brice, with a grim laugh. "This dog is Domino, and he belongs to me. He was run over by a motor-car last Saturday, and—"

"And you kicked him into the ditch for dead!" interrupted Willy accusingly. "You brute!"

"Why, confound your cheek—"

"You callous rotter!" said Willy, with deadly calmness. "You kicked the poor dog into the ditch and left him there, unconscious and dying. And now you come here and claim him! He's my dog! I saved his life, and now he belongs to me!"

It was impossible for Willy to keep up any pretence. This man knew perfectly well that the dog was Domino, so where was the sense in trying to deny it?

"I don't care whether you saved his life or not!" shouted Mr. Brice, startled and rather dismayed by Willy's tone. "I had half a mind to give you a quid for your good services. But I'm hanged if I will now!"

"I don't want your dirty quids!" said Willy contemptuously. "This dog is named Lightning, and he's mine. Understand that, Mr. Brice? He's mine! Domino has been dead since Saturday. He was kicked into the

ditch by a brute of a man who didn't care a toss for anything except money!"

Mr. Brice fairly bristled with rage.

"You insolent young puppy!" he panted, in a snarling voice. "So that's your game, is it? You reckon that Domino is dead, and that this dog is yours? All right! We'll see about that!"

He glanced round hurriedly, and found that nobody else was within sight.

"Now then!" he said thickly. "You've admitted to me that this is my dog. You found him in the ditch, and you brought him here. I don't care whether you call him Lightning or Thunder, or Electricity! His name is Domino, and he belongs to me! Are you going to hand him over quietly, or shall I take him by force?"

Willy laughed.

"Try it!" he said dangerously. "Just try it, Mr. Brice! I don't know how you found out that the dog was here, but it doesn't make much difference. He's my dog, and I'm going to keep him. You don't deserve to have any dogs. You ought to be prosecuted for——"

He broke off as Mr. Brice made a move towards him. But Willy was as agile as an eel, and Mr. Brice would never have caught him but for the fact that the man made an unexpected move.

As Willy dodged, Mr. Brice changed his tactics, and he bent downwards towards the convalescent dog. Lightning was by no means himself, and he was not capable of quick movement. He snarled, but Brice caught him by the shoulders, and lifted him from the ground. The dog uttered a whining cry, for he was still tender and bruised inwardly.

"You brute—you hound!" shouted Willy passionately.

That cry from the dog had aroused him to a pitch of excitement that was unusual in him. He threw himself upon Mr. Brice, but the man whirled his fist round, and Willy was unfortunate enough to meet it in full swing.

Crash!

The blow caught him on the side of the head, and he reeled over, half stunned. He fell to the grass and lay there, dazed.

And Mr. Brice, with Lightning in his arms, ran hurriedly away.



CHAPTER 18.

The Remove to the Rescue!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE raced upstairs, with Gulliver and Bell in his rear.

"Come on!" said the leader of the cads. "We can see better from our dormitory window. We can look

right out on to Little Side and see what's happening. We mustn't let Brice get away, you know."

"No fear!" panted Gulliver. "We don't want him to dish us!"

They vanished on the landing, and Edward Oswald Handforth, who had just turned into the lobby, looked upstairs in astonishment. He hadn't heard much, but he had seen the three cads scooting upstairs. Handforth, who had an investigating turn of mind, scratched his head in a puzzled sort of way.

"Now, what are those rotters up to?" he murmured. "There's something fishy about this!"

Handforth was on his way to the school shop to get some further supplies for the spread in Study D, but now he forgot all about his errand. His "detective" instincts were aroused.

"Of course, I don't want to spy on those cads," he told himself dubiously. "All the same, if there's something squiffy in the wind, I ought to make an investigation. By George! I'm going to pop upstairs. Gore-Pearce & Co. are usually up to some dirty trick or other."

With Handforth, to think was to act.

He went up the stairs three at a time, and when he arrived on the landing he paused uncertainly for a moment or two. He heard a faint murmur of voices from down the Remove passage, where the various dormitories were situated, and he walked down the passage. As he came opposite to the door of Gore-Pearce's bed-room, he heard a few words.

"There they are—on Little Side," Gulliver was saying. "Now for some fireworks!"

Handforth frowned. There didn't seem to be much in the affair, after all. The cads were only looking out of their window. There was evidently something happening on Little Side that attracted them.

Handforth walked into another bed-room, went across to the window, and stared out; he could see Little Side distinctly from here. Then he gave a sudden start.

"By George!" he muttered.

His minor was out there, talking with a big, burly-looking man. And Lightning, Willy's new pet, was crouching at his young master's feet.

"Well, it's a jolly good thing I came and had a look!" decided Handforth gruffly. "What the dickens is my minor doing with that man? And who is he, anyway? I'd better go down and look into it. I don't believe in my minor mixing with men like this."

Handforth spoke in a fatherly way—or, at least, in what he thought was in a fatherly way. He was on the point of turning, so that he could hurry down and go to Little Side, when he stiffened.

Without warning, the burly man had made a dive at his minor! And then, all in a flash, the thing happened. The man's fist

came round, and Willy received the full force of the blow on the side of his head. The unfortunate fag reeled over, and sank to the grass.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth, hardly able to believe his eyes.

The man had seized the dog in his arms and was hurrying away. He wasn't going towards the Triangle, either—but was making off in the direction of the towing-path. He had grabbed Willy's dog, after knocking Willy down!

Edward Oswald Handforth bristled like an angry terrier.

"The brute!" he ejaculated. "By George! The absolute cad!"

He spun round, tore out of the bed-room, and went flying downstairs as though he had taken leave of his senses. He rushed along the Remove passage, yelling at the top of his voice.

Doors opened to right and to left, and fellows came out, all shouting at once.

"What's the matter, Handy?"

"Cheese it, you ass! You'll have all the prefects down here——"

"Quick!" roared Handforth. "Come on, you fellows! Remove to the rescue!"

"But what's happened?" demanded Nipper.

