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THE REMOVE CRUSADER!

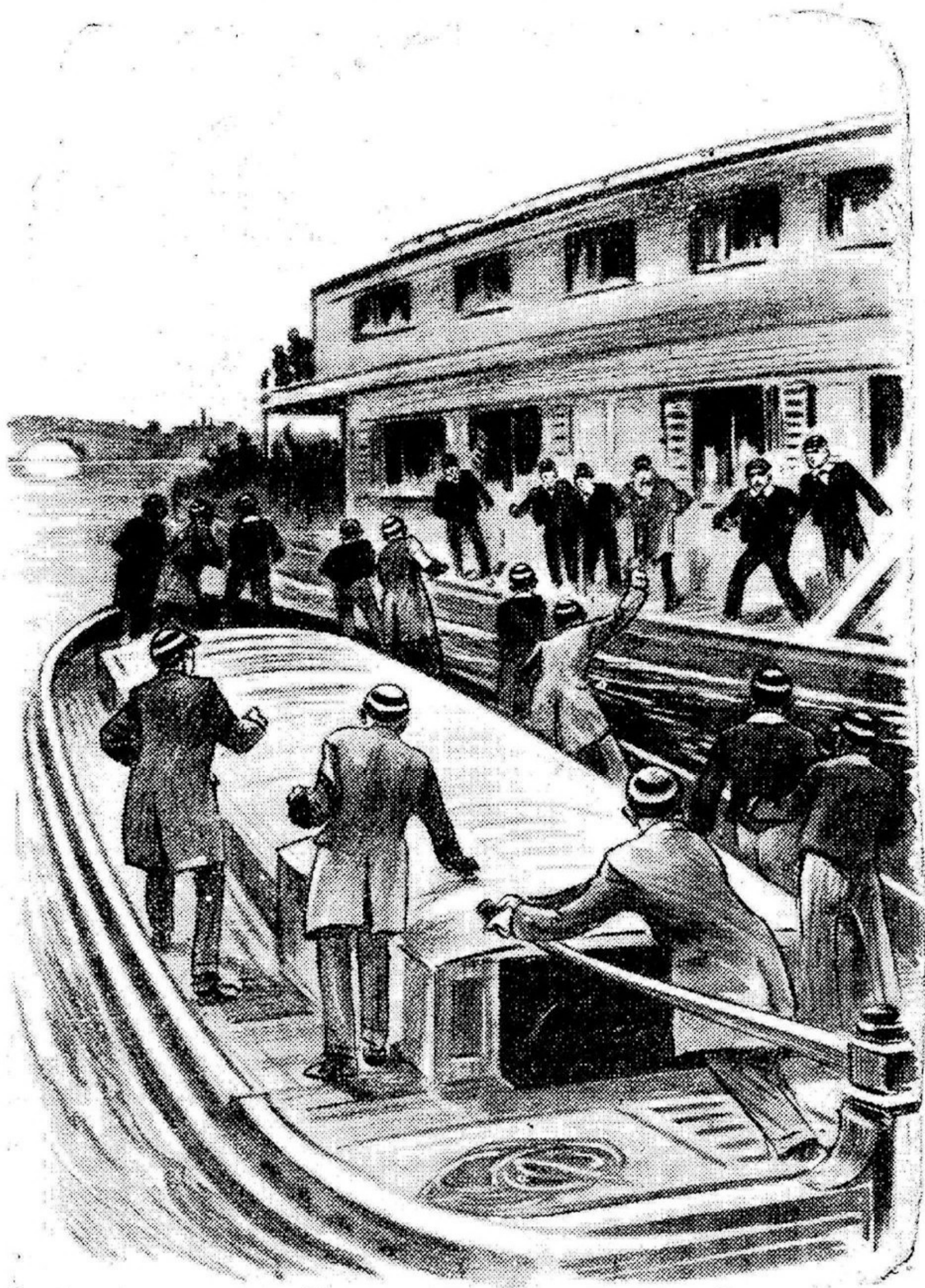
An incident from the superb long complete school yarn inside, featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 133.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

November 17th, 1928.

DANGER AHEAD!



Adrift and helpless in the grip of the deadly current, the houseboat containing the Fourth-Formers surged down the flooded river. Ahead, ominously near, loomed Bellton Bridge, against which the houseboat would crash with terrible results. Then alongside came Nipper & Co. on the barge. "Look out!" shouted Nipper to the Fourth-Formers, and pushed over the tiller. Would this desperate attempt to avert disaster prove successful?

Readers Welcome the New Removite—Tich Harborough of the Blue Crusaders!

THE REMOVE CRUSADER!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Nipper and his fellow Removites were disappointed when that cheery youth, Lionel Corcoran, went into the Fourth Form, but now that Tich Harborough, the famous winger of the Blue Crusaders, is coming into the Remove, they don't care so much. Nevertheless, Tich has good reason to regret Lionel's presence in the Fourth, for Lionel is a great lad at pulling off japes—as Tich discovers to his cost.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Meeting the New Removite!

TWO beams of brilliant light split the darkness of the pitchy November evening, as Lionel Corcoran and the Hon. Tom Silward Harborough motor-cycled along the road from Bannington to Bellton.

The evening was comparatively young, but it was inky black, and there was a wild, blustery wind, with more than a promise of rain in the scudding clouds.

"Better let me lead the way here!" shouted Corcoran, as he turned his head. "We go off to the right in a minute!"

"Carry on, then!" sang out the other rider. "You know the road—and I don't!"

"Right!" said Corcoran.

Lionel Corcoran of the Fourth—Tom Harborough of the Remove! New names at St. Frank's!

Corcoran had only been at the old school for a week, and so he was quite a new boy. And Harborough was a perfect stranger to St. Frank's; he was now being escorted there by his friend. But Harborough was a new chap, too. He was definitely booked for the Remove, and he was to board in the Ancient House.

There had been a good deal of jubilation at St. Frank's that day.

It was Monday, and in the morning Corcoran had received a letter from Harborough, saying that it was all arranged, and that he would be at Bannington Station on the evening train from London. So it came about that both these juniors were now motor-cycling through the black evening.

Lionel Corcoran was the fellow who owned the Blue Crusaders Football Club, the fellow who had created such a sensation the previous week by transferring the celebrated Blues from far-off Browton to Bannington. On the Saturday the Crusaders had played their first game on their new pitch, and they had trounced Devon Wanderers to the tune of six goals to nil. The whole country was still talking about that sensational game.

And St. Frank's, naturally, was highly animated.

The Fourth, in particular, was jubilant. It was their Form that could boast of Lionel

Corcoran, the schoolboy football club owner. And it really seemed that the Fourth at St. Frank's was in for a revival.

For many terms now the Fourth had been more or less comatose. It was the Remove, under the able leadership of Nipper, which had scored in japes and sports, and, in fact, in everything. The Fourth had become so tame that the Remove fellows were inclined to ignore it.

But with the coming of Lionel Corcoran there was a big change.

Corcoran was in the East House, and he had already fought Armstrong, the one-time leader of the East House juniors. Corcoran was now the leader, and Armstrong looked like becoming his strongest friend and adherent. Lionel had only been in the school a week, but Armstrong was revealing a dog-like devotion to his leader than was even more pronounced than the faithful slavery of Church and McClure to the redoubtable Edward Oswald Handforth.

In fact, a kind of warfare had been declared between the Fourth and the Remove; Lionel Corcoran had made it quite plain that he was going to buck the Fourth up and "put it on the map." Naturally, the Remove laughed and coolly told the Fourth to do its worst. Yet the Remove knew perfectly well that Corcoran was an ingenious, brainy youngster. Even in this extraordinarily short time he was infusing a new spirit into the Fourth.

As for the Hon. Tom Silward Harborough, he was almost as famous as Corcoran himself.

Affectionately known as "Tich," he was the renowned schoolboy winger of the Blue Crusaders. Tich Harborough played regularly for the professional club, and he was a footballer of singular skill. Fast as lightning, nippy as a hare, he was the terror and despair of full-backs all over the country. Tich was unassuming, modest—a regular sportsman to his finger-tips. In a word, a top-notch.

While the Blue Crusaders had been located at Browton, Tich had graced the Fifth Form at Halsbury. But now that the Blues had been shifted to Bannington, Tich had necessarily come south, too.

During the week-end he had persuaded his father, Lord Shevingham, to make swift arrangements for him to enter St. Frank's. He wanted to be with Lionel Corcoran—and also he had taken a great liking to Nipper and Handforth and Travers and the other St. Frank's juniors. He wanted to be with them all.

Lord Shevingham was an Old Blue himself; one of the most famous footballers in the great history of the game. A Corinthian—a celebrated International. Lord Shevingham was Corcoran's legal guardian, too—now that Colonel Corcoran was dead. So he approved heartily of Tich's desire to enter St. Frank's.

The Remove, of course, had been highly delighted when it learned that Tich was definitely booked for that Form. Although he had been in the Fifth at Halsbury, the St. Frank's Remove was really a grade higher.

And Tich wanted to be in the Remove, too—since he had taken such a liking to many of the Removites.

Handforth had insisted upon leading a big party to Bannington to meet the new fellow, and quite a lot of other juniors had supported him.

But Lionel Corcoran, hearing about it, had firmly put his foot down. He maintained that it was his privilege, as the owner of the Blue Crusaders, to go and meet Tom Harborough. The fact that he was a Removite made no difference. Besides, argued Corcoran, he had a motor-bike—and Tich would be using his motor-bike from Bannington. Far better that they should come along together.

So the Removites had resigned themselves, and now they were getting up a big welcome for this celebrated schoolboy Crusader. They felt that things were now more or less even. The Fourth had a Crusader—and so had the Remove!

In fact, the Remove rather felt that they had the best of it. For Tich Harborough was an actual player in the team, whilst Corcoran was only the owner. And who was the owner, compared with the lightning schoolboy winger?

In the blackness of the wintry evening the two young motor-cyclists sped along the country road, and Tich Harborough was feeling rather thrilled. He was as keen as mustard on entering the Remove; it was necessary for him to be at school, of course, and what better school than St. Frank's? It was within ten minutes' run of the Blue Crusaders' ground, and Lord Shevingham had made special arrangements with the Head that Tich should have extra privileges—so that he could be available for the club whenever it needed his services.

"Round this way!" yelled Lionel Corcoran, as he swung off the main road.

The other motor-cycle followed, and presently they were bumping along over a narrow, rutty lane. Tich Harborough had a vague impression that this was rather a poor sort of approach to such a famous school as St. Frank's.

But, then, Tich didn't know that Lionel Corcoran was playing a deep game!



CHAPTER 2.

Into the Trap!

THE HON. TOM HARBOROUGH was reassured when his companion yelled at him, over his shoulder, that this was a short cut. There was a much better road through the village of Bellton, but, by taking the lane, they were missing the village altogether.

Incidentally, they were also missing St. Frank's!

They came out on a bleak spot near the moor, where the wind whistled and boomed.

And then—although Tich didn't know it—they went back on their own tracks. In this way they would be approaching St. Frank's from another direction; but, before they got there, they would come to the Moor View School.

Lionel had been very anxious that they should not pass St. Frank's—for it was almost certain that his companion would recognise it by its many lights and buildings as a great Public School. But if he didn't see it, the situation would be quite different.

Thus, the very first lights they saw were those of the Moor View School—many lights from many windows, gleaming comfortingly out of the blackness. On such a pitchy dark night it was impossible to tell how many buildings there were, or actually how big this establishment was. That was precisely what Corcoran required.

"Steady now!" he sang out. "Into this gateway here."

"Right-ho!" said Harborough.

They entered the wide, gravelled courtyard of the Moor View School—for girls! And Tich Harborough took it positively for granted that he had reached St. Frank's. What reason had he to suspect anything else?

It was a big establishment—there were dozens of lighted windows—and Lionel Corcoran was a St. Frank's fellow. Surely Lionel knew his own school!

In the darkness Lionel was grinning to himself as he pulled his motor-bike back on its stand. He had timed the arrival to the minute. At this hour all the girls would be in their class-rooms on the other side of the building—quite at the rear—at prep. There was just a chance that the two schoolboys might be spotted by somebody—but it was only a remote chance.

Lionel had been here to tea, on the Sunday, when he had made the acquaintance of Irene & Co., the cheery girl chums of some of the St. Frank's fellows. Lionel liked them immensely, but he saw no reason why he should not perpetrate a little jape.

It was during that Sunday visit that an idea had occurred to him. Corcoran was ever on the alert for wheezes. He did not forget that he was now the leading spirit of the East House Fourth. He had made up his mind to make the Fourth Form supreme at St. Frank's, and it remained to be seen whether Nipper & Co. would allow such a revolutionary change.

But Lionel's policy was one of constant endeavour. And Tich Harborough was a Remove! Surely this was an excellent opportunity to work off a first-class jape on the Remove? Personal friendship did not come into the matter; Tich was to be an innocent victim of the rivalry between the Fourth and the Remove.

The Fourth, of course, knew all about it—and the Fourth was chuckling hugely over the joke. This would be one against the Remove! How the Fourth-Formers would howl with laughter later on, when the truth came out! Lionel was quite convinced that Tich would grin with the rest,

afterwards. He was a sportsman, and he would understand. But at the moment he was being very neatly victimised by his Crusader friend.

"Not many fellows about!" remarked Tich, all unsuspectingly, as he propped his own motor-cycle on its stand.

"Well, it's a cold night, and perhaps they're not expecting us just yet," replied Corcoran briskly. "In fact, Tich, before you see any of the fellows, it might be a good idea for you to go along to the Housemaster's study."

"Think so?"

"I'm sure of it!" said Corcoran firmly. "Might as well get it over and done with."

"All right, then."

"Good!" said the scheming Fourth-Former. "Afterwards you'll be free."

He led the way boldly to the front door—before Tich Harborough could have a chance of looking round.

"What about my bike?" asked the new Remove.

"Never mind about that," said Corcoran. "I'll see to your bike."

"So this is the Ancient House, eh?" went on Tich. "I suppose all the other Houses are further round—out of sight?"

"Oh, they're dotted about, you know," said Corcoran vaguely. "Well, come on! And don't make any noise. Everybody seems to be at prep," he added, with perfect truth.

"Don't the fellows do prep. in their own studies?"

"Of course they do," replied Corcoran. "Come on—this way."

He hurried Tich down the corridor—although he took care to show no sign of undue haste. Yet, in reality, he was on tenterhooks. It would ruin everything if one of the mistresses appeared at this crucial moment! But there was not much chance of it, since the mistresses were busily employed with the school.

They reached a door, and Corcoran gently tapped upon it. Receiving no answer, he was relieved; he opened the door, and stood aside.

"Nobody here," he remarked. "Well, it doesn't mater. You'd better go in and wait."

They found themselves in a very comfortable study. Only a small electric light was gleaming, and it was shaded. Most of the study was in shadow, except for a bright patch in front of the fireplace. A cheery fire was burning in the grate, crackling and flaming.

"I say, do you think this'll be all right?" asked Tich Harborough, in a dubious voice. "The Housemaster might not like it when he comes back and finds me in possession."

"Rot!" said Corcoran. "What's wrong with your being here? Sit down and make yourself at home, old man! I'll buzz out and see about the bike."

"Do you think the Housemaster will be long?"

"My dear chap, what on earth are you worrying about?" said Corcoran, with the cheeriest of grins. "It's early yet, and the best thing you can do is to squat down in

that easy-chair and make yourself at home. I know the ropes, and I can assure you that there's nothing to be scared of."

He nodded, and went out, closing the door. Tich looked round, and then sank comfortably into the easy-chair near the fire.

It was certainly very pleasant there. He reflected that he could easily jump to his feet when he heard the Housemaster's foot steps in the corridor. And perhaps Corcoran was right; it would be just as well to get the interview over at the outset. Housemasters were peculiar beings, at the best.

Tich Harborough's mind was at peace. Not a single thing had happened to occasion him the faintest suspicion. Yet here he was, in the Moor View School for Girls, calmly sitting in Miss Broome's study. And he was under the impression, all the time, that he was at St. Frank's!

Miss Broome was an under-mistress at the girls' school—the mistress, in fact, of the Fourth. Incidentally, she was very much of a Tartar—as Lionel knew! She was an acidulated person, and when she found Tich Harborough sitting in her easiest chair, making himself thoroughly at home, the fireworks were liable to be loud and dazzling!



CHAPTER 3.

Waiting for the Result!

THERE'S nothing like nerve!" said Lionel Corcoran blithely.

He had got outside, and his relief was unbounded. By sheer cheek—by unadulterated audacity—he had succeeded in this jape. He had escorted his unsuspecting companion into the girls' school, and had got out unscathed.

Now, without any delay, he shoved his motor-bike off its stand, and rapidly wheeled it out of the courtyard into the road. Propping it against the grass bank, he shot back into the courtyard, seized Tich's machine, and brought that out, too. Then he breathed another little sigh of relief.

"Well, that's that!" he murmured. "I wonder if the chaps are about, as they promised?"

He looked up and down the dark road, but could see no sign of human life. It was blustery and noisy, with the wind whistling through the trees overhead, and causing the boughs to groan and creak.

Corcoran gave a cautious whistle.

"Is it all clear?" came a voice, from his rear.

Corcoran spun round, but could see nobody.

"Yes, you asses!" he said. "Where the dickens are you?"

Armstrong and Griffith, of the East House, seemed to materialise from the hedge. Then they leapt across the grass border of the road, and joined their leader.

"We weren't sure!" said Timothy Armstrong. "We didn't want to mess things up."

"Good men!" grinned Corcoran. "It went off like a dream."

"We saw you drive in," murmured Griffith.

"Then grab Tich's jigger, and push it down to St. Frank's," said Lionel. "We'd better not hang about here—we might be spotted at any minute. Are the other fellows waiting lower down the lane?"

"A regular crowd of 'em," said Armstrong, with a chuckle.

So, wheeling the two machines, the juniors moved away from the gates of the Moor View School, and vanished into the gloom.

Armstrong was a big, burly sort of junior—aggressive and clumsy. Until the arrival of Corcoran, he had called himself the leader of the East House juniors. Actually, he had been nothing of the sort—since Armstrong did not possess the qualities of a leader. He had resented Corcoran's intrusion, and he had even provoked a fight.

But he had found that he had caught a Tartar! For Corcoran had given him the hiding of his life. After that, rather sportingly, Armstrong had agreed to accept the new fellow's leadership.

There was something rather compelling about Corcoran, and Armstrong's weaker nature easily succumbed to it. Corcoran was such a thoroughly decent sort that it was impossible to be at enmity with him. Armstrong considered, after a very little thought, that it was far better to have Lionel Corcoran as a friend. As Lionel was in the same study, and the same dormitory, as himself, he deemed that it would be in the interests of peace if he knuckled under.

And Armstrong had knuckled under—handsomely.

Now he was feeling very pleased about it. He was glad enough to accept Corcoran's lead, and he was proving to be a loyal supporter. Everybody had noticed the great difference in Armstrong during the past days. His usual surliness had gone; for Corcoran's influence had had a remarkable effect.

Griffith was a different proposition. He was a happy-go-lucky youngster, and his will was not famed for its strength. He had very easily succumbed to Lionel Corcoran's sway; and he was very proud of the fact that he shared Study No. 12 with this distinguished new chap. He was ready enough to do anything that Corcoran told him.

Further down the lane, the three juniors came into contact with a whole bunch of Fourth-Formers. John Busterfield Boots was to the fore. Boots was the skipper of the Fourth, and he belonged to the Modern House. Many fellows in the Remove were already asking themselves how long it would be before Boots was ousted by Corcoran. It seemed inevitable that Corcoran would ultimately become the Form captain, and not merely the leader of the East House section of the Form. His personality was so dynamic that he couldn't be kept out of

the supreme leadership of the whole Form for long.

"Everything O.K.?" asked Boots eagerly.

"You bet it is!" replied Corcoran. "It worked like a charm. Our dear friend, Tich, is now sitting comfortably in Miss Broome's study."

"My only sainted aunt!" grinned Bob Christine.

"He believes, in his childlike innocence, that he is at St. Frank's," proceeded Corcoran calmly. "There he sits, toasting his feet on the fender, awaiting the arrival of his Housemaster. I wonder what will happen when Miss Broome walks in and finds him in her sanctum?"

"I imagine," said Boots, "that there'll be ructions."

"Harborough will be kicked out on his neck!" chuckled Christine. "And he'll probably be grabbed by a bunch of those girls, and put through the mill first!"

"Do you think they'll go for him?" asked Corcoran thoughtfully.

"Those girls are full of spirit!" said Bob Christine, with a nod. "We know 'em! They're just as ready for a jape as any of our fellows—bles 'em! And when they find a perfect stranger in their midst they're liable to get excited. It would be different if Tich Harborough was known to them. But he isn't—and he's not even wearing a St. Frank's cap. They won't know him from Adam! And he'll be so jolly flustered when he sees them that he won't be able to explain himself."

"If he does try to explain himself, it'll be all up with him!" said Armstrong, with a yell of laughter. "Fancy him telling Miss Broome and the girls that he thinks he's at St. Frank's! He won't be believed! They'll think it's a lark of some kind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, let's hope that the girls *do* get hold of him!" said Corcoran cheerfully. "I'll admit I hadn't thought of that possibility. But it's an intriguing one. My sons, I rather think that the Fourth has 'put one over' on the Remove. We're doing well—but we mustn't get too satisfied. We've got to do better. This is only just the beginning of the campaign."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Corky!"

"Down with the Remove!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Fourth-Formers were very hearty and boisterous in their shouts.

But they took care not to yell too loudly, for they were quite near to the wall of the Triangle. And they remained there—not daring to enter the school premises. If they did so, some Removites would probably spot them, and then the Removites might get suspicious!

"We'll wait here till poor old Tich comes along!" said Corcoran. "I don't suppose he'll be very long—not more than a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, at the most. And won't we yell at him!"

"What a lark!" chuckled Boots. "We'll chip him for days over this—and pretend that he went there because he wanted to be with the girls!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's one thing pretty certain," said Corcoran complacently. "Old Tich will always remember his arrival at St. Frank's!"



CHAPTER 4.

As Tricky as the Boys!

THE HON. TOM SILWARD HARBOROUGH shifted rather uneasily in the big chair, and then got

to his feet.

"Rats!" he muttered. "I don't quite like this! I've been here for ten minutes—and nothing has happened! Why doesn't that giddy Housemaster come?"

He had no suspicions about Lionel; he assumed that Lionel had gone off, had joined the other juniors, and that they were all waiting for him to come out. It was purely the Housemaster's fault. That gentleman had obviously got into conversation with some of the other masters, and there was really no telling when he would come back to his own study.

This was the way Tich Harborough looked at it. He began to think that it might be just as well for him to clear out. Yet he didn't want to do this—because he might meet the Housemaster in the corridor, and that would be awkward. Perhaps, on the whole, it would be better to remain.

He looked round the study with interest.

It wasn't quite the kind of study he had expected to see at St. Frank's. In fact, he was rather disappointed with his first impression of the famous old school. He had rather hoped to see a huge range of imposing buildings, with brilliant lights everywhere, and with scores of fellows moving about.

Instead of that, he had the impression that St. Frank's was comparatively small. Of course, the night was dark, and there were probably lots of other buildings out of sight. But the Ancient House wasn't the fine place that Tich had pictured in his own mind.

The entrance hall, for example, was much smaller; and it seemed to him that it was rather old-fashioned. Even this study was peculiar. Tich didn't quite know how it was peculiar, but the impression persisted. There was a nice carpet on the floor, and the desk was solid and substantial. But he couldn't understand the pictures round the walls; they were too ornamental, too effeminate.

Then, too, on the mantelpiece there were some pretty ornaments. They seemed rather out of place in a schoolmaster's study. Yet, even with these clues, Tich remained sublimely unsuspecting.

He was in St. Frank's—he was in his Housemaster's study—and he was waiting here to be interviewed by the aforesaid Housemaster. These were the facts that were imbedded deeply in Tich Harborough's mind. At least, he thought they were facts. No other possibility occurred to him.

"I'll have a word to say with Lionel later on," he muttered, with a frown. "He might, at least, have hurried up the blessed Housemaster, and told him that I was here. It's such a rummy thing, being left here all alone——"

He broke off, and gave a start.

Distinctly, clearly, he had heard a sound of laughter. Not manly laughter, not even boyish laughter, but unquestionably the silvery laughter of young girls!

"That's jolly funny!" said Tich in wonder.

It was about the last sound he had expected to hear in a boys' school. He was even more staggered when he became aware of the fact that light footsteps were coming down the passage outside. A murmur of voices came to his ears, too—girls' voices!

"Must be some of the housemaids!" he muttered, more puzzled than ever. "Yet I don't see how——"

The door was suddenly flung open, and a soft, girlish chuckle sounded.

"Walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly!" came a laughing voice. "Buck up with your old lines, Doris!"

Tich did not even hear those last words, so they made no impression on his mind. He was so startled by this sudden intrusion that he could only stand there, as if rooted to the carpet.

"We might as well all go in," said another voice. "Perhaps the fire wants making up, and you know what the Broome bird is—Hullo! Oh, my goodness! Who ever put this in here?"

Tich Harborough's heart missed about four beats, and then raced on at tremendous speed, as though trying to catch up with itself. There were three girls standing just inside the doorway. Two of them were Winnie Pitt and Doris Berkeley—girls well known to the St. Frank's fellows. They were both dark, both bright-eyed, and slim. Doris was the one who had been speaking, and she looked at Tich in wonder and astonishment.

The other girl was different. Tich hardly knew how to take his eyes off her. She was fair—and very neat. Her complexion was wonderfully clear, with a touch of healthy colour in her cheeks. She was pretty, too—devastatingly pretty. Her name was Sylvia Glenn, and she was a girl who had not been at the Moor View School for long. Tich considered that her eyes were positively stunning.

But his bewilderment was much greater than his admiration. These three schoolgirls had marched into the Housemaster's study as though they had a perfect right there! Schoolgirls—in St. Frank's! It was extraordinary.

As for the girls, they were just as surprised as Tich. Expecting to find Miss Broome's study empty—seeing that they had left Miss Broome in the class-room—they were naturally astounded to find a perfect stranger in possession. They had never set eyes on Tich—there was nothing to indicate that he was a schoolboy, even, for he still wore his light-coloured leather motoring-coat.

"Er—good-evening!" said Tich awkwardly.

"Good-evening!" chorused the three girls.

"I—I'm just waiting, you know," explained Tich.

"So it seems," nodded Doris. "I hope you've been making yourself comfortable?"

"Oh, quite, thanks," said the junior. "I'm sorry if I stared at you just now. The fact is, I was a bit startled."

"We rather wondered what was the matter," murmured Sylvia. "But do we look so frightful that we startled you?"

"No, no!" replied Harborough hurriedly. "I—I didn't mean that. The fact is, I didn't expect to see any girls here—in this school."

The girls opened their eyes wider.

"You didn't expect to see any girls here—in this school?" repeated Doris politely.

"Well, hardly," smiled Tich.

"Why hardly?" put in Winnie, in amazement.

"Well, I mean—— After all, it isn't usual for girls to be dodging about in a boys' school, is it?" said Tich, with a grin. "But I suppose you're the Housemaster's daughters—or visitors of his? I'm a new chap at St. Frank's——"

"St. Frank's!" echoed the three girls, in one voice.

"Yes; only arrived a little while ago," replied Tich, looking at them in more surprise than ever. "I suppose you haven't seen Corcoran anywhere about? He brought me here, and told me that the Housemaster would come. But I haven't seen any sign of him. I expect he's over in one of the other Houses."

So certain was Tich that he stood in St. Frank's that even the sight of these three girls did not reveal the truth to him. And it was natural, after all, that he should take it for granted that they were visitors, or that they were the Housemaster's daughters. He might have jumped to the truth if they had come tumbling into a Common-room, or a Junior study. But this was the Housemaster's study, and more or less private.

"It's too bad!" said Doris Berkeley, with a sweet smile. "Fancy keeping you here all this time, like this! Housemasters are so inconsiderate, aren't they? If I were you, I shouldn't stay. He might be ages before he comes!"

With a slight backward movement of her dainty foot, Doris touched her companions' slim legs, one after the other. And with remarkable speed they took this as an indication that it was a time for them to remain silent.



Miss Broome flung open the cupboard door. The interior was as black as ink, but something seemed to be hovering in mid air—a face with streaks running down and across it—ghastly, horrible, spectral! Miss Broome gave a piercing scream!

In a word, Doris had taken command of the situation!

CHAPTER 5.

Rough on Tich!



THE unfortunate Tich had completely given himself away. He had done so unconsciously—and it had only taken Doris Berkeley about twenty seconds to realise the truth. The mention of Corcoran's name had given her the clue. This fellow was a new boy for St. Frank's—he had said so—and it was obvious that he had been brought here by a spoofer, and had been left in Miss Broome's study under the impression that it was a Housemaster's study.

He had been abandoned to his fate.

In some way his scheming companion had brought him into the school, and he had the impression that he was at St. Frank's. It was rather a peculiar state of affairs, but this was no time to ask for details. Doris Berkeley saw no reason why the joke should not be carried a little further. Yet Tich did not even notice the mischievous light that lurked in her dark eyes.

Doris felt that it was too bad to leave this innocent chap here, ultimately to fall a prey to Miss Broome—who was not only

vinegary in the extreme, but liable to disbelieve people when they told the perfect truth. It would be quite like her to make a complaint to the headmaster of St. Frank's for this boy's unwarrantable behaviour in invading her study.

"Of course, there's just a chance that we might be able to find the Housemaster," said Doris coolly. "Mind you, it's only a slim chance, but you never know your luck. You say you're a new boy?"

"Yes—my name's Harborough."

"Oh!" exclaimed Winnie, open-eyed. "Then—then you must be Tich Harborough!"

"Yes, I believe so—I—I mean, I am!" stammered Tich.

"Well, just wait a minute, and we'll see what we can do," said Doris crisply. "Shan't be long!"

She fairly pushed the other two girls out of the study, and then closed the door. They retreated a few yards down the passage.

"What's the idea, Doris?" murmured Winnie, seizing Doris' arm. "What are you having a game at, you silly?"

"My dear girl, there's a chance here for a ripping jape!" whispered Doris, her eyes twinkling merrily. "Poor old Tich Harborough! We heard that he was coming to St. Frank's, didn't we?"

"Yes, but—"

"He was brought here by that chap, Corcoran!" went on Doris. "You know—we met

him yesterday. He's played a joke on this new fellow."

"I like him!" said Sylvia firmly. "He looks a fine sort of chap!"

"Well, of course he is," said Winnie. "He's Tich Harborough—the boy who plays for the Blue Crusaders."

"Never mind that now!" murmured Doris. "We've got to get him out of the Broome bird's study. She'll claw him to pieces if she finds him there. In the cause of common humanity, we've got to rescue him!"

"And smuggle him out, eh?"

"Yes—when we've finished with him!" replied Doris calmly. "But, first of all, we'll smuggle him into the Common-room. My hat! What a rag! Won't the poor chap be flabbergasted when he finds himself pushed headlong into a room full of girls!"

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Winnie happily.

"It's too bad!" protested Sylvia Glenn. "The poor fellow will have a fit!"

"We can spoof him up to the eyes!" declared Doris. "He doesn't suspect a thing yet, and even after we get him into the Common-room we might be able to keep it up. Why can't we pretend that this really is St. Frank's, and that there are lots of girls here, too? I say, what a lark!"

She led the way back to Miss Broome's study, and then opened the door sedately.

"It's all right," she said, with a sweet smile. "You want to see the Housemaster, don't you? Do you mind coming this way?"

"Thanks awfully!" said Tich gratefully.

He walked out of the study, and Doris closed the door. Then, rather hurriedly, the three girls hustled him down the passage towards the Junior Common-room—which, they knew, was full of girls. Prep. was over, and the whole crowd would be round the fire.

Tich couldn't make it out at all. He didn't know why he was being taken away from the Housemaster's study, and he couldn't understand why these girls should have taken charge of him in this fashion. It was so different from what he had expected. He began to get rather nervous. This was more than he had bargained for! He began to see that it would be decidedly awkward at St. Frank's if he was in constant danger of running into girls all over the place!

By this time a vague sort of suspicion was beginning to form in his mind. It wasn't definite yet—it hadn't taken shape. Even if he had had time to ponder, he might only have come to the conclusion that there was a sort of girls' annexe at St. Frank's. He knew nothing about the Moor View School and its close proximity to St. Frank's. So it was impossible for him to suspect some thing which he did not even know existed.

But just then two things happened. The first was astonishing, and startling.

Three girls came running out of a side passage. They were Mary Summers, Irene Manners, and Marjorie Temple. They were laughing uproariously, and Mary, who was leading, suddenly pulled herself up so abruptly that she went skidding along the floor like a skater.

Tich was bewildered. More girls! They were everywhere! And the vague suspicion of his was now beginning to take shape. But before he could have time to think it out, and before the new arrivals could regain their breath, Doris caught her breath in with a little gulp.

"Cave!" she murmured. "It's Miss Broome!"

But it was too late. An angular feminine form hove into sight from the main hall, and it was a time for swift action—not for argument.

In this part of the passage the light was fairly dim, and, quick as a flash, Winnie Pitt whipped open a door close at hand, and the other two girls understood her motive.

With one shove, they pushed Tich forcibly through the opening, and then closed the door with a slam.

The unfortunate junior, in pitch darkness, stumbled over something, fell forward, and then sprawled full length. His face went plunging into a bowl of cold water. At all events, when he had recovered his wits, it seemed to him that it was a bowl of cold water. He was full length on the floor, and when he felt about him he found that there was a wall close at hand.

"Ugh!" he breathed, shivering.

He had hardly had time to know what was happening. But he guessed the truth now. For some reason those girls had wanted to get him out of the way—and so they had pushed him into a cupboard. He felt gingerly about him, and—yes, he had been right. There was a big bowl on the floor, and in his fall he had plunged his face into it. He pulled out a handkerchief, and hurriedly wiped himself down as best he could.

Outside, he could hear voices—one of them particularly acid.

Miss Broome, as a matter of fact, was making inquiries. She wasn't sure, but it had seemed to her that some of the girls had opened the door, and had quickly closed it. And Miss Broome had an inquiring turn of mind.

"What were you doing here, all of you?" she asked severely. "Who went into that cupboard just now?"

"Cupboard, Miss Broome?" said Winnie, with a gasp.

"Yes, cupboard!" insisted Miss Broome. "There is a girl in that cupboard——"

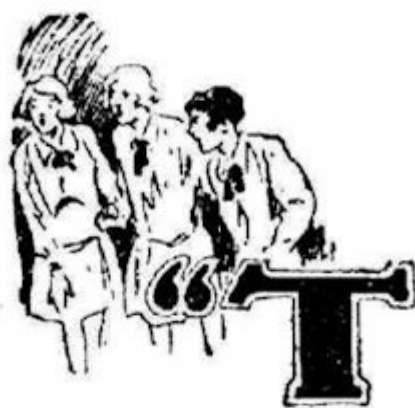
"There isn't—honest Injun!" said Doris truthfully. "You're quite wrong, Miss Broome! There's no girl in that cupboard!"

"Then if there is no girl in there, you have been up to some other nonsense!" said Miss Broome sourly. "Stand aside, please!"

She fairly pushed her way forward, and flung the cupboard door open. The girls fell back, feeling that all was lost.

The interior of the cupboard was as black as ink, but there, at about the same height as Miss Broome's face, something seemed to be hovering in mid-air—a face with streaks running down and across it!—ghastly, horrible, spectral!

Miss Broome gave one piercing scream, and fainted on the spot!



CHAPTER 6.

Saved !

THAT'S done it!" said Doris Berkeley in a hollow voice.

But the other girls were uttering piercing little screams. Two or three of them had fallen back, horrified.

"Look!" shrieked Mary. "What—what is it?"

"Here, I say—what on earth's the matter?" asked Tich Harborough, in dire alarm. "There's nothing—"

"Oh, it's you!" cried Sylvia, with relief.

"I'm not a ghost!" ejaculated Tich, with some impatience. "Look at this lady! I believe she's fainted—"

"It's all right—we'll look after her!" said Doris quickly. "It's not the first time she's fainted—she's rather subject to them, although she *does* look so jolly strong."

Marjorie and Irene were looking at Tich, however—looking at him with staring eyes.

"What's—what's the matter with him?" breathed Irene, horrified.

But Doris was pulling at Tich's arm.

"You girls look after Miss Broome!" she said hurriedly. "Come on—quickly!" she urged to Tich. "This way! Sorry, and all that, but there'll be the most frightful ructions if you're found here."

"But—but—"

"We were going to jape you, but it's too late!" whispered Doris. "You're in the wrong school, you know—this is the Moor View School for Girls—not St. Frank's!"

"Eh?" gurgled Tich Harborough. "But—but—"

He was not allowed to say anything further. The front door had been reached; he was simply whisked outside, and then the door was rapidly closed.

"Thank goodness!" murmured Doris. "We might do the trick, even now!"

"But—but his face!" panted Winnie. "What was the matter with his face?"

"All streaked with blue, you mean?" nodded Doris.

"Yes."

"That's nothing—only Mary's dye."

"Mary's dye!" said one of the other girls faintly.

"When we pushed him into the cupboard, we forgot all about that bowl of dye on the floor!" said Doris. "You know as well as I do that Mary has been dyeing that frock of hers on the q.t. She hung it up, and left the bowl underneath to catch the drips."