"Some hulking great rotter has just knocked my minor down, and pinched his dog!" shouted Handforth. "I spotted it from one of the upper windows. Come on! We're going to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll back you up, Handy!"

"Well, well!" said Travers. "Do you think it's worth it, dear old fellows? You know what a chap Handy is for getting the wind up——"

But nobody took any notice. They had heard enough. Somebody had knocked Willy down, and had pinched Lightning! This was no time for doubting or questioning. The only thing to do was to hurry out and look into the matter.

About fifteen Removites, with Handforth in the lead, went shooting out of the Ancient House, and they rushed off towards Little Side. Gore-Pearce & Co., coming downstairs at the same moment, were startled and dismayed.

They had seen Brice hurrying away, and it had been their intention to overtake the man and to demand their money. But it seemed unlikely that they would now have the opportunity of catching Mr. Brice in private.

So they adopted the only alternative course, and they joined the crowd of other Removites.

As the juniors flooded on to the playing fields, they saw Willy staggering off towards the towing-path. Mr. Brice's figure was visible in the distance. The heavy man was running now, but he was like a clumsy cart-horse compared to the terrier-like juniors. They overtook him long before he reached the towing-path.

"On him!" yelled Handforth excitedly.

"Hurrah!"

"Come on, the Remove!"

Mr. Brice turned, gasping painfully. He wasn't accustomed to running, and the exercise had completely puffed him.

"Stand back, you young fools!" he panted in a wheezy voice. "What do you think you're going to do? Why, what the thunder——"

They were on him like a pack of wolves. Mr. Brice went down, and Nipper deftly caught Lightning, and held him gently. The other fellows piled on Mr. Brice, rolled him over, and for a few hectic moments the unhappy bookmaker had an idea that the end of the world was coming.

At last he was allowed to sit up, and he looked something of a wreck. Handforth was holding on to him grimly, and at the same moment Willy arrived.

"Thanks, you chaps!" said the fag breathlessly. "Good men! He isn't hurt, is he?"

"Not yet!" said Handforth. "But he's going to be hurt!"

"I didn't mean Brice—I meant the dog!" said Willy, as he took Lightning from Nipper. "Poor old chap! They've scared you, haven't they? But you're all right now!"

Lightning seemed quite contented in Willy's arms.

"You bullying brute!" said Handforth, as he glared into Mr. Brice's face. "I saw what you did! You knocked my minor down, and——"

"I'll have the law on you for this!" snarled Brice, struggling to his feet. "You young whelps! That dog is mine, and——"

"Just a moment!" came a grim voice. "Stand back, boys! I want to have a word with this man."

There was an instantaneous silence, for that voice belonged to Mr. Nelson Lee, the popular schoolmaster-detective. He could not have arrived at a better moment.



CHAPTER 19.

Exit Mr. Brice.)

NELSON LEE was looking very stern, and Mr. Brice was looking very startled.

"And who do you think you are?" he roared violently.

"My name is Lee—I am a Housemaster of this school," replied Nelson Lee in a steady voice. "I think it is necessary that I should deal with this matter——"

"It's necessary that you should punish these young hooligans of yours!" shouted the bookmaker. "Didn't you see what they did? They knocked me down, and they——"

"I do not intend to punish the boys for their action," interrupted Lee coldly. "They

were perfectly justified in knocking you down, Mr.—Mr.—”

“Brice, sir,” said Willy obligingly.

“Mr. Brice,” said Nelson Lee, nodding. “And the best thing you can do, Mr. Brice, is to leave this neighbourhood as quickly as possible.”

“Hang your confounded nerve!” roared Brice. “I’m not going until I’ve got that dog of mine!”

“Indeed?” said Lee calmly. “That, of course, is a matter that we can very quickly decide. I might as well tell you, Mr. Brice, that I witnessed your brutal attack on this junior boy. I saw you knock him down, and you may count yourself very lucky that I do not complain to the police, and have you arrested for a particularly brutal assault. You might have done the boy an injury.”

A murmur of approval went up from all the Remove fellows. They were enjoying the situation immensely.

Mr. Brice muttered under his breath, and he glared at Nelson Lee with hatred and fury. He could tell that this quiet, steadfast man was his master. Nelson Lee, for his part, had sized Brice up in the first moment. He knew that this man was a rascal.

“It was an accident!” blustered Brice. “I didn’t mean to hit the kid like that. But he was keeping my dog from me. That dog is mine! And, what’s more, I’m going to have him!”

“What is the nature of your claim?” asked Nelson Lee. “You say that the dog is yours, Mr. Brice. But how can you substantiate

that statement? I really think there must be some mistake.”

“There is no mistake!” retorted Brice.

“This young boy found the dog dying in a ditch,” continued Nelson Lee. “Within half an hour the poor animal would have been dead. He had been callously left in that dying condition by his owner.”

Mr. Brice scowled.

“I thought he was dead!” he muttered. “I was angry and upset and——”

“You thought the dog was dead!” repeated Nelson Lee. “You gave him up for lost, didn’t you, Mr. Brice? Very well, then. As far as you are concerned, that dog is dead. Handforth minor found the animal, tenderly cared for him, and brought him back to life. Morally, therefore, that dog belongs to the boy.”

“Hear, hear!”

“Right on the nail, sir!”

“Bravo, sir!”

The juniors expressed their approval in a chorus of various murmurs.

Mr. Brice tried to remain calm.

“I don’t care a hang for the moral side of the question!” he said harshly. “Legally, that dog is mine.”

“Legally, perhaps,” agreed Nelson Lee.

“But there are times, Mr. Brice, when the law can be conveniently forgotten. In any case, you have your remedy. I do not deny for one moment that legally the dog is still yours. I should be a fool if I tried to do that. But, morally, the dog belongs to the boy, and I am going to see that he keeps him.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Willy gratefully.