"And—and that chap must have fallen over, and dipped his face into it!" said Mary, a light beginning to dawn upon her. "But who is he? Why do you want to push him off like that—"

"Can't tell you now!" replied Doris. "We've got to see about Miss Broome. And don't forget—leave most of the talking to me!"

The other girls could understand now how it was that Tich had looked so awful. Miss Broome had flung the door open, and he, standing there, had been in just the right position for a moonbeam, falling through the hall window, to strike his face. Blue as it already was, the moon had finished the general effect, and he had looked positively frightful.

Miss Broome was just recovering. When, at last, her eyelids fluttered, and she came to her senses, she found a group of girls collected round her. Doris was on her knees, dabbing the mistress' face with an Eau-de-Cologne-soaked handkerchief. Winnie was holding a glass of water ready.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Miss Broome faintly.

"It's all right, miss—you'll be better in a minute!" said Doris soothingly.

"But—but I don't understand!" murmured Miss Broome. "What has happened? Why am I lying here— Oh, yes! That cupboard—that—that awful figure—"

"Please, Miss Broome!" urged Doris.

"Where is it?" demanded the mistress, sitting up, and looking about her with staring eyes. "Where is it, I say?"

"Where is what, Miss Broome?"

"That—that Thing."

"Thing?"

"There was a ghastly face looking at me from the cupboard!" breathed Miss Broome feebly. "A horrible face—blue and terrible!"

"Perhaps we had better fetch a doctor!" said Doris, in a voice of concern.

"No, no—I won't have a doctor!" said Miss Broome, trying to struggle to her feet. "Tell me! Did you see that face, too?"

She stared at Doris anxiously, and Doris smiled in a kindly compassionate way.

"Please don't excite yourself, Miss Broome!" she said gently. "There isn't a blue face here!"

"Of course there isn't!" echoed the other girls in unison.

"But—but didn't you see it?" asked the mistress tremblingly.

"Oh, I say!" murmured Doris. "You don't really believe, Miss Broome, do you, that there was a blue face looking at you?"

"There was something in the cupboard!" whispered Miss Broome. "I tell you, there was something there! I couldn't have been mistaken—I'm not so fanciful as all that!"

"I don't think you're feeling well, miss," said Doris firmly. "I mean, doesn't it sound funny?"

"It is not funny!" snapped Miss Broome.

"No, I mean funny in the other way!" said Doris. "I mean—peculiar. You surely don't believe that there are blue faces about the school, Miss Broome? It's—it's so horrid!"

The unfortunate lady caught her breath in sharply.

"Perhaps I was mistaken!" she murmured huskily. "Of course—of course! Naturally, there could have been no blue face there. How ridiculous!"

"The cupboard's quite empty, Miss Broome!" said Sylvia, indicating the open door.

"Yes, I see it is empty!" murmured Miss Broome. "Please help me. I—I think I'll go to my room! Really, I'm not feeling at all well! I shall have to lie down for an hour!"

"You couldn't do anything better, Miss Broome!" said Winnie, with conviction. "Poor Miss Broome!"

"We *do* hope you'll soon be better!" said Doris compassionately.

Two or three of the girls gently led Miss Broome away, and escorted her to her own room. After she had gone Doris leaned back against the wall and held her slim sides.

"Oh, give me a handkerchief, somebody!" she breathed feebly. "If you don't, I shall scream like the dickens!"

"We're saved!" ejaculated Winnie. "Oh, my aunt!"

"And—and the Broome bird thought that she had been seeing things!" gurgled Doris, nearly bent double with suppressed laughter. "Oh, wasn't it too bad? Poor old Broome bird! The joke of it is, she did see the blue face, and now she thinks that she didn't! She'll be as tame as anything for weeks after this!"

"Well, it's about time she was tame!" said Mary.

They went along to their Common-room—but not until Doris had opened the front door and had cautiously looked out. But Tich, of course, had gone, and there was now no sign of him.

In the Common-room there were many girlish squeals of laughter—silvery outbursts of mirth. Doris was telling the other girls all about it, and they came to the conclusion that it was excruciatingly funny.

Perhaps it was—but the Hon. Tom Silward Harborough, as he made his way out of the gravelled courtyard, couldn't for the life of him see the point of the joke!



CHAPTER 7.

Tich on the War Path!

TICH, in fact, was fairly boiling.

"The spoofer!" he muttered furiously.

"The awful, tricky spoofer! I never thought he had it in him!"

His bewilderment was beginning to vanish. After the first shock was over, he knew how completely he had been taken in. Those words of Doris Berkeley's, whispered in his ear, had given him the final enlightenment. But even then he had found it difficult to

believe that he owed this predicament to the awful duplicity of Lionel Corcoran.

Yet it was as obvious as daylight.

Tich knew that he was at the Moor View School—for girls. Now he could understand the peculiarities of that study; he could also understand why those three girls had come in. Furthermore, he realised, with a bit of a shock, that they had been preparing to jape him when Miss Broome had come on the scene. Those girls had actually been leading him "up the garden," too! If Miss Broome hadn't appeared, goodness only knew what would have happened to him.

"The—the little bounders!" panted Tich breathlessly. "I'm dashed if they're not just as bad as the chaps! They found me there, and instead of telling me where I was, I'm jiggered if they weren't going to keep up the joke!"

His astonishment gave place to indignation as he again thought of Lionel Corcoran.

"I'll slaughter him for this!" vowed Tich darkly. "It couldn't have been an accident—he couldn't have made a blunder. He took me into that school deliberately, and then deserted me. Left me there—to my fate! My only hat! I wouldn't have believed it! And why? Why? That's what I want to know! Why did Lionel play such a trick on me? I've never done anything to him!"

Bubbling over with indignation he searched the courtyard and found no sign of his motor-cycle. That had gone, too. Lionel had walked off with it. And Tich had not the faintest idea where he was. He didn't know which direction to take to get to St. Frank's. For all he knew, St. Frank's was three or four miles away. Or, on the other hand, it might be comparatively close.

He went out into the road and stood there in the buffeting wind, looking up and down the pitchy dark lane. He turned up the big collar of his leather motoring coat, partially hiding his face. He did not know whether to go to the left or to the right. Overhead the scudding clouds were looking ragged and angry, and every now and again the moon would peep out between the rifts.

Tich Harborough thought that he had elucidated everything.

But he had completely forgotten that incident of the cupboard; although, true enough, he couldn't quite understand why the mistress should have been so frightened at his appearance. Probably the good lady was nervous, and the sudden sight of him had startled her.

The unfortunate Tich did not know that his face was covered in blue streaks, which gave him a most extraordinary appearance. He had dipped his face fairly and squarely into that bowl of dye, and the hurried use of his handkerchief afterwards had only removed portions of the stuff.

But it had felt just like water, and now that his face was dry again he never gave it a thought. It was a perfectly natural

assumption on his part to take it for granted that he was normal in appearance.

He listened, and then he heard footsteps approaching—trudging, clumsy footsteps.

He waited for a moment or two, and then, peering forward, he beheld the figure of a country yokel in the moonlight. But just then the moon went in, and the figure became merged into the blackness and gloom.

"I say, just a minute!" said Tich, stepping forward.

"Lor' sakes!" ejaculated the countryman. "Ye gave ine a rare start, young gent. I didn't know ye was there!"

"Sorry!" said Tich. "Can you tell me which is the way to St. Frank's?"

"Why, certainly!" said the yokel. "I just come past it, not five minutes ago. Straight down the road it is, young gent. Can't miss it."

"It's not far, then?"

"Why, no. Only three or four hundred yards——"

Then suddenly the yokel broke off. The moon had skipped out from behind the clouds again, and without warning the schoolboy's blue-streaked face was revealed. The moonlight playing upon it gave it an uncannily phantom-like appearance. It was inhuman, ghostly.

Tich saw the labourer's eyes open wider; he saw his jaw drop, and the short clay pipe that had been in his mouth fell to the ground and splintered into fragments.

"I say! What's the matter?" burst out Tich in alarm. "You needn't look so scared——"

"Help!" gasped the man.

He took to his heels like mad, running along the lane as though demons were after him. Never before had Tich seen a man bolt so abruptly. Tich, in fact, was startled.

"Everybody's mad!" he muttered, taking deep breaths. "They've all gone dotty!"

The sounds of the running yokel vanished as a heavy gust of wind came along, causing the trees to creak and sigh. Tich shivered, drew the collar of his coat more round his face, and then started trudging down the lane towards St. Frank's.

Sure enough, as soon as he had turned the bend he saw a number of lights gleaming cheerily from lots of windows, comparatively near at hand. He could tell that there was a big range of buildings there, an enormous range. This was more like the St. Frank's he had pictured.

He had almost reached the school wall when he beheld a form vaguely in the

middle of the road. The moon had gone in now, for quite a long time, by the look of the clouds that were banking up in the sky.

"That you, Tich, old son?" came Lionel's cool voice.

Tich halted in his tracks, then he gave a gulp and ran forward.

"Corcoran!" he roared. "You—you spoofing rotter——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A wild yell of laughter rang out, from dozens of throats. The next moment the lane swarmed with juniors. The Fourth-Formers came crowding round, laughing at the top of their voices. And Tich Harborough stood there, freshly bewildered.

"How did you get on with the girls, old man?" asked Lionel politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Tich!" grinned Buster Boots. "You're a regular lady-killer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wasn't satisfied with coming to St. Frank's, so he had

to barge into a girls' school," said Armstrong. "We're surprised at you, Tich. Naughty, naughty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling lunatics!" roared Tom Harborough wrathfully. "If you think it's funny, I don't!"

We do think it's funny!" gasped Bob Christine, holding his sides. "In fact, we think it's a positive scream. And if you don't mind we'll do a bit more screaming."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers were positively rocking with laughter, and it

was so infectious that even Tich found his anger oozing away. And at length he was compelled to grin. It was clear to him that there had been no malicious intent, and Lionel had perpetrated the joke with the full knowledge of all these other fellows.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tich at last. "I suppose I was an ass to get wild. It was a practical joke, eh?"

"Of course it was, old son," said Corcoran heartily. "No offence, of course, but we couldn't resist the temptation!"



CHAPTER 8.

Very Strange!

IT'S a pity that I should have tempted you!" said Tich, with a certain amount of bitterness. "Why pick on me? What have I ever done to you?"

"Nothing, old man," said Corcoran, clapping him on the back. "We're the best of friends—always have been, and as far as I can tell, always will be. It wasn't you I spoofed up at the Moor View School."

"It wasn't me?"

"Of course it wasn't," said Corcoran firmly. "It was just a new Remove chap."

"Well, I'm that new Remove chap, aren't I?"

"Yes."

"Then what the dickens are you getting at?"

"Merely that I'm in the Fourth," explained Corcoran. "All these other fellows are in the Fourth. And the Fourth Form at St. Frank's is now going full speed into a big campaign against the Remove. Japes, my lad. The more japes we can play on you the better. We just want to show the Remove that we're the top dogs."

"Hear, hear!" yelled the Fourth-Formers.

And then Tich Harborough understood.

"Well, it's a bit thick!" he complained. "I'm not in the Remove yet, I haven't even arrived at the dashed school, and yet you pounce on me and play these tricks. Still, I'll forgive you!" he added, with a grin. "After all, it was a pretty brainy jape. And I suppose I am a Removite?"

"You are, and you're fair game," said Boots heartily. "Good man! We knew that you wouldn't cut up rusty."

"But you needn't crow so much," went on Tich. "I'm in the Remove, am I? And the Remove is up against the Fourth? Well, you laughing hyenas, the Remove will have something to say about this later on. There's going to be a little matter of revenge."

"Go ahead!" chuckled Lionel. "That's just what we're after. The hotter we can make the game, the better. There's nothing like a bit of life to while away these dull winter days."

And they all chuckled afresh. None of them had noticed anything strange about Tich Harborough's face. The moon hadn't come out again, and they could only see him as a mere blur in the gloom. Also the big collar of his motoring coat, turned up, partially hid his features.

He condescended to explain something of what had happened to him. They howled with fresh laughter when they heard how the girls had taken him out of the study, and how Doris had obviously schemed to keep up the joke. But Tich didn't say anything about that cupboard incident; at least, he did not mention the bowl of water. He thought it quite unnecessary to give these fatheaded Fourth-Formers that added pleasure. He only intimated that Miss Broome had come along, and that the girls had managed to shove him outside.

"It was a pity that silly mistress came along and spoilt everything," said Lionel regretfully. "You'd have had a lovely time with all those girls, Tich."

"Ass!"

"Well, we'd better be going indoors," said Boots. "I expect those Remove chaps are wondering what the dickens has happened to the new chap. We'll probably come over later, Tich, and help in the celebrations."

Tich Harborough was feeling his cheery self again now. All his doubts and troubles were over. These Fourth-Formers had played a harmless practical joke on him, and it was ended. Now he could go into St. Frank's, as though nothing had happened, and thoroughly enjoy himself.

When they got into the Triangle, Lionel took Tich by the arm and led him towards the Ancient House.

"If it's all the same to you, old son, we won't come in," he said politely.

"Why not?" asked Tich, with fresh suspicions. "Is this another jape?"

"No—honour bright!" grinned Corcoran. "But it's more than likely that the Remove chaps will be a bit peeved when they hear what has happened. Much as I should enjoy a free fight in the Ancient House lobby, it wouldn't be exactly diplomatic. Prefects have a habit of springing out with canes. They're generally lurking about somewhere when they're not wanted."

Tich grinned.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said. "All right, I can easily look after myself. I'm not going amongst strangers, anyhow. I know Nipper and Handforth and Travers, and all those other chaps."

"They'll all be waiting for you—with a royal welcome," said Corcoran, nodding. "So long, Tich!"

The Fourth-Formers separated into two groups, and went to the Modern House and the East House, chuckling immensely. Tich mounted the Ancient House steps, opened the door and strode in.

As it happened, Nipper was in the lobby, talking with Handforth and Church and McClure and a few others. Travers and Gresham were chatting with Potts, and Fullwood was looking rather anxiously at his watch.

"He ought to have been here half an hour ago!" Nipper was saying. "Not that there's any reason to worry—"

"Of course not!" broke in Handforth. "I expect that fathead, Corcoran, has kept him. They were pals before they ever came to St. Frank's, and— Why, what the— How the— Great Scott! What's that?"

"Eh?" ejaculated the others, startled by Handforth's tone.

They saw that the celebrated leader of Study D was staring dazedly at the door, which had just opened. And there, framed in the half-open doorway, was a most remarkable sight. A schoolboy, attired in a leather motoring-coat, and with a face that was covered in blue streaks!

"Hallo, you fellows!" sang out Tich, grinning. "I'm here at last, thank goodness!"

A blank silence was the only reply. All those juniors in the lobby stared at him in amazement. And Tich, who was still in pitiful ignorance of the state of his face,

regarded them in wonder. What was the matter now? He even glanced down at himself, but he could see nothing wrong.

Somebody suddenly started laughing, and the others took it up and yelled at the top of their voices. The one obvious thing in this situation was that Tich didn't know that his face was streaked with blue! That was the excruciatingly humorous thing about it! If he had known he would not have been so astonished at their behaviour.

Nobody could understand why Tich was ignorant of the truth, but it was apparent that somebody had been playing a joke on him—in the dark, perhaps. And he really was so funny that they simply couldn't hold their laughter back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The lobby echoed and re-echoed with the shouts of mirth. Tich's smile vanished, and he glared.

"What the dickens are you howling about?" he shouted wrathfully.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "It's Tich, you chaps!"

"Of course it's Tich!" agreed Fullwood.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The others echoed his laughter, and in the midst of it Biggleswade, of the Sixth, came sailing into the lobby, cane in hand.

"Here I say!" he yelled protestingly. "Cut it out, you young fatheads! What's all this infernal noise?"

"Cave!" yelled somebody.

The juniors, with one accord, bolted. Perhaps they had an idea that a master was coming, but the main reason for their flight was different. They wanted to get away, so that they could finish their laugh in comfort. They could collect the new fellow later, after somebody had gently told him the truth.

Tich Harborough's bewilderment was supreme. Before entering the Ancient House, he had thought that everything was now plain sailing. But it obviously wasn't so. It had occurred to him that these juniors were indulging in a jape of their own. Perhaps they thought it funny to shout with laughter at him, just to fool him.

But this idea was soon scotched—for Biggleswade, of the Sixth, was fairly goggling at him—and it was ridiculous to suppose that this prefect was in the joke.

Tich advanced into the lobby with an impatient stride, and it was just his bad luck that there was no mirror on any of the walls.



CHAPTER 9.

Browne Keeps It Up!

BIGGLESWADE closed his eyes, opened them again, stared, and then gave voice.

"Well I'm hanged!" he ejaculated blankly.

"Look here, what's the game?" asked Tich Harborough, striding up. "Is there anything the matter with me?"

"Eh?" gasped the prefect. "Oh, my goodness! Take it away!"

"Take what away?" roared Tich.

"Does it hurt?" asked Biggleswade, staring, fascinated.

"Does what hurt?" howled Tich.

In all probability, Biggleswade would have made some pointed remark about the junior's blue face as a result of this question, but just at that moment William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, strolled leisurely into the lobby. And William Napoleon Browne halted in his tracks and gazed coolly and calmly at the phenomenon.

Browne was a lanky senior, and he was renowned for his imperturbability. He had never been known to express astonishment; in all circumstances he was calm. Even now, when viewing Tich's blue-streaked face for the first time, and after coming upon it suddenly, he only revealed a kindly interest. He had not turned a hair.

"I say!" burst out Tich, running up to him. "Everybody in this school seems to be dotty! Is there something wrong with me? Can you see anything rummy about my appearance?"

"A stranger within the gates, I perceive," said Browne benevolently, ignoring Tich's question. "What, brother, may be your name?"

"It may be Julius Caesar—but it happens to be Tom Harborough," grunted the schoolboy winger. "I've only just arrived at St. Frank's—"

"Ah, now I have it!" said Browne. "Brother Harborough, let me officially welcome you to this great school. As its most prominent individual, I regard it as a duty to—"

"If it's all the same to you, can't you leave your duties out of the question?" interrupted Tich impatiently. "I want you to tell me if there's anything the matter. As soon as I came in the door, a whole crowd of fellows started yelling at me. They howled like mad."

"Alas!" murmured Browne. "Such crudity!"

"And this—this chap has asked me if it hurts?" went on Tich, glaring at Biggleswade. "What's the joke? I believe you're all in the plot together! I was spoofed by the Fourth, and now everybody else is spoofing me!"

It was this conviction in Tich's mind which prevented him from jumping to the possible truth. Knowing nothing of his blue face, and feeling no pain, he did not really think that there was anything wrong with his appearance. It was just a jape.

"Let me assure you, brother, that both Brother Biggleswade and myself are far above the form of amusement you indicate," said Browne gently. "I trust you are feeling well?"

"Of course I'm feeling well."