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When you’ve finished reading the NELSON LEE, you’ll certainly want to read another story by your favourite author, Edwy Searles Brooks, won’t you? Then here’s your opportunity. Did you know that Mr. Brooks is writing a series of yarns in the BOYS’ REALM? Well, he is, and these yarns are about that famous football club called the Blue Crusaders. You are all well aware that Edwy Searles Brooks is in his element when writing about football, and so you can guess that these Blue Crusader yarns are simply top-hole.

This week’s story, especially, is a corker.

It’s entitled

“The Spendthrift Crusader!”

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"But this is an outrage!" stormed the bookmaker. "I tell you that dog is mine! He's a valuable greyhound! He's worth hundreds of pounds to me!"

"In that case, Mr. Brice, you had better bring an action at law," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "You are quite at liberty to do so, you know. If you think that you will win the case, you had better go ahead. But I am this boy's Housemaster, and I shall forbid him to hand the dog over into your charge. After seeing what I have seen, I do not think that you are a fit and proper person to have the care of any dumb animal."

Mr. Brice nearly choked.

"But this is an outrage!" he bellowed. "You have admitted that the dog is mine, and yet you won't let me take him away!"

"Need we go all over it again?" asked Nelson Lee quietly. "And let me remind you, Mr. Brice, that I do not like your tone. I should advise you to moderate it. You were callous enough to kick your dog into the ditch, as you had admitted from your own mouth. It was this boy who saved the dog, and in my opinion the animal is now his. The matter is dismissed."

"Oh, is it!" snarled Brice. "And who do you think you are to pass judgment? A petty schoolmaster!"

"A petty schoolmaster, eh?" roared Handforth. "Why, you rotter, this is Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective!"

Brice started.

"Why, I—I didn't know— So that's it, is it?" he went on, his tone becoming harsher than ever. "You think you can act as judge and jury and everything else, do you? All right! We'll see about this!"



NELSON LEE

is one of the world's cleverest detectives, but since he has been at St. Frank's he has had little scope to prove his abilities.

Very shortly now,

however, he is to blossom out as a detective once more. Together with Nipper as his assistant, he sets out to unravel an amazing plot of football intrigue. Look out for full announcements of our grand new serial of detective and football adventure, featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper, in next week's issue of

THE NELSON LEE
School Story Library

Mr. Brice turned on his heel and strode away. If he had been a dog himself, he would have had his tail between his legs.

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Willy.

"That's all right, young 'un," replied Nelson Lee, with a smile. "But you must be prepared for this man taking drastic action."

"Why, you don't think he can legally claim the dog, do you, sir?" asked Willy anxiously.

"He can claim him, but I do not believe that he will be successful," replied Lee. "The law of this country is generally very fair. But take my advice, Willy, and keep your dog in a safe place."

Nelson Lee had always been popular, but his popularity was greatly increased by this action of his. The whole school was soon talking about it, and the whole school approved.

In the meantime, Mr. Brice, gnashing his teeth with rage, had encountered Gore-Pearce & Co in the lane. When they asked him for money, he nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"You young fools!" he snarled. "You won't get a penny out of me! That dog is Domino right enough, but I can't get him! They won't let me have him!"

"But why not?" asked Gore-Pearce, in dismay. "If he's your dog, why can't you claim him? Why can't you bring an action?"

Mr. Bill Brice muttered under his breath. He knew very well that he would not dare to bring an action. For in a civil court all the facts would come out, and that would undoubtedly mean his ruin. Moreover, there was something else, perhaps, that prevented him from bringing an action. At all events, he did not give the matter a moment's consideration.

He was thinking of setting up a greyhound-training establishment—he had his plans all made. What would they come to if he brought an action against this schoolboy? He would be compelled publicly to admit that he had kicked an injured dog into the ditch, and left it there to die. It would mean ruin for him.

No: he would not dare to court any kind of publicity, and therefore he could not bring an action.

So Mr. Brice went away, filled with rage and evil. Gore-Pearce & Co. were completely dished, and Willy Handforth kept his dog.

But how long would this state of affairs last?

Mr. Brice had gone off, vowing that the matter was not ended. In his evil mind he told himself that there were other ways and means—quite apart from bringing legal actions!

In a word, Mr Brice was in a mood for mischief!

(And Bill Brice certainly causes some mischief, as you will see for yourselves when you read next week's long yarn, which is entitled "The Plotters of the Remove!" Make sure you don't miss reading this stunning story.)



E. S. BROOKS.

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4.



WILLIAM J. ALDOUS.

THERE'S nothing like keeping young —William J. Aldous (Norwich)—and I am glad that you think my stories contain that atmosphere which helps us in this direction. People aren't really young or old according to their age, but according to how they feel. And if they feel young when they're reading my yarns, I'm well repaid for all my labours.

The occupants of Study K are Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey only—Wilfred James Lester (London, S.W.1). Study L is occupied by the Trotwood twins and Fatty Little. Study S shelters Alan Castleton, Tom Burton and Lord Pippinton.

I am sorry that Claude Gore-Pearce isn't bad enough for you—John Austin (Gateshead)—but perhaps you'll be satisfied with him in some stories I am now writing. I can assure you that in these yarns he is a really bad lad.

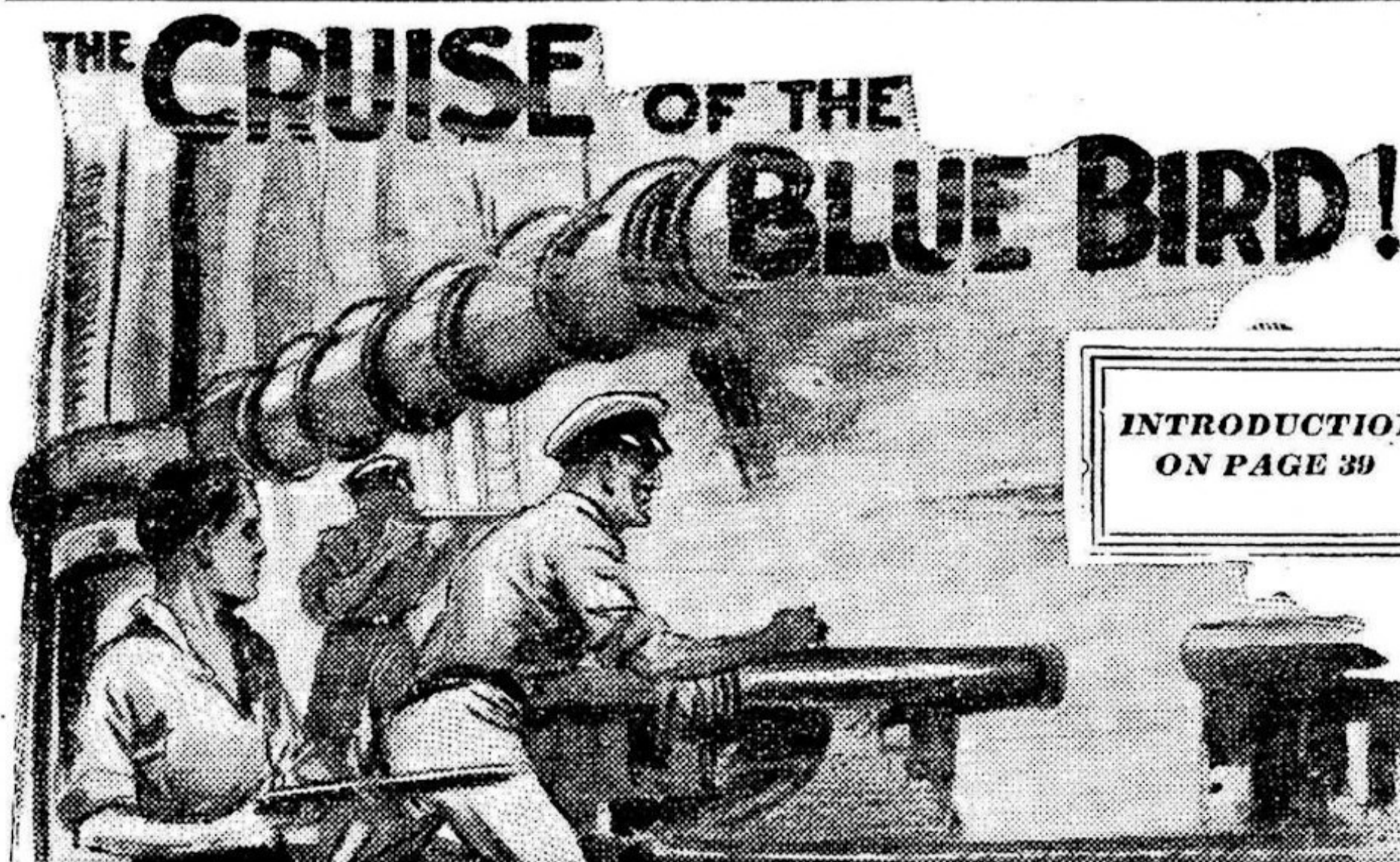
I'm sorry I can't give you any exact details—Reg. T. Staples (Walworth)—about the circulation of the Old Paper. You ask me: "Could you tell me, roughly speaking, the average net sale?" Well, the circulation is now four times as much as it was when it was only a quarter of what it is now. And that, in a way of speaking, is exact—and not rough at all. As for whether we are extending the overseas circulation—yes. Absolutely, with knobs on! We're getting more and more overseas readers every week. A full hundred and fifty boys have already been named in the St. Frank's stories, not counting any outsiders; but, of course, there are lots and lots more fellows at St. Frank's than this. You can't expect me to name them all, can you? If I did so it would be like reading a telephone directory. Cricket, of course, is a better game than football. I'm not saying this because I personally like the game better, but because cricket stands for everything that is clean and honest and honourable. If a fellow isn't acting on the square, the

thing he does isn't "cricket." You can't apply the game of football in the same way, can you? And, really, I think cricket is the one game of all games that is consistently innocent of foul play. So it *must* be the best.

Inner Court has always been out of bounds for juniors—Cyril J. Whittington (Ventnor, I.W.). The Head doesn't like to have noisy crowds rushing about outside his windows. Besides, the sanatorium is at the back of Inner Court, too. The House-master of the Modern House is Mr. Arthur Stockdale. He's a good old stick, who fancies himself a bit as a painter in oils.

Yes—Eric G. Matthews (Berlin)—by all means let me have your photograph, and then I will scrawl my signature across one of mine and send it in return. And don't forget to mention if you would like to see your dial gazing out from the top of this page. No readers' photographs are published here unless they express a definite consent. As you're on the stage, I should imagine you'll have no scruples. The clearer the photograph the better you'll look in that right-hand panel in the north-east corner of this page. If it comes to that, any photographs that *aren't* clear are simply shoved into one of my albums, marked, "Unfit for Publication." So you'd better look out. You can see what a fate awaits those readers who only send me blurry snapshots. I'm sorry to tell you that my "Unfit for Publication" album is a whacking great thing, about the size of ten, and I'm just on the point of buying another—even bigger. It's up to all you readers to stop me from taking this step.

This Serial is nearing an end—and it's working up to a smashing climax!



INTRODUCTION
ON PAGE 39

By COUTTS BRISBANE

Once more Captain Manby is in possession of his schooner, but even now his worries have not finished. For a French gunboat turns up—and that gunboat causes trouble!

Ah Moy Explains!

HOWLING like a fiend in torment, the squall struck the ship. She heeled over, steadied, came up as Manby brought her head into the wind. For a few minutes the air was full of noise and water. Everything was blotted out. Thunder crashed overhead, unheard amidst the tumult of raging water. The sea seemed to have risen up and fallen on the little vessel, but gamely she rose to it, shaking herself free with streaming scuppers.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the fury of the squall abated, the air cleared. The sea was in a tumult of crashing waves, breaking high upon the reef to leeward, but now behind the ship, while out of the sky came a speck that grew larger, came lower, swung round and headed towards the island. Trotter had returned to play guide through the maze.