"I deplore this bluntness of speech," said Browne, shaking his head. "Let me impress upon you, brother, that I am concerned for your well being. I take it that you are always like this?"

"Like what?" asked Tich thickly.

"Like you are."

"Of course I'm always like it," retorted the exasperated new boy. "How else did you think I should be?"

"Well, of course, we all have our own little peculiarities," agreed Browne. "At the same time——"

"Is there any dirt on my face?"

"As far as I can see, none, brother."

"Then what were all those fellows laughing at?"

"It is indeed a difficult task to understand the laughter of mere juniors," replied Browne kindly. "At times they have even laughed at me, and that, as you can well imagine, is inexplicable."

"I think everything's inexplicable!" said Tich wearily. "Look here, do you mind taking me to the Housemaster?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure—only I regret to say that the Housemaster is absent for the moment," replied Browne, with keen sorrow. "I can well imagine Brother Lee's cat-like leap upon catching sight—Well, no matter!" he added. "Let us not conjure up these painful visions."

"I'm going to the Head, then!" said Tich grimly. "I'm fed-up with all this! Where can I find the headmaster? I've got to report myself to somebody, so I might as well go to him."

Browne looked interested.

"You really wish to be escorted to the Head?" he asked gravely.

"Yes, I do!"

"Exactly as you are?"

"Yes—exactly as I am!" roared Tich. "You can't fool me! I know there's nothing the matter with me! You're just trying to keep up the joke!"

"Steady, young 'un!" said Biggleswade, with a slow grin. "You'd better not go to the Head——"

"Who are we, Brother Biggleswade, to deter this determined youth from his purpose?" interrupted Browne sternly. "If it is his desire to be presented to Brother Stafford, then it shall be my pleasure to act as his escort. He shall have the most distinguished escort in the school—to wit, myself."

"Don't be an idiot, Browne!" ejaculated Biggleswade, startled.

"Come, brother!" murmured Browne, patting Tich kindly on the shoulder.

Before Biggleswade could make any further protest, they had both vanished out into the Triangle. Little did Tich guess that in William Napoleon Browne he had fallen upon the greatest practical joker in the whole of St. Frank's! Browne was celebrated for his "stunts." And Browne rightly held the view, in this case, that if Tich Harborough wanted to be taken to the Head, then that was a good and sufficient reason why he should be taken.

Who was he—Browne—to interfere?

They arrived at the Head's house, after crossing Inner Court, and when the door was opened, in response to Browne's knock, Phipps stood there.

Phipps was the Head's butler—and at certain times of the day he was Archie Glen-thorne's valet. Archie claimed full proprietorship in Phipps, but he was only allowed to stay on at St. Frank's on the condition that he undertook additional duties.

"Thank you, Brother Phipps," said Browne, with a large wink. "We have here a young gentleman who is anxious to interview the headmaster. I trust that Brother Stafford is available?"

Phipps, after one glance at Tich, became immobile.

"I think the headmaster is alone, sir," he said smoothly.

"Excellent!" beamed Browne. "Brother Harborough, the fates are kind to us. Allow me!"

He went to the door of the Head's study, tapped, and waited.

"Come in!" came the Head's deep voice.

Browne opened the door, and stood aside. And Tich Harborough, feeling that he would be free from the japers at last, strode in!



CHAPTER 10.

No Ill Feeling!

R. MALCOLM STAFFORD looked up from his desk as Tich entered, and then he started like a frightened stag. The glasses fell from his nose, and thudded to the desk.

Tich Harborough felt his heart sink. Even the Head himself was affected just the same as the boys! He was staring with goggle eyes—as though he were gazing upon some grotesque phenomenon.

"Good-evening, sir!" said Tich, trying to speak steadily. "I thought I'd better come and report——"

"What—what is the meaning of this?" interrupted Dr. Stafford thunderously.

"Eh?" gasped Tich. "The—the meaning of what, sir?"

"How dare you!" stormed the headmaster.

"But I don't understand!" panted Tich, backing away. "I don't know what you mean, sir."

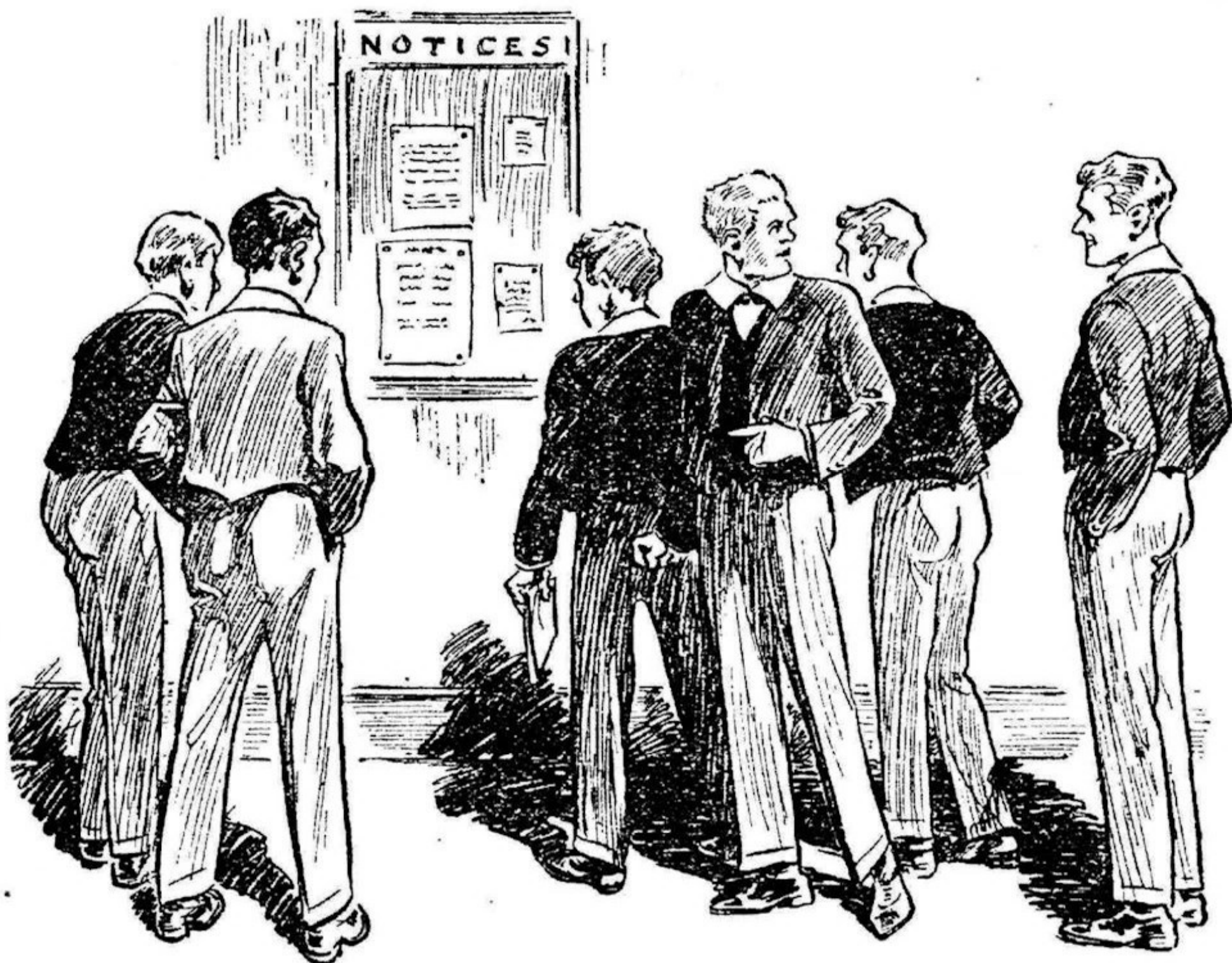
"Are you telling me, young man, that you don't know that your face—— Nonsense!" he added angrily. "It is quite impossible! This is obviously deliberate!"

"My—my face, sir?" babbled Tich.

"Go!" shouted Dr. Stafford, pointing to the door. "Leave this room at once!"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"And come back to me when you are more presentable!" ordered the Head sternly. "You impudent young rascal! How dare you play these tricks upon me?"



Buster Boots and the other Fourth-Formers scanned the list that had just been put on the notice-board by Nipper. It contained the names of the players who had been selected to represent the St. Frank's Junior Eleven against the Blue Crusaders Reserves. And not a single Fourth-Former had been selected! Buster Boots turned to Nipper angrily. "What's the meaning of this?" he asked coldly.

Tich Harborough staggered out of the study somehow. He looked round the hall dazedly, expecting to see Browne. But that lanky young gentleman had discreetly vanished, and was, at the moment, proceeding across Inner Court with long strides, chuckling to himself.

Browne had been ready, at a moment's notice, to enter the Head's study and intercede on Harborough's behalf. But that was not necessary now.

"I believe I've come into a lunatic asylum, instead of a school!" breathed Tich desperately. "Everybody's crazy!"

"Might I inquire, sir, if you are aware of the condition of your face?" asked a quiet, sedate voice.

Tich spun round, and found Phipps near him.

"My face!" he yelled. "Everybody keeps talking about my face! There's nothing wrong with it! Do you think I don't know?"

"Kindly come this way, sir," said Phipps gently.

He led Tich across to the hall mirror, and then stood aside. The unhappy Tich gave one look at his reflection, and then he

reeled back, as though somebody had struck him a blow.

"My only sainted aunt!" he gasped hoarsely.

He beheld a face which was covered with vivid blue streaks. He couldn't even recognise himself. Cheeks, forehead—his entire face was a mass of blue streaks!

"Help!" gurgled Tich. "Oh, why didn't somebody tell me? No wonder they yelled!"

"I suggest, sir, that you repair, without loss of time, to a bath-room," said Phipps imperturbably.

"A bath-room!" ejaculated Tich. "But—but I can't wash this off! I must be ill!"

"I hardly think so, sir," said Phipps. "If I may suggest it, sir, I should hazard a guess that your face, in some way, received a coating of dye. Such tricks are not entirely unknown in this school, sir."

"Dye!" muttered Tich, as a great light flashed upon him.

He remembered that incident at the Moor View School; he remembered tumbling into that cupboard, and splashing his face into a bowl of something. He had taken it to be water—and had never given the incident another thought, from that moment to this.

But now, in a second, he knew the truth. That bowl had contained dye—and he had dipped his face right into it. Frantically he took out his handkerchief. Yes! His handkerchief was deeply stained.

"Oh, my hat!" he breathed. "And—and I went in to the Head like this!"

He fled. He stumbled to the door, tore it open, and rushed out into the night. As he was flying through Big Arch, into the Triangle, a form loomed up, and he recognised the lanky figure of Browne.

"You rotter!" he gasped. "Why didn't you tell me about my face?"

"Alas, brother, you would not permit me to do so," said Browne, with a sigh. "However, there is no need for you to be concerned. The headmaster, I am assured, did not recognise you. If you fail to return, I doubt if there will be any inquiry. My earnest advice is for you to get yourself cleansed at once, and then to forget the entire matter—trusting, at the same time, that the Head's memory will be faulty."

"You're all a lot of spoofers!" said Tich gruffly.

He went back into the Ancient House, and in the lobby he found Handforth & Co., with their overcoats on.

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "We were just coming out to look for you, Tich. We thought you'd got lost, or something! By George! Your face is worse than ever!"

"I know all about my face!" said Tich thickly. "You rotters! Why didn't you tell me? Instead of standing there and yelling, why couldn't you have given me the tip? Where's a bath-room? Be sportsmen, and tell me where I can find a bath-room!"

Handforth & Co. promptly escorted the new boy upstairs, and for nearly a solid half hour Tich scrubbed away at his face. But that dye was tenacious, and after frantic efforts he only succeeded in getting the worst of it off.

By the time he had finished, and had brushed his hair, his face still had a slightly bluish tinge—although he now only looked as though he were a trifle ill.

"That's fine!" said Handforth approvingly.

"Do I really look all right?"

"Of course you do!" said Edward Oswald. "You've got a bit of a bilious look, but that doesn't matter. Anybody's liable to be bilious. If it comes to that, you probably will be bilious later on in the evening!"

"And what makes you think that I shall be bilious?" asked Tich, in surprise.

"Come down to our Common-room—and see!" grinned Handforth.

When Tich Harborough finally presented himself in the Junior Common-room of the Ancient House he was accorded the long-delayed "royal welcome." Nearly the entire Remove was present, including Reggie Pitt and his merry men from the West House. The Common-room was filled with heavily-laden tables. Every preparation had been made for a huge feast.

"But why all this?" asked Tich, in wonder.

"In your honour, old man," replied Nipper. "As captain of the Remove, it is my pleasant duty to welcome you into St. Frank's. I had a speech all ready, but there's been such a lot of delay that I've forgotten it."

"Thank goodness!" said Handforth feelingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's all rot!" protested the schoolboy Crusader. "I—I mean, all this fuss! You don't always do this when a new chap arrives, do you?"

"Rather not!" said Nipper, grinning. "The average new chap thinks himself very lucky if he is invited into somebody's study for a snack, during his first week."

"Then why all this special treatment for me?" demanded Tich. "I appreciate it, of course, but I don't see why you should treat me differently from any other new kid."

Nipper chuckled.

"You're too modest, Harborough, old man!" he replied. "You're a very special sort of new chap. The Remove is honoured to have you in its midst. The Blue Crusaders have come to Bannington, and you are one of the regular players for the Blues. So you can bet your boots that we're glad to have you with us!"

"Rather!"

"Good old Tich!"

"Three cheers for the Blue Crusaders!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheers were long and loud. Tich Harborough felt that there were, after all, many compensations in this life.



CHAPTER 11.

Feasting the New Fellow!

IN the midst of all the cheering and commotion, a plaintive voice made itself heard.

"I say!" came the protest. "Aren't we ever going to start the grub, you chaps? I'm feeling so empty that when I touch my waistcoat I ring hollow!"

"Good old Fatty!" chuckled Nipper. "All right, my son. Go ahead! The feast is now officially open."

Fatty Little, of the West House, lost no time in getting to work.

"Is he your Junior goalie?" asked Tich, with a grin.

"Who? Fatty Little?" said Handforth, with a glare. "You silly ass! I'm the Junior goalie!"

"Sorry!" said Tich. "But your own pet Fatty reminds me of the Crusaders'."

"Fatty Fowkes is an exception," said Nipper. "He may be big, but he's as nimble as a kitten. Rather a pity he isn't here to-night," he added dryly. "He would soon make some of this grub fly."

"I'd better go pretty easy on it, if you don't mind," said Tich, looking at the rich foodstuffs with a wary eye. "Old Piecombe is hot on grub, you know. He'll have a fit if he finds out that I've been eating these things."

"Why let him find out?" asked Reggie Pitt blandly.

"By all that I can hear, old Piecombe is a bit of a food crank," said Nipper. "And you mustn't take too much notice of food cranks. They mean well, but good grub never hurts anybody."

So Tich Harborough threw his scruples to the winds, and entered wholeheartedly into the feed. He did not fail to recognise the honour that was being paid him. He was more pleased than ever that he had persuaded his father to send him to this great school.

During the feast he entertained his hosts by giving an account of his adventures. He did not spare himself, either. He told the whole story, and there were many chuckles when the Remove heard of the part that the Moor View girls had played in the night's doings.

"They're a lot of lads—those girls!" said Handforth, grinning. "It's a jolly good thing for you, Tich, that Miss Broome came along when she did. If those girls had got you into their Common-room, they would have ragged you unmercifully."

Tich heaved a sigh.

"I'd rather be shoved into a den of lions!" he said feelingly. "No disrespect to the ladies—but I'm frightened of 'em. A fellow feels so—so helpless!"

"Yes, you had a lucky escape," said Nipper.

"By the way, who's that exceptionally pretty girl?" asked Tich, with a careless air.

"Irene Manners!" replied Handforth promptly.

"Mary Summers!" said Nipper.

"Doris Berkeley!" declared Reggie Pitt.

"Reggie's sister, Winnie!" vowed Fullwood.

They all spoke at once, and there was a general yell of laughter.

"They're all pretty, I know!" grinned Tich. "But there's a fair one—as pretty as a picture."

"Irene!" insisted Handforth. "And look here, Tich, my lad! Irene is my special chum—"

"Is Irene the one with fluffy hair?"

"Well, no—"

"You're safe, Handy!" grinned Nipper. "He means Sylvia Glenn."

"Oh, Sylvia Glenn!" said Handforth carelessly. "You don't call her pretty, do you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought she was rather ripping," confessed Tich. "I shall have to get some of you chaps to take me along one day, and introduce me properly."

The juniors duly promised that they would undertake this duty, and then the conversa-

tion changed to Lionel Corcoran and his doings.

"We've got to face the facts, you chaps!" said Nipper, becoming serious. "Those Fourth-Formers worked off a good jape on the new chap this evening. They'll be crowing all over the school to-morrow. And we can't blame them, can we? They've scored."

"They'd better not crow in my hearing," said Handforth darkly.

"The Fourth is awakening from its long slumber," continued Nipper. "Corcoran seems to have imbued the whole Form with a new spirit."

"Good luck to the Fourth!" said Reggie Pitt heartily.

"Hear, hear!" nodded Nipper. "Nothing better could have happened. It's high time that we had some real rivalry in the Junior School. But we mustn't allow the Fourth to get too active," he added. "Corcoran is a fine chap, and we all like him. It's his ambition to make the Fourth the cock Form in the Junior School. Are we going to let him succeed?"

"Never!" roared the Remove.

"Then it's up to us to avenge this jape that the Fourth has perpetrated this evening," said Nipper. "We've got to make Corcoran and his merry men understand that they're the underdogs."

Handforth leapt to his feet.

"I know!" he shouted excitedly. "Let's make a raid—now! Let's buzz into the East House, wipe up all those fatheads, and—"

"There's no need to start a riot, Handy," interrupted Nipper gently. "A jape is a jape—but you seem to think that a free fight is the best thing to be done."

"There's nothing like a good old scrap!" declared Handforth.

"We're not going to whack the Fourth like that!" declared Nipper. "We're going to do it by well-thought-out methods. It's only Monday evening, and we've got the whole week before us."

"The whole week!" echoed Handforth, aghast. "Do you mean to say that we might not jape the Fourth until the end of the week?"

"It's quite likely," said Nipper. "It all depends upon how things go. We don't want to do anything precipitate. War has been declared, and victory will come to the better general. In my opinion, this fight is going to be won by strategy."

Handforth, naturally, was bitterly against the proposal. He was a fellow of action, and he wanted to rush out then and there and do something drastic. But the Remove loyally supported Nipper, and Handforth was squashed.

"It's always the same!" he confided grumpily to Church and McClure, after they had returned to Study D. "Whenever I make a suggestion, the chaps jump on me! By George! If I was the skipper of this Form—"

"It's a shame!" said Church stoutly.

"Eh? What's a shame?"