Achille, who had been hanging on beside the fatal galley, came staggering aft to Captain Manby, pointing, gesticulating. Durand and the other man who

had been wounded, had been laid on top of the main hatch. In the hurry and bustle of getting under way, and during those tense minutes of suspense while the schooner was passing through the narrow channel, no one had given a thought to them.

Now they had disappeared. No need to ask their fate. They had been swept overboard to a watery grave by the first wave that broke over the deck.

Mr. Sinclair, who had been clinging to the foremast, came aft, looked about him, then comprehended the Frenchman's gestures.

"Well, they're gone. The best thing that could have happened to them. If we had handed them over to the French authorities at Noumea I guess they wouldn't have been any better off, eh?" he said.

"They are gone. What would have been done to them at Noumea?" asked Captain Manby in halting French.

Achille shrugged his shoulders, and drew a finger round his neck significantly.

"There is a guillotine at Noumea, m'sieu. For myself, I would prefer the sea—even the sharks—to that. What will you do with me, m'sieu? Do you give me over to the mercy of the law, which does not exist?"

"That boy is my son," replied Manby, nodding towards Jack. "You had mercy upon him and my nephew. You gave them a chance for life. It saves you now. You shall go free, with something to start you again in life."

"I thank you, m'sieu. I am grateful. And, indeed, I took no part in the killing of the crew of the ship, for I was sick at the time. M'sieu, I will try to deserve your great kindness. I shall be ever your servant."

"Then start by clearing out that galley. Wash the pots most carefully. Cleanse the place."

"With pleasure, m'sieu." And at once Achille got busy.

Mr. Sinclair got the foresail hoisted, and the Blue Bird made good way. Little more than a couple of hours after the squall had died away, she curtseyed through the entrance to the lagoon and brought up opposite French Beach, still littered with odds and ends that had been thrown away by the convicts when they made their last trip to capture the schooner.

A couple of minutes after, the crew—who had remained behind on the island while the captain and Jack had gone on their mission—crowded in the cutter, came alongside and tumbled aboard, cheering wildly. Ah Moy waddled sedately to his galley, and at once began directing Achille in the way he should go, with never a word of question.

"Here, Ah Moy! Come aft and tell me what you had in those tins of kidneys," roared Captain Manby. "D'you know they're responsible for laying out most of those scoundrels?"

Ah Moy, looking more bland and innocent than ever, pattered aft.

"Thlem piecee tin open?" he asked softly.

"Yes. They were mixed in with a lot of other stuff," said Jack. "Those fellows ate them—and they all died. Had they gone bad?"

"Me makee go bad," murmured Ah Moy plaintively. "No makee Flenchee man eatee. Keepee along one side so no one eatee. Not makee. How me knowee thlem eatee?"

"You makee go bad? How?" asked Captain Manby.

"Thlat timee alongee Gladen Island. Thlinkee mebbe thlem Solomon boy catchee shlip, killee allee. Thlinkee thley likee eat piecee tin chop. Gettee leetle ploison, makee leetle hole in tin, puttee ploison in. Mendee hole. Thlem no comee but thlinkee not wastee ploison. Mebbe good one time. Leavee shlef. Not makee thlem Flenchee eatee. Thlem no good. Bletter dead."

"But what sort of poison? Where did you get it?" asked Captain Manby.

"Velly good ploison. Stickline ploison. Findee one time. Keepee till wantee. No got now."

"Strychnine! No wonder they were knocked out," muttered Manby. "And if I questioned you for a week I'd never learn when or where you got the beastly stuff," he thought. "Anyhow, it saved us the trouble of shooting them down. That will do, Ah Moy," he added aloud. "As you say, you didn't make them eat it. Now, go and make certain that there's nothing left to harm us."

"Yes, cap'n. Me makee mighty fine dinner click. Gottee shlip back. Hoolay! Hoolay! Hoolay!"

Cheering shrilly, Ah Moy went back to his domain; and Manby turned all hands to work to clean the ship. The bodies of the convicts were taken ashore and buried,

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. Captain Manby is successful in retaking the vessel—and finds that the convicts, with the exception of three, have all very mysteriously died after their eating some food. The captain decides to sail back into the lagoon of the island, in spite of the fact that the volcano is in a violent state of eruption, for a squall is approaching and the schooner is anchored among a lot of dangerous reefs. Jack and a man named Coombes go aloft to set the sails; the vessel safely passes through the reefs—and then the squall comes!

(Now read on.)

the decks were washed down. Once more the little Blue Bird began to resume her normal spick and span appearance.

Darkness was near when Trotter and Coombes returned from a circular flight above the reefs which surrounded the island. They came aboard just as Ah Moy was preparing to serve his celebration dinner.

"There has been a regular rearrangement of the whole blamed stoneyard," said Trotter. "So far as we can see, the way by which you entered is now entirely hopeless. So many new reefs have been