"Why, the way the fellows shut you up as soon as you open your mouth."

"Oh, do they?" said Handforth, bristling. "I'd like to see the fellow who could shut me up!"

"So should I!" murmured McClure.

Handforth didn't hear that remark, and Church waved his hand.

"Well, we won't quibble," he said soothingly. "Perhaps the fellows don't shut you up, Handy. They squash you."

"They do what?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

"They squash you whenever you make a suggestion——"

"Why, you silly, hulking, fatheaded ass!" roared Handforth. "Are you standing there, Walter Church, and telling me that the fellows squash me?"

"But you just said it yourself!" gasped Church.

"Eh?"

"You just said——"

"Oh, rot!" snorted Handforth, turning red. "If the Remove thinks that it can squash me, the Remove had better think again. Everybody knows that the Fourth is going to do some big things. Those fatheads have already started. Old Corky is a giddy live wire, and there'll be no holding him once he gets fairly on the warpath. Why wait until he scores another victory? My policy is to attack, and keep on attacking!"

And he glared at Church and McClure as though he would at the slightest provocation attack them. But they were not in a mood for an argument, and they agreed wholeheartedly with their leader's views. In fact, they agreed so much that after about five minutes Handforth had nothing further to argue about, and his eloquence gradually petered out, like the gas when the meter needs a shilling in the slot.



CHAPTER 12.

Nipper's Brainy Idea!

NEXT day the Hon. Tom Silward Harborough lost no time in shaking down into his new surroundings.

He found his companions of the Remove very congenial, and he liked St. Frank's generally. He was compelled, however, to do most of his admiration indoors, for it was a perfectly wretched day.

It was pouring with rain when the rising-bell rang, and it was still pouring with rain after morning lessons. The wind was howling, and the countryside was bleak and cheerless.

"This isn't going to do Little Side much good!" said Handforth glumly, as he stood looking out of the Common-room window.

"Just what I was thinking!" said Nipper. "We've got a match on Saturday afternoon against the River House crowd. I expect it'll have to be postponed."

"Why?" asked Tommy Watson.

"If this rain goes on there's bound to be a general order prohibiting the use of the playing-fields," said Nipper, with a frown. "It always happens. And I daresay the beaks are right. A good ground can be ruined if it's played on when it's in a boggy state."

Handforth grunted.

"I don't believe in these newfangled notions!" he said. "There never used to be any rules like that. Anybody might think the giddy football field was a bowling-green!"

"Well, it's no good kicking, Handy," said Nipper. "And if the game's off, it's off."

"What about the Bannington Town ground?" asked Tich Harborough.

"The which?"

"The Bannington Town ground."

"I suppose you mean the Blue Crusaders' ground?" said Handforth severely.

"Sorry!" grinned Tich. "But I thought perhaps you knew it better by the old name."

"The Blue Crusaders' ground is one of the best in the country!" said Handforth firmly. "It never gets flooded, and the turf is always firm."

"Yet it's quite near the river," said Tich.

"That doesn't make any difference," replied Handforth. "The high terracing runs all along by the river bank, and it acts like a big dam. It doesn't matter how much the river gets flooded, the ground is always O.K."

"Well, that's one consolation, anyhow," said Tich with relief. "When I saw the river so near I was a bit windy. You get a few floods down this way, don't you?"

"Now and again," replied Nipper. "By the look of things, we shall have one this week. The Stowe soon overflows its banks, but as a rule the floods aren't serious. Only the marshes and meadows, you know."

At this moment Lionel Corcoran walked coolly in.

"On him!" yelled Handforth. "Down with the Fourth!"

"Pax!" said Corcoran. "It's no good, Handy; I'm crossing my fingers!"

"Blow your fingers!"

"That won't do any good, they'll still be crossed."

Lionel walked leisurely into the middle of the Common-room and looked round him with a cheery smile.

"Well, I've heard a bit of news about the Blue Crusaders," he said. "Considering that I'm the owner of the club, it's not very surprising. But I must say that old Piecan has got a weird and wonderful brain."

"What's he done now?" asked Tich with interest. "There's never any telling with old Piecan. He's a caution!"

"He's hired a houseboat!" said Corcoran.

"What!" yelled the juniors.

"Fact!" nodded Lionel. "I was knocked sideways when I heard about it, over the 'phone. This morning, in the pouring rain, he carted all the players off to the houseboat and dumped them on board. It seems to be a rotten old hooker, because when Fatty Fowkes jumped on board he went clean through the planking and fell into one of the cabins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The planking needn't necessarily have been rotten," said Nipper.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's his idea?" asked Handforth, staring. "What does he want to put all the players on to a houseboat for?"

"He's going to keep them there; it's their new home!" replied Corcoran. "One of Piecan's brilliant wheezes, you know. The Spartan life. I've a pretty shrewd idea, too, that he wants to keep all the boys under his eye."

"He's mad!" grunted Tich. "He was bad enough when we were up at Browton. I thought perhaps he'd get better down here, but he seems to be worse."

"He wouldn't let the players go into lodgings, and he didn't tell them a word until this morning," continued Corcoran, with a chuckle. "And if that isn't like our gentle Ulysses, what is, Tich? So they're all aboard the Skylark, or whatever the houseboat is called, and I should imagine they're having a pretty damp time of it."

Handforth grunted expressively.

"The Blue Crusaders Club belongs to you, doesn't it, Corcoran?" he asked.

"You know it does," said Lionel. "Why ask?"

"And old Piecombe is employed by you as manager?"

"Yes."

"Then what's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth. "Why the dickens do you allow the man to carry on like this? Why don't you give him the sack?"

Lionel shook his head.

"Old Piecan may have a few weird ideas, but he's a jolly good football manager," he replied. "He keeps the players up to the mark, too. Some of his training wheezes are wild and woolly, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The Blues are doing better this season than they've ever done before. So why change the manager?"

And even Handforth couldn't argue the point.

"No," went on Corcoran. "Piecombe leads the boys a dance, but they like him all the same. I think he's only got this houseboat for a few weeks. We've rented a big old mansion, you know, just near the ground. We're turning it into a huge clubhouse, a kind of headquarters. There'll be accommodation for all the players, with

bed-rooms club-rooms, and everything. But it won't be ready until near Christmas. So I expect old Piecan thought that this houseboat would do in the meantime."

"What about going over to-morrow to have a look at them?" suggested Handforth. "It'll be a half-holiday, and I don't suppose we shall be able to use Little Side."

"Yes, rather!" said the others.

"Talking about Little Side puts an idea into my head," said Nipper thoughtfully. "If this rain keeps on we shan't be able to have that match against the River House chaps. So that leaves us with Saturday vacant. The Blues are playing away this week-end, aren't they, Corky?"

"They're going over to Devon, to play the Wanderers."

"The return match, eh?" said Nipper. "Well, what about the reserves? Have they got a match fixed up for this end?"

Corky looked rather troubled.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "You see, the reserve fixtures were rather messed up when the club moved down from Browton. They generally played local teams; in the Browton combination, and the smaller leagues. Now they've come down here they can't keep these fixtures."

"But there are plenty of local leagues round about Bannington," said Handforth.

"I know," agreed Corcoran. "And old Piecombe is fixing up some matches. But I rather think that next Saturday is vacant."

"That's a pity!" said Tich. "The reserves ought to have a game of some kind, if only to keep up the local interest. It'll be rotten to shut the ground altogether."

"That's what I told Piecan—but he says it's no good having a match unless it's a good one," replied Lionel. "He's the manager, and I allow him a free hand in these things. He knows best. And I believe he's right, too."

"A good one, eh?" said Nipper keenly. "Then it's settled, my sons."

"Settled?" repeated Corky. "How?"

"The St. Frank's Junior Eleven will go over to Bannington and play the Blue Crusaders Reserves!" replied Nipper coolly. "How's that?"

There was an immediate buzz, and Lionel Corcoran opened his eyes wider.

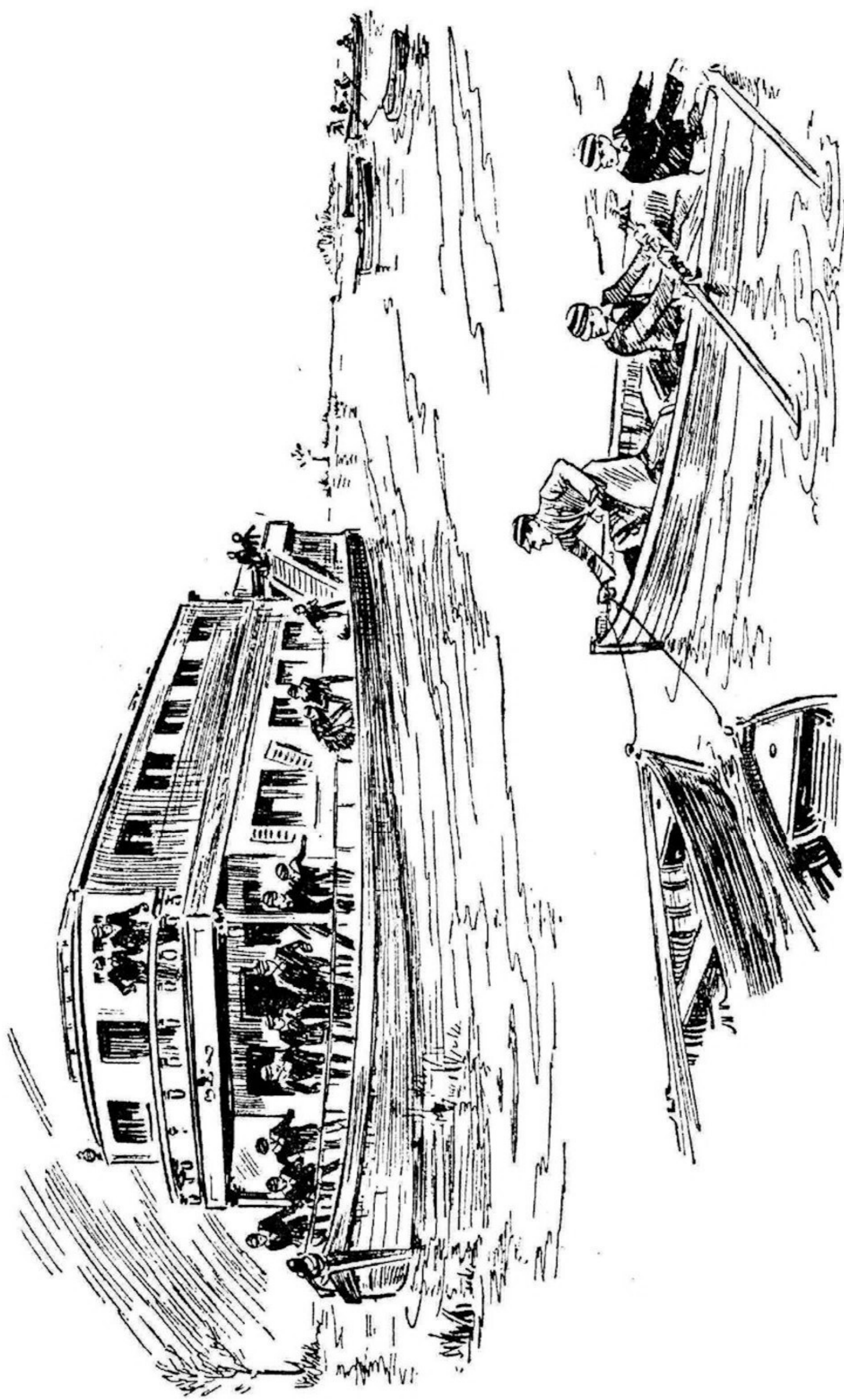
"A game between you fellows and the Blues' Reserves, eh?" he said breathlessly. "By Jingo! That's not an idea, Nipper—it's a brainwave!"

"I was just going to suggest the same thing!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think Mr. Piecombe will agree?" asked Nipper.

"Leave it until to-morrow afternoon!" replied Corcoran confidently. "If Piecan raises any objections, I'll have a word with him on the quiet. My sons, you can look upon this fixture as a cert."



The Fourth-Formers on the houseboat uttered gasps of consternation as they realised the Removites' intentions. For the Removites, instead of trying to capture the houseboat, merely towed away all the rowing boats. In other words, the Fourth-Formers were now marooned on the houseboat! "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites in triumph.



CHAPTER 13.

Tough on the Fourth!

MR. ULYSSES PIECOMBE was rather dubious when the proposition was put before him on the afternoon of the next day. At first he didn't want to agree, but in the end, after Lionel had spoken to him for a bit, he gave way.

But he mainly did so, not because of Lionel Corcoran's arguments, but because of the behaviour of Curly Hankin.

This latter gentleman was the centre-half of the Reserves—a thick-set, surly-looking individual. The St. Frank's fellows hadn't seen much of him until that afternoon—and now they came to the conclusion that he was a bit of a bad egg.

Curly Hankin yelled with derisive laughter at the idea of the Blues' Reserves playing against a schoolboy team—and a junior schoolboy team at that. In fact, Curly not only swore that he wouldn't play, if any such match was arranged, but he even had a fight with Handforth, and Mr. Piecombe only just arrived in time to stop it, before it got serious.*

The disturbance was patched up, after a style, and when the St. Frank's fellows went away they were feeling more or less satisfied. The houseboat that Mr. Piecombe had acquired was not so bad after all—although Fatty Fowkes and his fellow players were not particularly enthusiastic about it.

It seemed that Curly Hankin had two companions in the Reserves—fellows named Brewer and Parr. They were his own particular pals, and these three always hung together. Handforth was rather pessimistic, later that day, when they were discussing the coming match round the fire in the Ancient House Common-room.

"There'll be some trouble with that rotter Hankin!" he declared darkly. "I shall be in goal, so he can't get at me."

"It's a jolly good thing you will be in goal, too, Handy!" said Nipper. "If you were in the field, and you got anywhere near Hankin, the pair of you would be scrapping in next to no time. But with you in goal, and Hankin playing half-back, there's not much chance of your coming into contact."

"Yes, but he'll go for the other chaps!" said Handforth. "I'm warning you, straight from the shoulder, that you'd better go easy. Hankin may be a Blue Crusader, but he's a bad lot!"

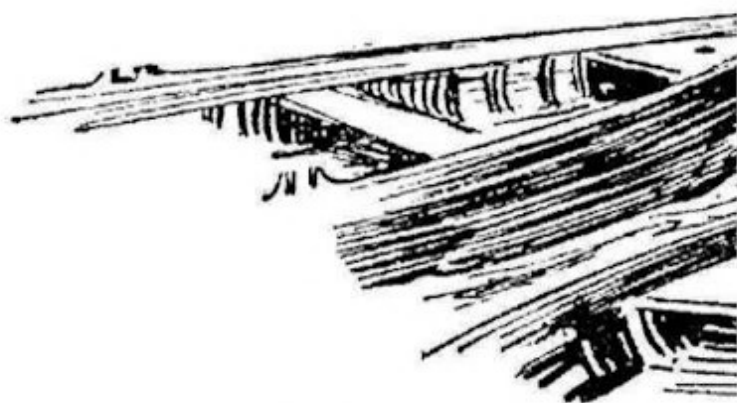
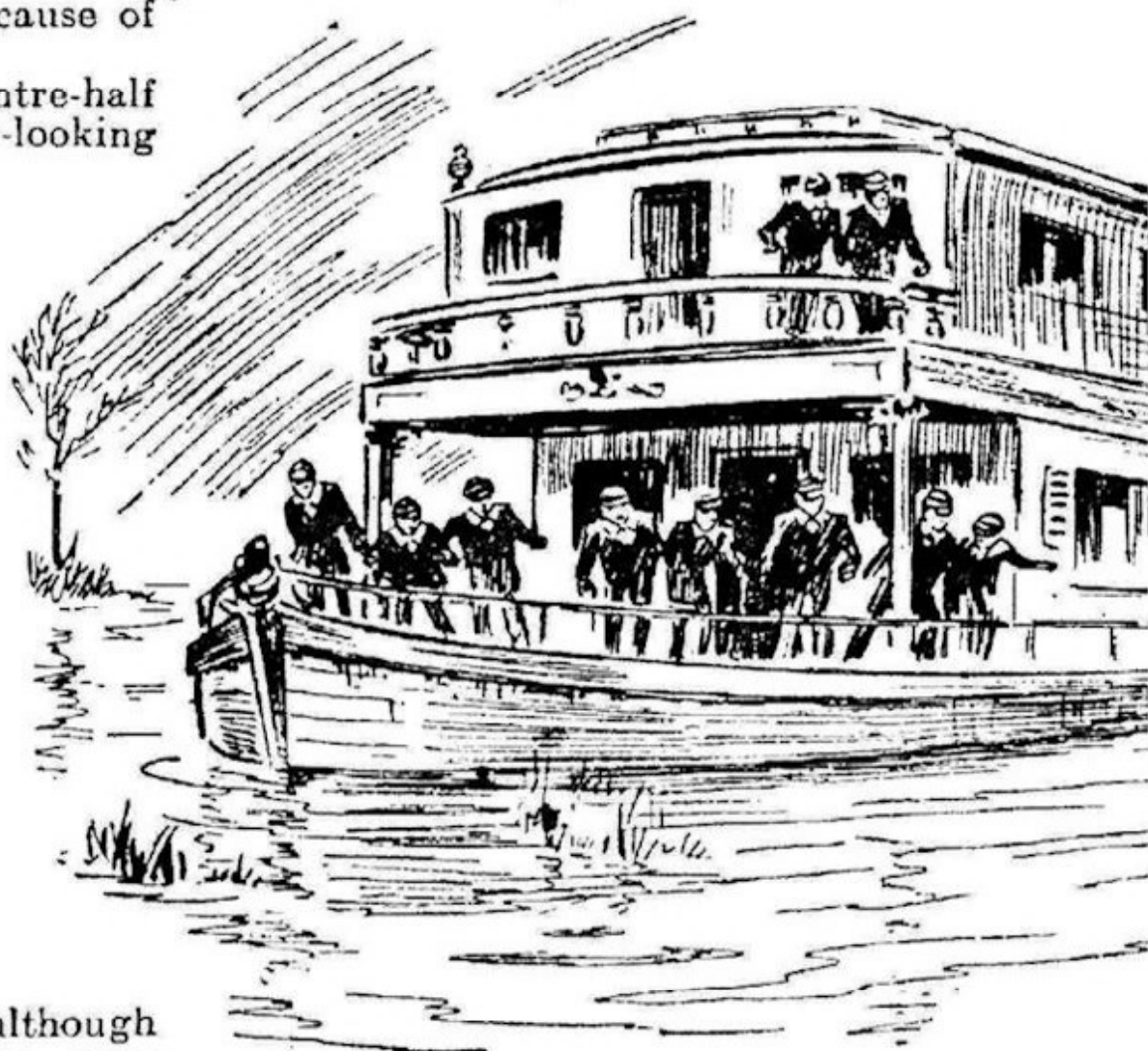
"Oh, he may be all right on the field," said Travers. "Even I'm all right on the

field, you know—and yet lots of people look upon me as a bad lot."

Tich Harborough was looking concerned. "Unfortunately, Curly Hankin is a rotter," he said slowly. "But he's a jolly fine footballer, and Brewer and Parr are keen men, too. I suppose that's why Piecombe keeps them on. But they're not above a bit of dirty play now and again; and after that row this afternoon Hankin will have his knife into you fellows."

"Well, let's change the subject," said Handforth briskly. "What about a jape on the Fourth this evening?"

"We've been too busy with football to



The Fourth-Formers on the houseboat uttered a Removite, instead of trying to capture the houseboat. The Fourth-Formers were now marooned on the

think out any japes, Handy," said Nipper. "And it's too late in the evening now."

"It's never too late!" retorted Handforth. "Now I suggest that we get up two parties, and sneak into the Modern House and the East House. We'll go upstairs and shove a lot of golden syrup in their beds!"

"And supposing we're collared in the middle of this interesting enterprise?" asked Nipper.

*These incidents are fully described in this week's Blue Crusader story in "The Boys' Realm."

"We mustn't get collared, that's all."

"It's a bit too crude, Handy, dear old fellow," said Travers, shaking his head. "And golden syrup, when all is said and done, is a pretty expensive item. Besides, it's made to eat."

Handforth had all sorts of other wild and woolly ideas, but they were all squashed. As a matter of fact, everybody was much too interested in football to bother about japes.

It rained practically all day Thursday and Friday, and everybody was in the dumps. The wretched weather was getting on the juniors' nerves. They could hardly move out of doors, and by this time Little Side was definitely banned. The playing-fields were just like one vast bog.

There were floods in the Stowe valley, too. The river had swollen a good deal, and had overflowed its banks in many places. By the Friday night, when the weather set in wild and rough, there was a good deal of alarm round the countryside. The river had risen



as they realised the Removites' intentions. For the towed away all the rowing boats. In other words, the "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites in triumph.

very considerably, and large tracts of meadowland were inundated.

But at the Stronghold—as the Blue Crusaders' new ground was christened—there was no worry. Mr. Ulysses Piecombe was gratified by the wonderful security of the ground. The draining of the playing pitch was so excellent that even the turf was still in a good condition.

On the Friday evening there was a bit of a sensation in the Junior School at St.

Frank's. Nipper had posted his list of players on the notice board, and, although the Remove was very pleased, the Fourth waxed highly indignant.

Buster Boots and Bob Christine and a few other Fourth-Formers came over and scanned the notice with angry eyes.

"What's the meaning of this Nipper?" asked Boots coldly, grabbing hold of Nipper's shoulder. "Where's my name?"

"It isn't there," replied Nipper.

"I can see that, ass!" snorted Boots. "Why isn't it here?"

"Because there's a better player in the Remove," said Nipper quietly. "The same applies to you, Bob, old man," he added, turning to Christine. "I'm sorry—but there can't be any favouritism in selecting a footer team. You know as well as I do that you haven't been quite up to the mark just lately."

Bob Christine glared.

"How can you expect me to be up to the mark if you don't play me in any big game?" he asked tartly. "Why can't you put me in the forward line, instead of Gresham?"

"Because Gresham is a better player in that position."

"Rats!" yelled Talmadge. "It's all a plot!"

"Of course it is!" said Harry Oldfield angrily. "Nipper is the Junior skipper, and just because there's this warfare between the Remove and the Fourth, Nipper is giving the Fourth the cold shoulder!"

Nipper coloured.

"You don't mean that, Oldfield!" he said. "I'm not the sort of fellow to do a thing like that."

"Then what's the meaning of it?" shouted Oldfield. "Why are all our men left out?"

"I have already explained that —"

"That's no explanation at all!" broke in Clapson gruffly. "The fact remains that there isn't a single Fourth-Former in the Junior Eleven! That list won't do, Nipper!"

"Won't it?" said Nipper, firing up. "I'm skipper—and it's my list! What's more, it stands!"

"Oh, does it!" roared Boots. "We'll see about that! There'll be a first-class row over this rotten business!"

And then Lionel Corcoran appeared. Armstrong had gone flying across the Triangle, in the wind and rain, to fetch him, and Armstrong had been very excited and indignant. He was looking more subdued now.

"What's the trouble here?" asked Corcoran.

"A slight spot of bother, laddie," said Archie Glenthorne. "I can't quite make head or tail of the dashed affair, but it seems that there's a spot of bother."

Buster Boots grabbed at Corcoran's arm.

"Look here, Corky—I'm glad you've come!" he said tensely. "Look at that list!"

It's Nipper's selection for the game tomorrow against the Crusaders Reserves!"

Lionel Corcoran inspected the list with interest.

"There's nothing wrong with this!" he said at length.

"Nun—nothing wrong with it!" babbled Oldfield.

"It's a good list!" nodded Corcoran. "What's the matter with it?"

"But there isn't a single one of our chaps down!" ejaculated Bob Christine. "Even Boots isn't included!"

"That's neither here nor there!" said the owner of the Blue Crusaders. "Nipper is skipper, and it's his job to play the best men available. Personally, I consider this team is very brainily chosen."

"Thanks, Corky!" said Nipper quietly.

"Rats!" replied Lionel. "No need to thank me. The fact of the matter is, you know your job—and you're doing it thoroughly. A really good football captain doesn't care a toss about public opinion. If he's got any strength at all, he selects his best men, and he doesn't care a hang what anybody says."

"And you're in the Fourth!" said Boots bitterly. "I'm surprised at you, Corcoran! You're nothing but a traitor!"

all along the line. The Fourth doesn't *deserve* to be represented."

"What?" shouted many of the Fourth-Formers.

"You're all wonky!" said Corky. "I haven't been at St. Frank's long, but I've seen a bit of football while I've been here. And the Remove can wipe us up any day. Why, we daren't even play a match against the Remove! We should be the laughing-stock of St. Frank's if we did!"

The Fourth-Formers were silent.

"So why grumble when Nipper does his job properly, and selects his best available team?" went on Corcoran. "Of course, it's going to be altered. It's *got* to be altered. And the only way is for the Fourth to practise—and practise—and practise—until it can whack the Remove."

"In the sweet by-and-bye!" said Handforth promptly.

"It all depends," replied Corcoran. "If the Fourth bucks up, and gets to work in earnest, it'll make big strides. There are plenty of hefty chaps in the Fourth—plenty of good players, too. They only need polishing up a bit."

This was literally true, and before long the Fourth-Formers realised, with something of a shock, that Corcoran was right. And they ceased to grumble at Nipper's team. They became imbued with the desire to improve their own form.

"But what's the good?" said Boots, with disgust. "We can't do any practising now—Little Side is too boggy!"

"Well, it won't be like this for long," smiled Corcoran. "The season has only just got fairly going."

Saturday morning, much to everybody's relief, the weather turned out better. The rain had stopped, and the wind had dropped a bit. There were some big floods along the banks of the Stowe, however, and St. Frank's had a good deal to talk about that morning.

It appeared that a crowd of Removites had been up in the early hours—before daylight—attracted by flares from the flooded meadows.

Rushing to the rescue, they had found the Blue Crusaders' houseboat—with all the Blues aboard! It had got adrift during the night, had swept down the river, and had then been caught in an eddy until it grounded. And there the Blues were stuck—marooned.

It was a pretty serious affair, too—because the famous team, under the care of Mr. Piecombe, had arranged to travel to Devonshire by the early morning train from Bannington. Only in the nick of time had the Removites got the Crusaders off; and then they had rushed them to Bellton Station, and had actually stopped the express, so that the Blues could get on board.*

There was a good deal of satisfaction among the juniors after breakfast, while the story was being discussed.

CHAPTER 14.

A Chance for the Remove!



L

IONEL CORCORAN grinned; he wasn't in the least offended.

"You don't mean that, Boots, old man!"

he said.

"No, I know I don't!" grunted Boots. "All the same, it's a bit thick, the way you're talking!"

"Listen to me, all you Fourth-Formers!" said Corcoran, becoming serious. "I'm not boasting when I say that I'm one of the leaders of the Fourth. I'd like our players to be represented equally in the Junior Eleven. That's as things should be. And in a game of this sort, when the St. Frank's team is playing against the Reserves of my club, I'm more than ever eager for the Fourth to be fully represented. But I'm with Nipper

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*These incidents are fully described in this week's Blue Crusader story in "The Boys' Realm."

"The main thing is, the team has been able to get to Devonshire," said Lionel Corcoran. "It would have been pretty rotten if they had really got stranded."

"It's all Piecombe's fault!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "He shouldn't put all the players on that silly houseboat!"

"It's a funny thing how it got adrift!" said Corcoran, frowning. "The moorings seemed strong enough to me. I'm blessed if I can understand it."

"What's the team going to do when it gets back?" asked Boots. "That houseboat is aground."

"Yes, and when the flood goes down it'll be in a pretty hopeless position," said Bob Christine. "It'll be left high and dry on the meadows, and then they'll never be able to get it back to the river."

This remark set Corcoran thinking, and later on he gathered the Fourth-Formers round him, and put a proposition to them.

"Are you fellows willing to help my club?" he asked, as a beginning.

"Rather!"

"Just say the word, Corky!"

"Hear, hear!"

Corcoran smiled as he heard the chorus.

"Well, look here, I want you all to come along with me to that houseboat—directly after lessons," he said. "My idea is to get it afloat again, and then tow it back to Bannington, so that it is at its proper moorings when the Blues come back from Devon."

"Good idea!"

"We're game, Corky!"

"Rather!"

"Trust the Fourth!"

"If we can't manage to tow it all the way back to Bannington, we can at least moor it safely," continued Corcoran. "But I dare say we shall be able to do the trick if we take enough boats, and if we use our strength. We shall be in Bannington then, in good time to see the match between the Remove and the Blues' Reserves."

"I'm glad you said the Remove!" grunted Boots. "It's not the Junior Eleven at all! It's the Remove Eleven."

"Well, that's our fault," said Corcoran coolly. "But we're not going to start that argument again, are we?"

"No," said Buster. "At the same time, it makes me a bit wild when I think about it."

"The remedy is in our hands, old man," replied Lionel quietly.

This little arrangement had been made during the interval, and after morning lessons were over the story had got about. The Remove fellows were talking about it, and it wasn't long before Nipper called a full meeting of the Form.

They gathered together in the Common-room of the Ancient House, Reggie Pitt bringing all his men over. Of course, there

were one or two other fellows who did not turn up—Claude Gore-Pearce, and Gulliver and Beil, for example, but cads of this kind did not count. Tich Harborough was also absent, because he had gone with the Blues to Devon.

"Look here, my sons!" said Nipper keenly. "You've heard about the Fourth, haven't you? You've heard that they're going to refloat the houseboat, and tow it back to Bannington?"

"What about it?" asked Handforth. "You're not going to suggest that we should give them a hand, are you?"

"Well, no——"

"Because that's my idea!" said Handforth triumphantly. "It's like Corcoran's cheek to leave the Remove out of it! We're just as much interested in the Crusaders as the Fourth is!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on!" said Nipper, as some of the juniors began to support Handforth. "I'm going to suggest a better idea than that."

"Let's hear it!" said Handforth challengingly.

They did hear it, and, although they were a bit startled at first, they soon began to grin. Then their grins changed to chuckles, and finally the chuckles became roars of laughter.

"My only hat!" gurgled Fullwood. "This'll be one up against the Fourth, won't it?"

"It'll be a sort of revenge for what they did to Tich Harborough on Monday evening!" said Nipper cheerfully. "We'll get own back to-day, my sons!"

Even Handforth was reluctantly compelled to admit that the wheeze was a top-holer.

"Well, I'm glad that you're making a move against the Fourth at last!" he said tartly. "It's about time! You've allowed the whole week to go by!"

"It's always better, Handy, to await a good opportunity," said Nipper. "It's no good rushing into a thing blindly—or rashly. This afternoon, directly after dinner, we're going to give the Fourth the shock of its life——"

At that moment Harry Gresham came hurrying in.

"I say!" he ejaculated excitedly. "All those Fourth Form chaps have gone off! They've cleared away to the river—every one of them, to a man!"

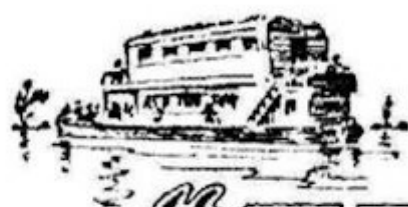
"By George!" roared Handforth. "Then we're too late!"

"No, we're not!" said Nipper briskly. "We thought they wouldn't go off until after dinner—but this is all the better! This will be the cream of the jape! Come on, Remove! We've got to get on the warpath!"

And the Remove, with considerable gusto, went surging out into the open!

CHAPTER 15.

Putting it Across the Fourth!



"HERE we are!" said Corcoran, as he shipped his oars.

There were quite a number of boats out over the flooded meadows. In every direction the floods extended far and wide. The Stowe itself could hardly be seen. Only the swirling current, sweeping odds and ends of debris along, marked the true course of the stream. Everywhere else there were scenes of desolation.

Yet the flood was not extensive. No real damage had been done yet—for it was quite a commonplace thing for the marshes and meadows to be inundated. And there, stuck in the middle of a wide patch, was a big, towering structure. It was the Blue Crusaders' houseboat.

It was an exceptionally large craft of its type, and, by the look of it, it had been allowed to go to rack and ruin for many years. Yet it was a sturdy craft, and it was

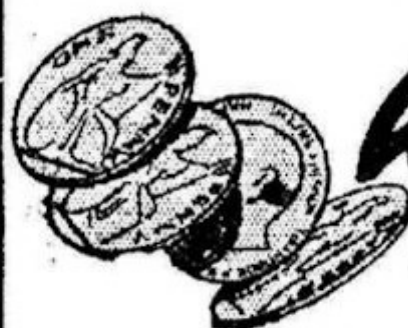
providing the Blue Crusaders with an excellent temporary home. They had the advantage, at least, of all being under one roof. Yet it had to be confessed that such a dwelling had its disadvantages, when it was liable to wander two or three miles during the night.

"I expect old Piecan is worrying about this houseboat, isn't he?" asked Boots. "He'll be jolly pleased to-morrow when he finds that the old tub is back at its proper moorings, near the Stronghold."

"All the Blues will be pleased," said Corcoran. "I thought about getting a firm of contractors to do the job, but why go to that expense when I can get free labour?" he added, with a grin.

"How are we going to start?" sang out Bob Christine, from another boat.

"Well, first of all, a few of us will get on board," replied Corcoran. "We've brought plenty of tow-ropes, and we'll tie these securely to the houseboat, and then we'll do some concentrated tugging. She's only just lightly aground, and I think she ought to shift off pretty easily. After that we'll take her along by easy stages, and get her back into the main stream."

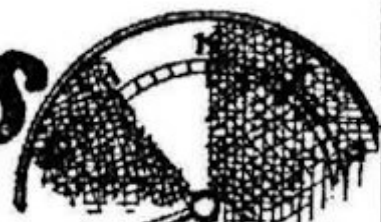


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"The current is pretty strong!" said Boots dubiously. "We shan't be able to hold her."

"Well, we can have a shot at it—and if we fail we'll anchor her, and then I'll get a powerful motor-boat to come along and do the towing," said Corcoran. "But I thought it would be rather good if the Fourth could do the job on its own."

"Yes, rather!" said Oldfield. "Let's have a shot at it!"

Before long everybody was busy. Corcoran, with several helpers, got on board, and all the other boats, crowded with Fourth-Formers, floated round the towering houseboat. She was all superstructure—all decks and deck-houses.

"I say, Corcoran!" ejaculated Buster Boots suddenly, as he stood on the deck. "Just a minute! Look at all these Remove chaps coming down!"

"Eh?" said Corky. "By Jove! It doesn't look any too healthy!"

Within a minute all the Fourth-Formers were shouting, and there was a good deal of excitement.

Unexpectedly, a number of boats had appeared, and they were bearing down upon the stranded houseboat. They were all filled with Remove fellows, and Nipper was in the leading craft.

"Down with the Fourth!" came a sudden united yell.

"On the ball, Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Let's wipe 'em up!"

The approaching boats gained speed, the oars flashing in and out of the murky water.

"It's an attack!" gasped Bob Christine. "My only aunt! Fancy these Remove fellows choosing a time like this!"

Corcoran made up his mind quickly.

"There's only one thing to be done!" he sang out. "Everybody come on board!"

"But what's the good of that?" yelled Christine.

"These Remove chaps are going to seize the houseboat!" roared Corcoran. "That's their wheeze! But they'll never be able to take it if we get on board, and hold them off. We won't let any of them board us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Look lively, there!"

The boats came bumping alongside, and all the occupants scrambled on board and prepared for action. In less than three minutes the entire Fourth Form was gathered round the decks of the stranded craft, and the juniors were relieved and triumphant.

"Well, this will do 'em in the eye!" said Bob Christine breathlessly. "If they try to board us, we'll hold them off with these oars!"

The air became filled with yells.

"Remove for ever!"

"Down with the Fourth!"

"Rats!" bawled the Fourth. "You're dished! You can't do anything!"

By now the Remove boats were quite close, and they swept round, coming on until they were practically alongside the houseboat.

But, curiously enough, the Remove seemed to have no idea of attack.

Nipper and his merry men were not even looking at the houseboat; they were concentrating their attentions upon the rowing boats that were dotted round. In the hurry, hardly any of them had been secured, and they were just floating idly on the still waters of the flood.

"Now!" roared Nipper. "Don't make any mistake about it, you fellows! Grab every one of them!"

"Why not get on board and have a scrap first?" asked Handforth, as fiery as ever.

But nobody took any notice of him. The Removites concentrated their attention upon the boats. Within two minutes all these had been grabbed, and they were being carried away from the houseboat's side.

When it was too late, Corcoran realised what the game was.

"Quick!" he shouted suddenly. "Grab those boats, you chaps! Don't let them go!"

"But what are these chaps up to?" gasped Boots. "We thought they were going to attack us—"

"They never meant to!" snapped Corcoran. "They only came here to pinch our boats!"

"Sorry, Corky, you're a bit too late now!" sang out Nipper. "You're marooned!"

"What-a-at!"

It was a long-drawn-out gasp of consternation from the Fourth-Formers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The excitement was over, and the Removites, having drawn well away from the houseboat, eased and rested on their oars. All the empty boats were secured, and they were some distance from the houseboat's side. And there stood that big craft, loaded with Fourth-Formers—aground!

The joke of it was, the Fourth had got on board by their own efforts; they had not been driven to take that step. But Nipper had anticipated that they would make that very move.

And now they were marooned—imprisoned on the houseboat, without any means of getting out of the flood.