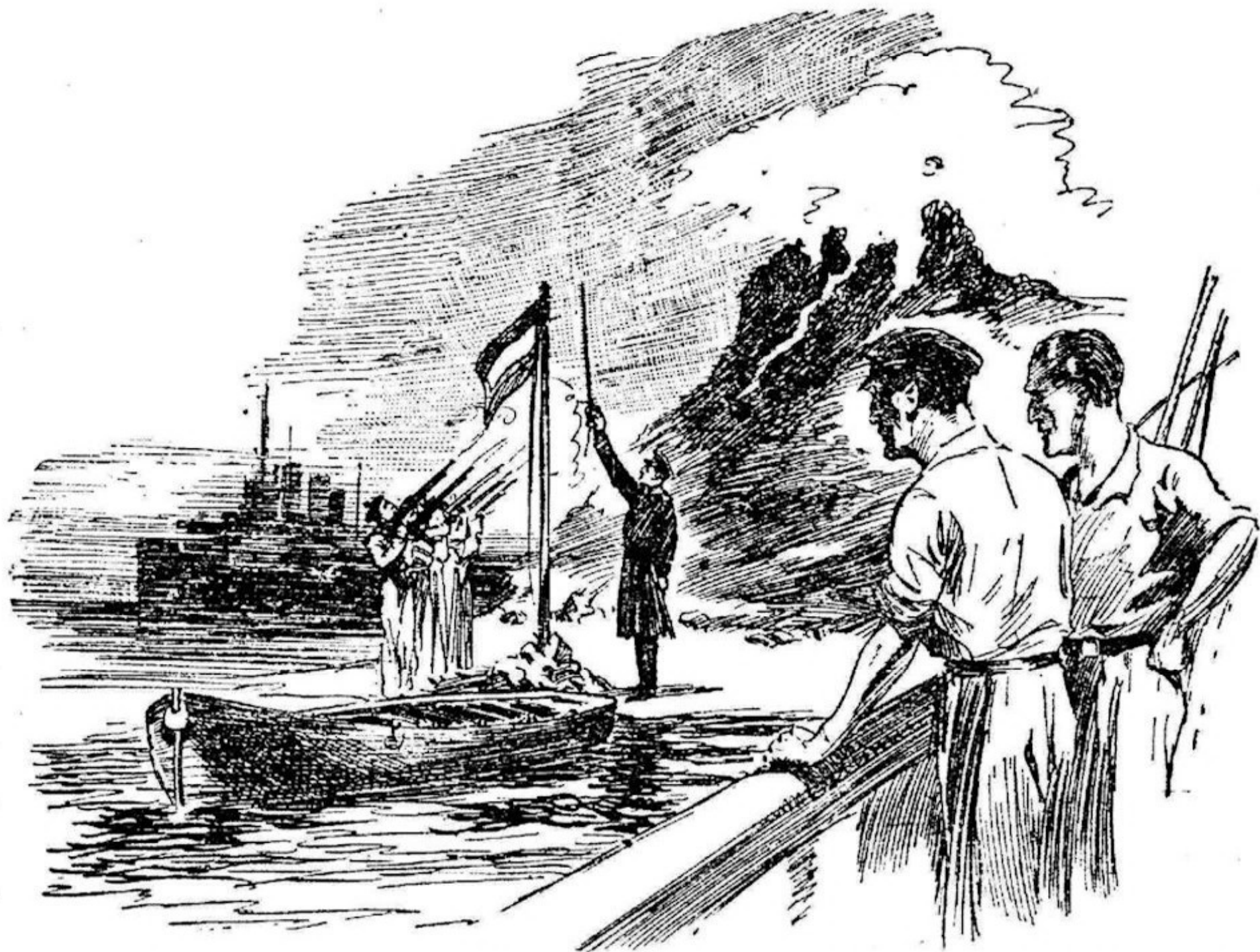
volcano seems to be stoking up for another razzle-dazzle. And talking about smoke, we saw a vessel of sorts nosing around to the north. I shouldn't wonder if, finding the way clear, she turned up to-morrow."

"Humph! Could you make out what she was?" asked Manby.

"No. We didn't go near her, though I've no doubt she saw us. We wanted to get back before dark. She looked to be a small cruiser, or perhaps a gunboat."

"Was she one of ours?"

"Don't know, sir, but I somehow don't think so."



The officer drew his sword, up went the bunting, broke out at the staff head—and the tricolour spread to the breeze as a volley crashed out.

pushed up that not even a boat could get through to the south-west."

"Then we're trapped here? Is that what you mean?" asked Manby. "In that case we'll have to be taken away by air, eh?"

"No. Having taken a look to west and south-west, we turned the other way—and so far as we could ascertain the sea is quite clear to the north and east, where the groups marked G to K used to form a practically continuous barrier. They have sunk, while those on the other side have risen. You have a clear way out at the moment, sir, though I shouldn't care to say how long it will be so. The

"French, then." Manby looked thoughtful. "Do you know that this group of rocks was once formally annexed by France, Trotter?" he asked. "Away back in the '80's."

"Shouldn't have thought it was worth while, sir, since no one has been able to get here before. It would be now, of course. But you mean that they might make a fuss about you having taken a load of shell?"

"Not forgetting the pearls, my lad! Yes, it's possible that they might want to make a bobbery. But"—a fierce gleam came into the captain's eyes—"I'll be hanged if they get a cent's worth out of

the Blue Bird if I can stop 'em. However, we won't worry over it to-night. Here comes Ah Moy, with all the perfect content of the cat who has at last cornered and absorbed the canary, shining on his smug mug."

"Dinner allee rleady," murmured Ah Moy.

The meal was a merry one, despite an occasional rumble from the volcano to remind them that they were not yet out of danger. The hill top was flaring once more, though as yet no lava had burst forth.

Dinner was finished when a series of heavy detonations like the firing of heavy guns shook the island. Manby rose.

"I don't like this," he said. "I don't want to put to sea in the dark, for there may be some more rearranging of the reefs, and it's on the cards that we might pile up the hooker. But we'll make ready to start at the first peep of dawn. I shall be glad to get out of these jack-in-the-box waters, where you find a rock popping up in the fairway while you wait. We'll sail at dawn, Sinclair."

"Very good, sir."

"And we'll go, too, sir. We have to re-fuel from our depôt ship, which is due off Atoll B to-morrow," said Trotter. "We'll stow ourselves aboard the 'plane. Good-night, sir. See you in the morning before we start."

The Gunboat!

THE two airmen got aboard their seaplane, and presently the Blue Bird retired for the night also. That is, everyone but the watchman and Mr. Sinclair turned in.

The mate paced the deck, thinking of all that had happened since the schooner left Moreton Bay. The desperate fight with the revolting labourers on Graden Island, the strange chance by which the wrecked convicts had been able to guide the schooner through the reefs, the exciting events of the past few days—all passed before him in a sort of mental panorama.

"There's one certainty, the skipper has earned a bit of peace if ever man did," he thought, then turned sharply as a report, heavier than any that had preceded it, rumbled down from the hill-top.

He was in time to see a spout of flame leap high in the air, while down the near side of the hill crept a scarlet worm—of lava. The flame lit the whole island, the lagoon and the sea for many miles. The island trembled visibly, the lagoon rippled. Long phosphorescent streaks told that the fish, alarmed by the vibra-

tion, were seeking safety in the open sea.

Sinclair ran to the captain's cabin and opened the door. Manby was out of his bunk and slipping into his clothes.

"Has the volcano split?" he asked.

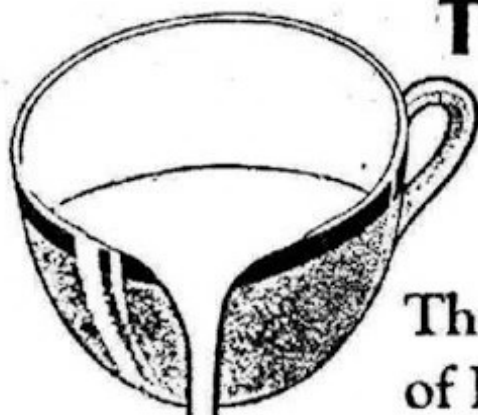
"There's a stream of lava running down hill. If it should come as far as the lagoon there'll be so much steam that we won't be able to see our way out, sir. There's plenty of light. Shall we get out, sir?"

Manby went aloft and looked at the scarlet ribbon of lava creeping down the hillside. Sinclair followed him. As they watched the ribbon turned aside, meandered towards the further end of the island and so took the course of the first stream which had reached the sea two days before.

"We'll wait a little," the captain decided. "The smoke is blowing clear, but I'm uneasy about taking the ship out yet. If that blaze up should fail just as we were rounding a reef, it might be awkward. Go and turn in for an hour or two. I'll take the watch."

Sinclair obeyed gladly enough, for he had had but little sleep of late. Manby remained aloft, watching the progress of the eruption. The top of the cone was crowned with a garland of coloured fires, venomous scarlet, livid green, flaring

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orange. Rills of lava from time to time overflowed from the main stream and ran a little way, to accumulate in pools which slowly turned, to become purple as they cooled, then became invisible.

All the while the rumbling, as of heavy artillery in the distance, continued without intermission. Once, with a heavy report, a great stone howled high into the air and fell with a tremendous splash somewhere near the head of the lagoon.

At last the eastern sky began to lighten, and soon the fires of the volcano paled under the growing light of day. There was a movement on the deck. Jack and Ned appeared, saw the captain, and swarmed aloft.

"Noisy beggar, that volcano, dad, isn't it?" observed Jack cheerily. "Is there any danger now, d'you think?"

"It isn't exactly a healthy neighbourhood," replied his father. "And we're going to leave it presently. Get down and call all hands. We will——" He stopped suddenly, bringing his glasses to bear on something which had suddenly hove in sight, rounding the end of the island and making in towards the opening of the reef.

In a moment he had it clearly—a small, white-painted vessel, ghost-like in the dawn.

"Well, I'm hanged! This must be the ship Trotter saw," he exclaimed. "And she's French. One of the old gunboats that usually cruise around the Society and Marquesas Islands and all around the Low Archipelago. She's a thundering long way off her beat."

He frowned at the oncoming vessel, shook his head doubtfully.

"Call the men. It's a pity we didn't get out before, but we can't now till she's in."

"There won't be any sort of trouble, will there, dad?" asked Jack.

"There may be complications. You never know. Some of these officers of small vessels are so ravenous for promotion that they'll do anything to show their zeal. Jack-in-office can be an awful nuisance sometimes. Down you go."

They descended to the deck, the men were called. Ah Moy scuttled to coffee-making.

"Stand by the halliards, Timo," called Manby. "As that ship comes in, run up the ensign, then dip it in salute."

A minute later the gunboat came nosing through the passage, the tricolour streaming from her peak. Up went the blue ensign of the Blue Bird, dipped once, twice, thrice.

It seemed as though the courtesy had

an electrical effect on the Frenchman. A boat swung out, her crew scrambled in in haste, an officer got aboard. She dropped into the water and sped shoreward as fast as her oars could send her, reached the beach opposite the convicts' huts. Officer and half the crew tumbled out, two of the men carrying a pole, which they instantly began to steep in the sand, others collected chunks of coral, which they piled at the foot of the pole to steady it, while the officer stood by barking orders.

"What are they doing, sir?" asked Ned. Captain Manby laughed. Sinclair, beside him, chuckled.

"Doing? That's a flag-staff, lad. They're about to take possession of this island in the name of the Republic, one and indivisible. The darlings are in such a hurry because we're here. They think they're wiping our eye. Look!"

A man stood by the foot of the flag-staff, now secured, a bundle of coloured bunting under his arm. The rest of the landing party, hopping back to the boat, returned with rifles, got into line, and stood at the salute while the officer drew his sword. Up went the bunting, broke out at the staff head—and the tricolour spread to the breeze as a volley crashed out.

"Very pretty. Wow! The volcano thinks so, too." A thundering crash from the hill had drowned the echoes of the rifles. "Timo, dip the ensign again. International courtesy is always delightful. Ah, they're coming here. I think, Mr. Sinclair, I'll put on a uniform coat."

Manby ran to his cabin, and came out, wearing an old naval captain's uniform jacket, just as the boat came alongside. Mr. Sinclair, standing by the gangway, saluted formally as the officer—a lieutenant—came up the side. Captain Manby stepped forward, and chuckled inwardly as he noted the effect of the uniform coat upon the lieutenant, who stiffened, halted, clicked his heels together, and made a flourishing salute.

"My captain, I did not expect——" he began.