"I rather think, Corky, old man, that this is one up for the Remove!" sang out Nipper cheerily. "What do you say?"

"You tricky bounder!" roared Corcoran.

"We need to be tricky—when we're up against a fellow like you!" replied Nipper. "I hope you'll enjoy your afternoon on the houseboat. The scenery is very pleasant round here—"

"Our afternoon!" gasped Bob Christine. "You're not going to leave us here all the afternoon, are you?"

"Until after the match!" said Nipper sweetly. "Awfully sorry to deprive you of that treat, but now and again it is necessary to be cruel to be kind. And you children need a lesson. I hope this will teach you to be good little boys in future!"

The Fourth gave vent to a roar of fury, and it was intermingled with the laughter of the Removites.

"What about our dinner?" shouted Clapson.

"You'll have to go hungry for once!" replied Handforth. "We're going now—and you can get ashore as best you can. Of course, you can swim, if you like—"

"We can't swim in this water!" yelled Oldfield. "It's as cold as ice!"

"Well, it'll do you good!" said Handforth. "It'll cool you down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Remove force rowed away, with all the empty boats in tow. Without doubt, the Fourth had been very soundly whacked!



CHAPTER 16.

An Old Friend!

THERE were many chuckles in the Remove during dinner. The juniors were thinking about the unhappy Fourth-Formers, marooned in the flood, stranded on that ramshackle old houseboat.

Nipper's idea had worked to perfection, and everybody was compelled to admit that it had been a brainy jape. Its chief charm had been its simplicity. It had been a certain success, right from the very start.

As soon as dinner was over Nipper made some inquiries, and he found that none of the Fourth-Formers had returned. All those juniors, in fact, had been conspicuous by their absence, and Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Fourth, was in an irritable mood. He promised the Fourth a hot time when it finally turned up.

"Well, they've missed their dinner, anyhow," chuckled Nipper. "But, of course, I don't suppose they'll miss the match."

"But you told them that they're not going to be released until the match is over!" said Handforth, staring.

"We're not going to release them, if that's what you mean," said Nipper. "But, my dear chap, they'll find a way of getting off during the afternoon."

"Then the whole thing's going to be a failure!" protested Handy.

"I rather think it's been a big success," grinned Reggie Pitt. "And Nipper's right. We don't want to be vindictive, you know. Corcoran and Boots and the others are bound to get off before long, and I'll bet we shall see them at the match."

This had been Nipper's idea all along, and he was rather surprised therefore when all the Remove fellows started off for Bannington to see the match. In the distance, from one point of the road, they caught a glimpse of the houseboat, forlorn and deserted, in the middle of the flood. Many figures could be seen moving about the decks, and there was not a small boat to be seen on the entire landscape.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper, grinning. "They're still on there!"

"What else can they do?" asked Tommy Watson. "They can't swim in this icy water, and the old tub is stuck. The only way they can get off is for somebody to go along to rescue them."

"That's bound to happen before long," said Nipper. "Well, the longer they're on there the more they'll take the lesson to heart. After this perhaps they won't be so keen on japing the Remove."

There were many chuckles as they continued their journey. They were on their bicycles, for the road wasn't flooded anywhere; it was open all the way through to Bannington.

Just as they were passing over the bridge near Bellton they noticed a smartly-painted river barge moored to the bank, which was very high here, quite near to the bridge. They would have probably ridden straight on, only Nipper found something familiar in the figure standing on the barge's deck.

"Here, wait a minute, you fellows!" said Nipper, with a grin. "I'm blessed if it isn't old Captain Pepper!"

"So it is!" said Reggie Pitt. "Hallo, cap'n! How goes it?"

Captain Joshua Pepper, of the barge *Gladys* turned about and gazed at the crowd of juniors, who had dismounted from their bicycles and were leaning over the bridge, looking straight down upon the barge's deck.

Captain Pepper was a grizzled old fellow, and he thoughtfully removed his pipe, tipped his peaked cap on one side, and rubbed his bald head.

"Well, bust my skin if this ain't a surprise!" he ejaculated, his grizzled face breaking into a crinkly smile. "Good afternoon, young gents! Darn my hide if I ain't pleased to see ye again."

They all greeted the old fellow. They knew him well, for they remembered the time when the Stowe had been flooded on one other memorable occasion. The St. Frank's fellows had rescued a couple of stranded barges, and they had encountered Captain Joshua Pepper during that exciting adventure.

"In trouble, cap'n?" asked Nipper.

"Well, it ain't exactly what you might call trouble!" replied Captain Pepper. "Tain't what I'd like, though. This 'ere flood has took me by surprise, in a way of speakin'. Can't move, neither up river nor down."

"Can't get under the bridge, eh?" said Nipper.

"That's the size of it, sir!" said Captain Pepper. "So I'm anchored here, waitin' till the water goes down. I don't reckon it'll be long, now that the weather has let up."

"The old *Gladys* looks smart now!" remarked Handforth, as he inspected the barge.



Without warning, Curly Hankin came charging up. He caught Nipper right in the middle of the back, and the unfortunate Junior Skipper went crashing to the ground. "Foul!" went up an indignant cry from the crowd. "Send him off the field!"

"'Tain't the same old barge, young gent!" said the skipper, scratching his chin. "Same name, but a new craft. A rare fine craft, too!" declared Captain Pepper enthusiastically. "I don't use the towin' path no more, young gents."

"So I notice!" said Nipper. "She's a motor-barge, isn't she?"

"One o' the very latest," said Captain Pepper, nodding. "At fust I wouldn't 'ave nothin' to do with these 'ere motor-barges. But I reckon they 'ave their good points."

"I'll bet you can get about a lot quicker!" said Harry Gresham.

"'Tain't allus smooth-goin'," commented the old bargee thoughtfully. "Only last week the engine jibbed, and it was a rare time afore I could get her goin' again. Still, I ain't grumblin'. On the whole, she's a good craft. And if we don't progress in these 'ere days we're left behind. Now, I once knew a bloke named Jerry Minns. Maybe I told you about him afore, eh?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised!" grinned Nipper.

"Well, this 'ere Jerry Minns was a decent sort o' bloke, in 'is own way. In the North Sea fishin', he was. Well, he 'ad one o' them old-fashioned craft what couldn't hardly keep afloat, what with the barnacles on her keel, and what with 'er rotten boards. Well, Jerry Minns was run down one night, off the Dogger Bank. Foggy, it was, an' his old tub was cut clean in two—"

"If it's all the same to you, Captain Pepper, we'll have this story another time," said Nipper hurriedly. "We've got to get on now."

"Right ye are, young gents!" said the old bargee complacently. "Don't make no difference to me. But the next time ye see me don't forget to mention Jerry Minns. Then I'll tell ye what 'appened arter his rotten old craft was cut in two off the Dogger Bank."

The juniors mounted their cycles and went on their way. They remembered Captain Pepper and his yarns; at every conceivable opportunity he trotted out one of these reminiscences, and although they were entertaining they generally occupied a lot of time, and just at present the Remove fellows were in a hurry. It was necessary for them to get to Bannington.

When they arrived at the town they found a great deal of enthusiasm.

The populace was crowding towards the Blue Crusaders' enclosure, and the gate looked like being a record one—for a reserve match. Perhaps the weather had something to do with this excellent attendance, for the people were fed up with the rain of the week, and now that the Saturday afternoon was fine they were enticed out of doors.

Everybody was keen to see the Crusaders Reserves on the field, too, and in a match against the St. Frank's juniors the play was calculated to be interesting. Bannington had seen these St. Frank's boys playing against the old Bannington Town Reserves, and it had been a very good game, with the St. Frank's juniors the winners.

But it was hardly likely that this school-boy team would be able to repeat its success. The Blue Crusaders were a different proposition.

Sam Russell, the Reserves captain, greeted Nipper and his men warmly, and most of the other players were just as hearty. It was noticed, however, that Curly Hankin and his two cronies took absolutely no notice of the juniors. They deliberately hung back, ignoring the schoolboys.

This was a bad sign, for it proved that Curly Hankin was maintaining his attitude of defiance and sullenness—and that wasn't the right spirit for any player to be in at the commencement of a game!



CHAPTER 17.

Professionals v.
Schoolboys!

THE enclosure was nearly full when the teams came out, and the players were accorded a rousing reception.

For a reserve match the crowd was exceptionally large.

All the Removites, except the members of the eleven, were in the stand, looking on eagerly. They felt that this was going to be a keenly-fought match, although they never really believed that the juniors had the slightest chance of winning.

On the field Sam Russell was having a final word with his men.

"We've got to play our best!" he was saying. "It's no good thinking that because these youngsters are schoolboys we can run them off their feet. We can't. They're hot stuff!"

"It's a rotten insult to the Crusaders that we should be forced to play them!" said Hankin sourly.

"That's not the right spirit, Curly!" protested Russell. "Dave Moran and the boys are doing their best in Devon, and it's up to us to do our best here on the home ground. We're only playing a schoolboy team, but they're fast and they're nippy——"

"What's this—a lecture?" sneered Parr.

"No, it isn't!" snapped the reserve skipper. "I'm just trying to make you understand that we're here to play the game. And don't forget that these schoolboys are light. There mustn't be any heavy charging."

Curtis and Laver and the other reserves were willing enough to take notice of Russell's excellent advice, but it was noticed that Hankin and Brewer and Parr were openly contemptuous. As Handforth had anticipated, Curly Hankin in particular was furious because he was compelled to play. Mr. Piecombe indeed had threatened him with suspension without pay if he refused orders.

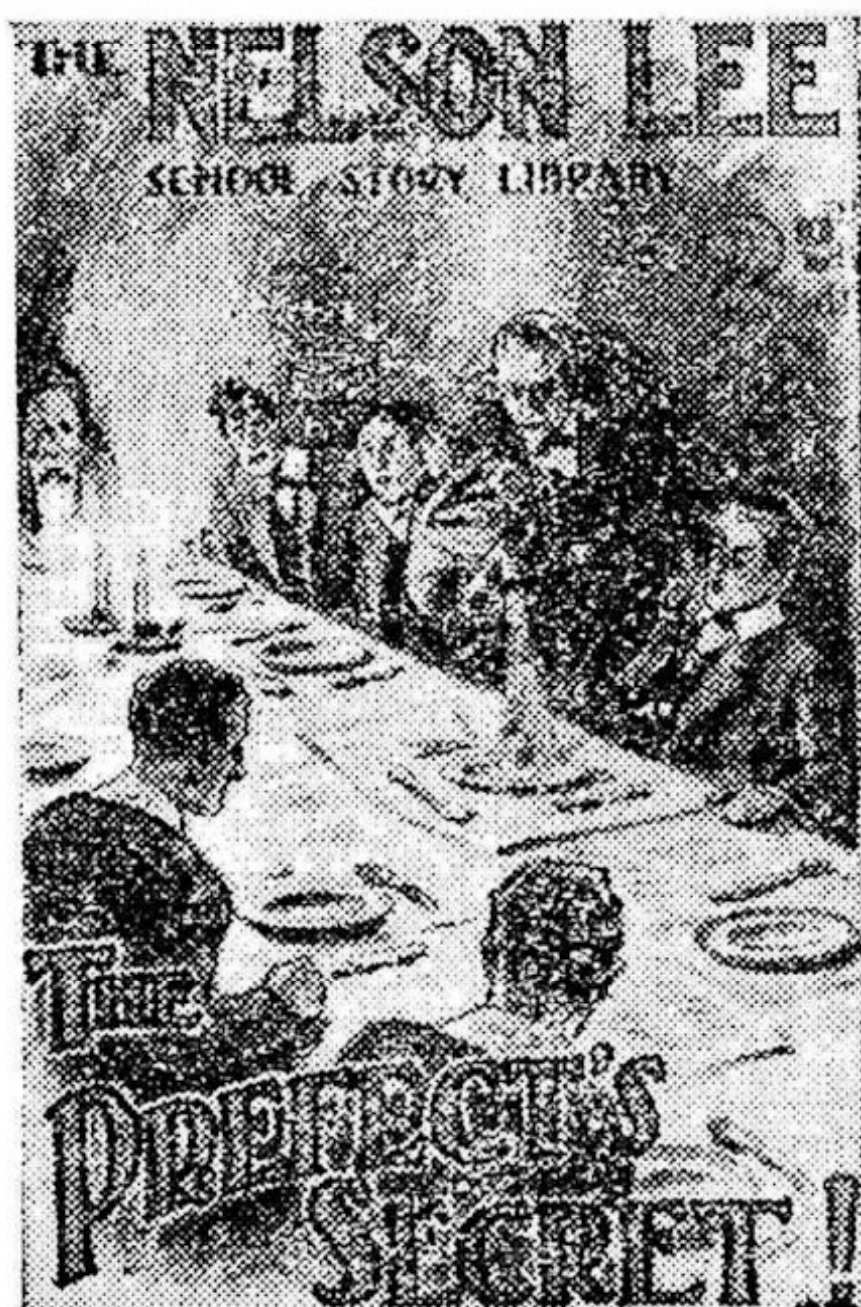
The Remove fellows were looking very businesslike as they lined up. Nipper had won the toss, but this gave his side little

advantage, since the wind was blowing across the pitch.

The St. Frank's Eleven was as follows: Handforth, Church, McClure; Fullwood, Castleton, Potts; Gresham, Travers, Nipper, Grey, Pitt. In more than one game this season Church and McClure had been playing in the left-back and right-back positions respectively. They had developed into quite a brilliant pair, and it was quite fitting that they should form, with Handforth, the main defence.

Castleton, of the West House, at centre-half was a splendid player, and Gresham was

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



developing into a first-class winger this season.

There were shouts of genuine enthusiasm when the ball was set rolling. The Blues were inclined to take it very easily at the start, but after about seven minutes' play they began to change their minds. The schoolboys were rather ragged at first, but they soon pulled themselves together, and then they revealed their true form.

From an excellent pass by Castleton, Reggie Pitt got away, and he was down the field like a flash—playing as cleverly and as brilliantly as Tich Harborough himself.

The Blues' back was taken completely by surprise; he was left standing, and when Pitt sent over a perfectly-timed centre, Nipper was there ready.

Slam!

Nipper sent in a glorious first-time shot, and the Reserves' goalie only just got to it in the nick of time. But he was not able to make a good clearance. He only scraped the ball away, and Travers, running up like a hare, drove it hard and true into the net.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the kids!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, the Remove!"

Sam Russell gave his fellow players some hard looks as they lined up. On their own ground they were being beaten by these schoolboys! And they were the Blue

"THE PREFECT'S SECRET!"

Simon Kenmore drowned—and Fatty Fowkes of the Blue Crusaders responsible for the tragedy!

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Whatever you do, chums, don't miss reading this magnificent story.

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE ROVERS?"

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~~~~~ORDER IN ADVANCE!

Crusaders! Even Curly Hankin pulled himself together a bit.

The juniors were not allowed to keep their lead for long. Within five minutes the Blues, aroused by the reverse, got going in earnest, and it was Russell himself who scored the equaliser.

Church did his utmost to avert the disaster, but Russell was too quick for him. He had Church guessing, and then he took a hard shot from the corner of the penalty area.

Handforth leapt. He caught the ball and sent it swinging out again into play.

"Well saved, Handy!"

"Oh, good man!"

But one of the other Blues' Reserves was there, and back went the ball towards the goal. Again Handforth leapt, and he even got his fingers to it. The leather struck the upright, bounced back into play, and fell at

Russell's feet. There was no mistake about it this time. In a flash it was at the back of the net, and Handforth had no chance of saving.

"Goal!"

"Play up, the Blues!"

Gradually the juniors were finding that this team was a very different proposition from the Bannington Town Second Eleven. The Blues were smarter—faster—more brilliant in every department of the game. It was only by almost superhuman efforts that the schoolboys prevented the score from mounting before half-time. Handforth did wonders in goal, saving again and again, and when the whistle blew the score still remained one—one.

The Removites in the stand had not failed to notice that none of the Fourth-Formers had turned up. And now it was half-time! Surely the unfortunate Corcoran and his companions were not marooned in that houseboat all this time.

Yet, strangely enough, this was the truth!

On more than one occasion the Fourth-Formers had seen a boat in the distance, and they had yelled with all their strength, and they had waved their arms. But nobody had taken any notice of them. Every boat had continued on its leisurely way, the occupants only waving in reply to the juniors' frantic signals.

"It's no good!" said Corcoran at length. "We're done, you chaps! The match must be half over now, anyhow."

"We'll make those rotters suffer for this!" said Boots fiercely. "It was a dirty trick to leave us on here like this—and diddle us out of the match!"

Feeling was running high in the Fourth. They were all fed up with their imprisonment. Yet they could do nothing to save themselves. There was no boat, and it was certainly out of the question to swim to the dry land.

"People think we're only fooling, I expect!" said Corcoran gruffly. "They see us waving and they hear us shouting, and they take it for granted that we're having a lark. That's why nobody has come. Somehow, I don't think that Nipper meant us to be here all the afternoon. He was pretty sure that we should be taken off."

"There'll be a reckoning for this!" said Bob Christine darkly. "By Jingo! Wait until this evening! There'll be the most unholy row that's ever happened at St. Frank's!"

All the other Fourth-Formers were of precisely the same opinion!

CHAPTER 18.

Danger!



MEANWHILE the game at Bannington was not only getting exciting, but unpleasant.

Nipper and his men, in the second half, made a tremendous effort, and they came within an ace of scoring two or three times. The Blues Reserves, much as they hated admitting it, were nearly run off their feet by these energetic schoolboys. They were on the defensive for fifteen minutes on end, and Curly Hankin, at centre-half, found it almost impossible to hold the elusive Nipper.

And after Nipper had tricked him with supreme ease on three occasions, Curly began to lose his temper. He had hated the idea of the match from the first—and now he was enraged by the realisation that his contempt for the juniors had been unjustified.

After that he began to play roughly. More than once he charged the juniors in such a heavy manner that the referee was compelled to caution him. Brewer and Parr, in the forward line, were playing well, for they were both excellent footballers, whatever their personal characters. They formed a very effective left wing, and in that position they had few opportunities of fouling, even supposing they wanted to adopt such tactics.

But it was different with Curly Hankin.

In his position at centre-half he had endless opportunities of playing roughly. Twice within a minute he displayed very questionable tactics. He charged Travers off the ball so heavily that the Removite went sprawling, tipping head over heels. The referee at once awarded a free kick.

"What's the matter?" demanded Hankin sullenly. "That was a fair enough charge!"

"I don't want any arguments!" retorted the referee. "I've cautioned you once before, and you'd better be careful!"

Hankin muttered under his breath, and went back to his position.

From the free kick, Gresham came within an ace of scoring. He sent in an oblique shot which had the goalie guessing, and the leather went only an inch outside the bar.