"My lieutenant, let me hasten to assure you of my pleasure in seeing you here," said Manby. "And to congratulate you on adding a new island to the territory of France. This is not a naval vessel, but as an old naval officer, still in the Reserve, I am entitled to fly the blue ensign and to wear a uniform coat on such an occasion as this joyful one. May I offer you some refreshment? A glass of wine to drink to your speedy and well deserved promotion?"

"You are very good, my captain. But there is one little error. I did not take possession of this island just now for the first time, as it were. I but reaffirmed the claim which was established to the whole group many years ago. That is clear?"

"Quite clear. I might put in a claim as the discoverer of the island, but I do not. In fact," murmured Manby, with a glance towards the volcano, "I have some doubt whether there will be any island to claim in a few hours. I propose to sail at once, my lieutenant, and I would advise that you do so also."

"Perhaps. But I wish to make myself quite clear——"

"Blamed sea lawyer!" thought Manby.

"There are some huts on the island. They seem to have been there for some time. You built them, perhaps? You have been here for a while? And there is some pearl shell. You have been taking the shell from this lagoon?"

"The huts were built by some French convicts, who were being taken to Noumea in a ship which they seized."

"The Requin!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Yes, I remember that she was reported missing. But this only confirms matters. Frenchmen lived here. Convicts though they were, they have affirmed this island as French. By the way, what has become of them?"

"They deceived me. They seized this vessel. They killed several of my men. They have all perished, either through eating some bad food, or during the fighting."

Manby naturally said nothing about Achille, who had stowed himself away at sight of the gunboat, or of the indirect part Ah Moy had played in the final tragedy of the convicts.

"So?" The lieutenant shrugged. "Doubtless you will be good enough to make a deposition to that effect, with witnesses and so forth. But you have been here some little time? You have been taking shell? And perhaps pearls?"

"Yes." There was no denying it. The lieutenant had but to look below to see what the schooner's cargo was. Indeed, several shells lay beside the main hatch, where Sinclair had laid some specially fine specimens on the previous evening. "Now it's coming," Manby thought.

"Then, with great regret, my captain, I must inform you that, since you have no permit to take shell from this island, which is most indubitably French territory, it will be my painful duty to confiscate your cargo and arrest your ship for judgment by a court!"

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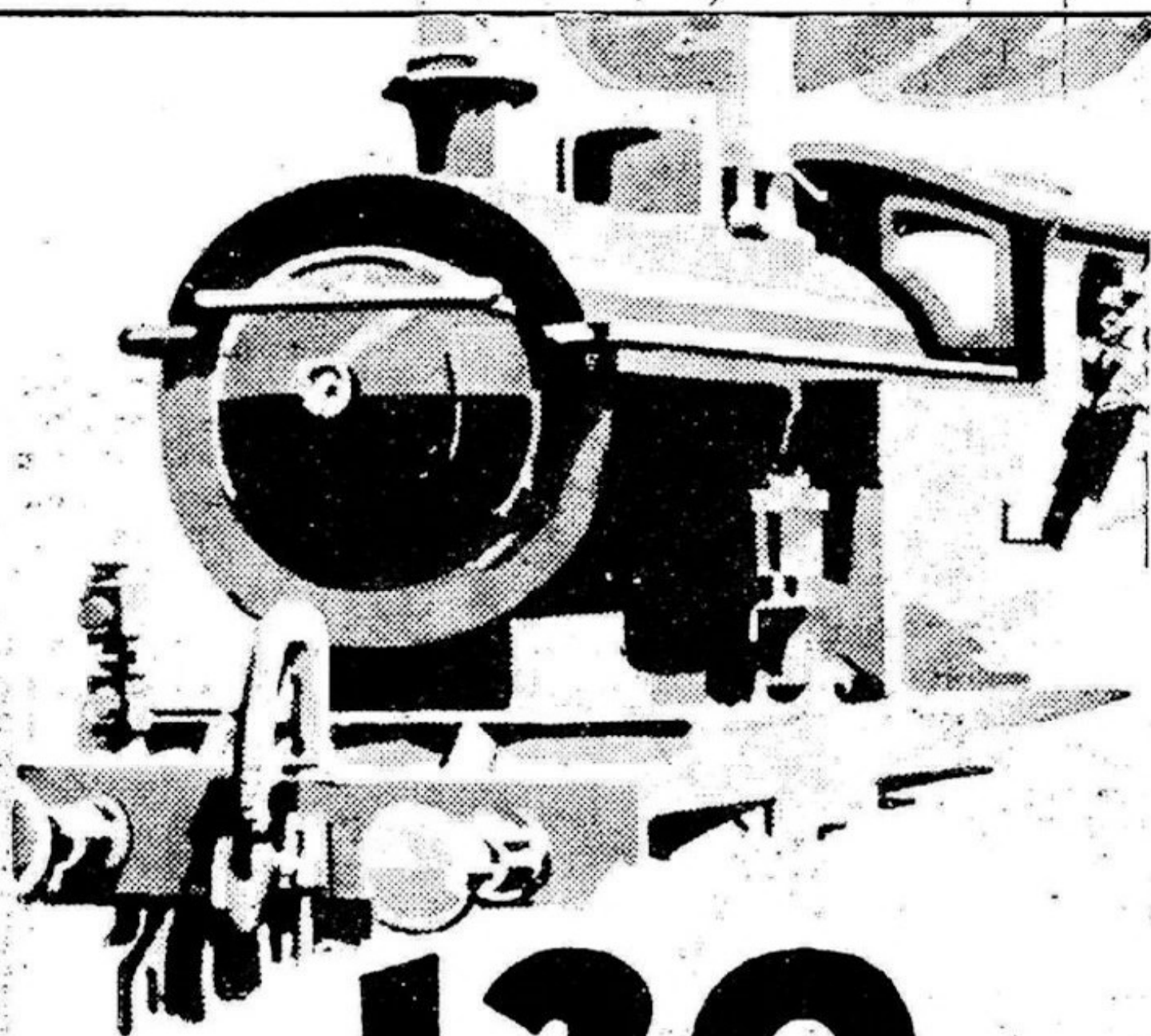
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