And so the game went on, hard fought, keen and brisk. Handforth had seldom had so much to do in a match, and he was proving his worth as a goalie. Indeed, but for his able keeping the Blues would have scored six or seven times. For the Remove backs found it almost impossible to hold those enterprising forwards, and, when it came to the pinch, Handforth was the fellow who held the fort.

Then, with only about four minutes to go, Nipper intercepted the ball as it was being passed over to Parr, on the left wing. He trapped it neatly, spun round, and prepared to pass out to Reggie Pitt.

And then, from behind, without warning, Curly Hankin came charging up. He caught Nipper fairly in the middle of the back, and the unfortunate Junior skipper went hurtling over, to crash to the ground helpless.

"Foul!"

"Send him off the field!"

"Penalty—penalty!"

It was a fact. The incident had happened in the extreme corner of the penalty area, and the referee was already pointing at the spot. The crowd was angry, for that charge

of Hankin's had been a deliberate piece of dirty play. He had taken Nipper in the back.

"Hurt, dear old fellow?" asked Travers, as he bent down over the Junior captain.

"It's all right!" muttered Nipper, as he sat up. "My back's a bit crooked, I think, but I shall be all serene in a minute. What happened?"

"It was that rotter Hankin!" said Jack Grey hotly. "Anyhow, the referee has awarded a penalty kick!"

"You'd better take it, Castleton!" said Nipper, as he struggled to his feet.

The referee was talking angrily to Curly Hankin.

"Before this incident happened, I gave you two warnings," he said curtly. "I'm not going to warn you again. You're going off the field."

"What!" ejaculated Curly, startled and filled with consternation. "You're mad! You don't know what you're talking about! It was a perfectly fair charge——"

"I'm in charge of this game, and you'd better not argue!" said the referee. "You're going off the field."

"But I tell you——"

"You heard what I said!" snapped the referee, pointing.

Everybody in the great crowd understood that gesture.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old ref!"

"Send him off the field!"

And Curly Hankin was compelled to go—gnashing his teeth with fury. He had believed, in his stupidity, that this referee would be weak. It was only a friendly match, and a Reserve match at that. The officials at such games are usually easy to get on with. This decision took Curly Hankin completely by surprise.

Alan Castleton took the penalty kick, and he made no mistake about it.

He sent in a low, wicked shot which gave the goalkeeper no chance.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the schoolboys!"

"Keep it up, St. Frank's!"

The St. Frank's Junior Eleven did keep it up. There were only two or three minutes to go, and they managed to hold the fort with success. During the last minute Handforth saved twice—he saved brilliantly. When the final whistle went the enthusiasm was tremendous. The St. Frank's schoolboys had won! They had beaten the Blue Crusaders' Reserves! This, indeed, was a surprising result.

It was no consolation to the Blues when they realised that Curly Hankin was the cause of their downfall. But for that piece of foul play, there would have been no penalty kick, and, at the worst, the result would have been a draw. Indeed, the chances were that the Blues would have won, for the schoolboys would not have been so keen during those final minutes.

"I'm rather glad that Corcoran wasn't here to see!" said Nipper, as he and the other

juniors changed. "Poor old Corky! He'll be properly upset when he hears about this."

"About our winning?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"No—about Hankin fouling!" said Nipper. "It's a wonder I'm not crooked. That charge was terrific. I expect Hankin will be suspended for this."

"And serves him right, too!" said Handforth hotly.

It was noticed that Handforth did no crowing. He had played the game of his life, and yet not a word of self-praise came from his lips. In any ordinary game, where he had done some very moderate goalkeeping, he would have been enthusiastic about his own performance, but when he had done something really meritorious he said little or nothing about it.

But that, after all, was just Handforth's way.

The juniors did not stop long. After the unpleasantness with Hankin, they felt that it would be better if they left at once. Besides, they were anxious to find out what had happened to Corcoran and the Fourth. Nipper, in fact, was beginning to get a bit anxious. He did not like the idea of the Fourth-Formers being marooned on the houseboat all the afternoon. Nipper had never intended any such drastic practical joke as that.

As it happened, it was very fortunate that the Removites wasted no time in getting away from Bannington after the match.

For the Fourth-Formers were not only in an uncomfortable predicament, but they were in positive peril!

Late in the afternoon, after they had despaired of ever attracting attention to themselves, they became resigned to a wait. They knew that the Remove would turn up after the match, and Nipper & Co., of course, would take them off.

The high wind was returning, now that the afternoon was growing to a close, and the river was still rising and the floods still extending, for water was draining into the Stowe from endless small tributaries and from the hills.

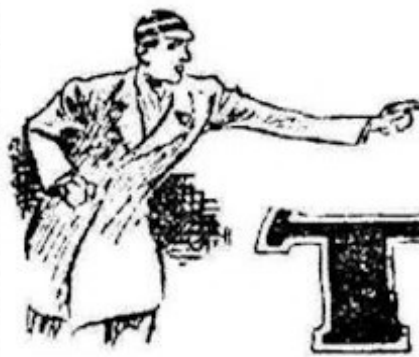
And suddenly, unexpectedly, the houseboat gave a kind of lurch, shifted, and then swung round. In a word, she had dislodged herself from the hillock upon which she had been resting. And now she was free—floating in the flood again.

"My hat!" sang out Boots, as he looked over the side. "We're adrift again!"

"Thank goodness for that!" said Clapson wearily. "Now we shall probably be able to get off!"

But after four or five minutes had elapsed it was noticed that the houseboat was drifting gradually and insistently towards the main stream. Corcoran, who was watching, began to get worried.

"There's going to be some trouble, you fellows!" he said gravely. "In another ten minutes we shall be right in the full force of the current—and if that happens it'll be a case of every man for himself!"



CHAPTER 19.

Up to the Remove!

THE danger was unexpected—dramatic in its swift arrival.

The marooned Fourth-Formers had believed themselves to be as safe as though they had been on dry land. The thought of danger had never occurred to them. They were inconvenienced, yes—they were angry with the Remove for having perpetrated this trick. But none of them ever thought of danger.

Now, with the houseboat adrift, and getting nearer and nearer to the main current, the peril became acute.

As Lionel Corcoran had seen, they were not very far distant from the Bellton Bridge. The Stowe was rushing tumultuously along its course towards the heavy stone bridge, and there was scarcely room for a low-lying barge to pass under the arch.

What would happen when the houseboat got fairly into the swirl of the flood, and then went hurtling down towards the bridge? Nothing could save it from destruction. It would crash against the stonework with full force, and it would be madness for the juniors to remain on board until that happened. For they would be courting disaster—even death! Their only chance would be to swim for it.

And this would be a drastic step—a well-nigh fatal step for some of them.

For not all the Fourth-Formers were good swimmers, and in that icy water their limbs would be paralysed; they would not be able to keep afloat for long. In still water the swim would be difficult enough, but what chance would they have in those flood waters—full of treacherous currents and mysterious eddies? A great many of those juniors would never be able to reach the land. They would be swept down by the flood—drawn under by the mighty pull of the swollen river.

Yet there was no panic on board that drifting houseboat.

The Fourth-Formers took it gamely—yet there were many pale faces, many startled eyes, as the possibilities were discussed.

"What on earth can we do?" asked Bob Christine huskily. "It's getting dark now, and there aren't any boats anywhere!"

"Hadn't we better make a dive for it now?" suggested Clapson, with a shiver. "We might be able to swim in this flood—and perhaps the water won't be too deep. But there won't be a chance for us later on."

"No!" said Corcoran. "We'd better stick on board now. It's half a mile to the nearest land, and there's not one of us who could do that swim in this icy water. Something may turn up yet."

"It's impossible!" panted Yorke. "Nobody knows that we're in danger—and by the time they do know, it'll be too late!"

There was a good deal of truth in this. The houseboat was swinging round ominously, and rocking from side to side as the flood waters caught it broadside. Now, with ever increasing speed, the craft was getting towards the centre of the main stream. She was surging through the water like a thing alive, and with every minute that passed her speed increased. Soon she was on the bosom of the flood, charging down the river towards her doom.

All those Fourth-Formers on board, faced by this dire peril, had forgotten all the previous events of no importance. Here they were, in the gathering dusk, rushing down that swollen stream, making headlong for the stone bridge. The crash, when it came, would be devastating in its force.

For the houseboat was nearly all superstructure, and it would crumble to fragments—to splinters—when it hit the bridge. To remain on board would be madness.

The only thing, therefore, was to jump for it at the last possible moment, and fight gamely to get to the dry land. They wouldn't all succeed, but they would do their best.

The tragedy of it was, nobody seemed to be aware of their peril!

Yet there were plenty of people in the village—plenty of people all round. Still, what could these people do? Nothing could take the houseboat out of the grip of the stream now; she was caught too firmly in that deathly embrace.

"Let's yell!" suggested Buster Boots suddenly. "Let's all shout at once!"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Talmadge. "Are you ready?"

And the Fourth-Formers, in one voice, let out a tremendous shout:

"Help! Help!"

It was a shout that went ringing over the flood, only to be caught up by the high wind, and dissipated into the disturbed atmosphere.

It was just at this time that the Removites, returning from Bannington on their bicycles, caught sight of the houseboat. They were on the other side of the village, on a rising knoll. The dusk was gathering, and they had been on the look-out for the first sign of the houseboat. And now, with a dreadful shock, they saw what was happening.

"Look!" ejaculated Handforth, pointing. "She's adrift!"

"Great Scott!"

"And all those chaps are on board still!" said Nipper hoarsely. "Can't you see? Look at them—like dots. They're all on board, I tell you. And she's rushing downstream towards the Bellton bridge!"

"They'll all be crushed!" said Church, in horror. "Why don't they jump?"

"Jump?" roared Handforth. "Jump into this flood? That would be almost certain death!"

"What can we do?" asked Reggie Pitt blankly. "Nobody seems to be helping them——"

"We got them into this mess, and we've got to get them out of it!" snapped Nipper.

"Good heavens! How could we expect anything like this? We thought they would be taken off hours ago. It's an awful thing!"

And then suddenly an inspiration came to him.

"I know!" he yelled. "Come on, you chaps. Pedal like mad! We've got to get to the Bellton bridge."

He did not explain, and the others did not want him to. There was not a second to be lost. Seldom indeed had they cycled as they cycled now. They put every ounce of their strength into their pedalling, and they fairly flew along the wet road.

They scorched through Bellton like a crowd of lunatics, causing several of the villagers to dash for safety, and to grow hot with anger against these crazy schoolboys.

But Nipper knew what he was doing.

When the bridge was reached they flung themselves from their bicycles and dashed to the parapet. Nipper's heart gave a jump when he saw that the barge, *Gladys*, was still moored there, almost beneath him.

"Captain Pepper!" yelled Nipper, at the top of his voice.

"By George!" bellowed Handforth. "The barge! You mean——"

"She's a motor-barge!" ejaculated Nipper. "If she can get got going in time we can get alongside the houseboat and then push her out of the current and send her aground. But where's Captain Pepper?"

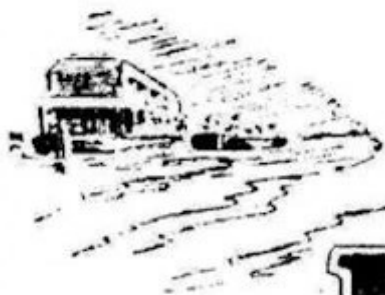
"There won't be time—there won't be time!" said Tommy Watson in anguish.

They all stared at the houseboat. She seemed a fair distance off yet, but she was now in the full flood of the current, and she was charging down towards them like some ugly, enormous juggernaut of the water.

"Captain Pepper isn't here!" said Gresham. "He must be in the village. How can we find him? There's nobody on board!"

Nipper's mind was made up in a flash.

"We can't waste time in finding him!" he said fiercely. "Come on! Half a dozen of us will be enough. We'll see if we can't get the engines going ourselves!"



CHAPTER 20.

Touch and Go!



IT was really a dreadful chance.

Nipper was something of an expert when it came to petrol engines, but he had to confess that he was unfamiliar with the type of engine that was installed in a big barge. And the motor of the *Gladys* would certainly be cold after two or three days of idleness. Perhaps it would be impossible to get her started; perhaps if she was started the engine would prove insufficiently powerful to force her way against the current.

There seemed to be a hundred and one chances against the success of this venture.

Yet it had to be attempted. As for Captain Pepper, nobody thought of him now. Nipper and Travers and Handforth and two or three others were tearing at the hatchway, aft, uncovering the powerful engines.

"Here's the starting handle!" yelled Handforth. "Shall I swing her over?"

"Yes!" panted Nipper. "Where's the switch? The switch must be somewhere——"

"Yes! Here it is!" said Travers. "Take it coolly, you fellows. Swing her, Handy. I've switched on. Flood the carburettor, Nipper."

But Nipper was already doing so, having found the petrol tap and having turned it on. Handforth, with herculean efforts, was pulling at the starting handle and turning the cold engine.

Perhaps it was sheer luck which caused the engine to fire after the second pull over. She spluttered, backfired, choked once or twice, and then settled down to a steady roar.

"Cast off the moorings!" shouted Nipper, looking up. "Hey, you fellows! Those ropes! If you can't do anything else, cut them!"

It was an admirable piece of work. Within three minutes the barge was moving. Nipper himself was at the tiller, and a surge of joy passed through him when he found that the clumsy vessel was slowly making her way upstream against the current. The engine was roaring all out, and the propeller was churning furiously.

By this time numbers of villagers had

come running up, attracted by the noise, and the excitement was spreading.

On board the houseboat the Fourth-Formers had seen what was happening, and they were getting new hope. Yet they could not understand what the Removites hoped to accomplish. But something was being done, and they watched with burning, feverish eyes.

It was touch and go now.

It wasn't far to the bridge, and the Fourth-Formers were startled and amazed when they saw that the barge was going directly away from them, swinging out of the river and over the flooded meadows. It was an incredible proceeding, and the hope that had come to them now died away.

And then soon afterwards the meaning of this manœuvre was understood.

Nipper had taken the barge out of the current because he gained enormously in speed. Then when he swung round he was just a little above the houseboat, and he sent the barge at full speed into the main current, and then steered her so that she would rapidly overtake the lumbering houseboat, edging her nearer and nearer towards the doomed craft.

To have attempted anything else would have been disastrous. For if the barge had tried to meet the houseboat it would have meant a terrific collision, in which both craft would have been sunk.

As it was, Nipper succeeded in sending the *Gladys* alongside the houseboat, and so gentle was the contact that there was hardly a bump. Then he swung the tiller hard round, and there came a grinding of wood.

(Concluded on page 43.)



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BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



ISABEL W. RINTOUL.

YOU needn't know any member of the St. Frank's League in order to become a member yourself—Mervyn Gibbons (Liverpool). The next time the League Application Forms appear, simply buy an extra copy of the Old Paper, fill in the two forms according to the instructions, and send them to the Chief Officer. That simple action makes you a member on the spot. You can give the extra copy to anybody you like—it needn't be a friend, or even an acquaintance. Surely it's easy enough to give a copy of Our Paper away?

It doesn't matter if you write bad English in your letters—Edward Magnanie (Cap-d'ail, France)—although I have seen no sign of it in the one to which I am now replying. No need to be afraid that your letters won't interest me. As for a good English Dictionary, giving quotations to show the appropriate use of words, the best one you can buy is the "New Oxford Dictionary." But this is a very expensive proposition. Still, you asked me to recommend a good one, so I am only complying with your request.

There's nothing easier than buying the Old Paper—Maurice Hallibardy (Seine-et-Oise, France). It doesn't matter where in the world you are; providing there's a postal delivery, you can get it. Simply send the necessary subscription to the Publishers, as indicated at the foot of Page 4 of cover in every issue, and the Old Paper will be posted to you as regularly as clockwork—while the money lasts. When that gives out, you'll get a polite letter, asking for more.

There are two very essential requirements if you want to become a story writer—Isabel W. Rintoul (Glasgow). First of all, you must have an extraordinary amount of patience; and secondly you must have a capacity for sustaining hard knocks. Story writing is all very well after you've had the experience, and providing you've got a continuous flow of ideas. But the experience is liable to be bitter at first, and if you want to meet with success you'll have to stick at it—and keep sticking at it—and then keep sticking at it.

You certainly need not fear that you are the only girl reader who has written to me—Louise King (East Ham). I have had thousands of letters from readers of all ages and both sexes. And a very large percentage come from girl readers. Buck up, boys, if you want to head the list!

The Rebellion Series—Stanley Welsby (Fleetwood)—started in No. 82, New Series, dated Nov. 26th, 1927, and there were eight stories in the series.

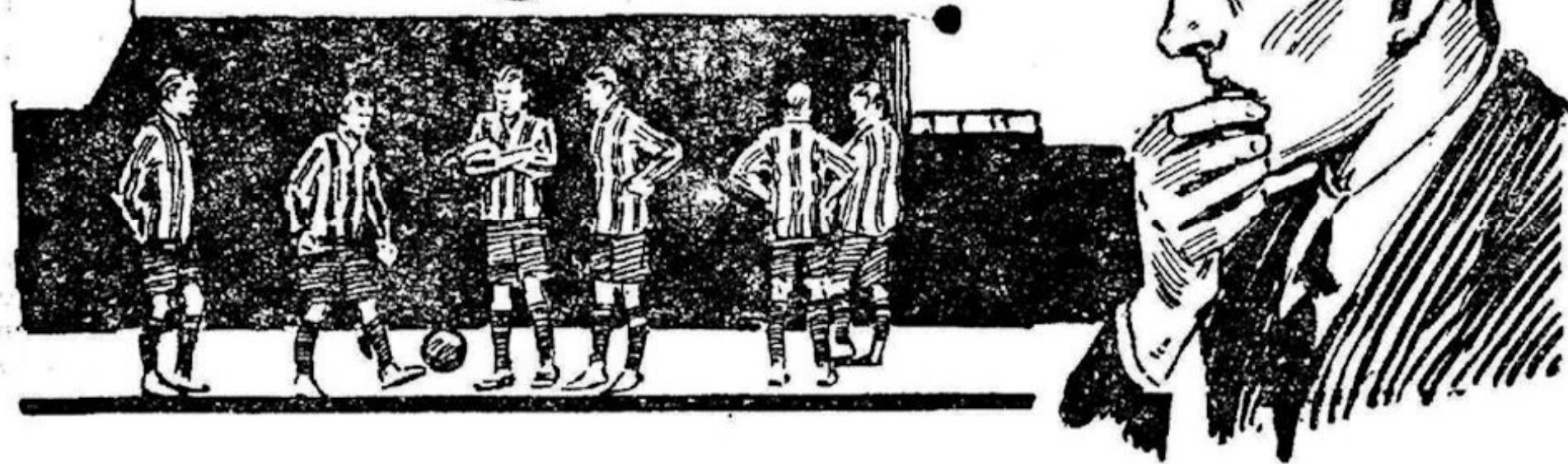
Quite a number of readers have promised to send me later photographs of themselves, and you are one of the few to do so—Allan G. Carter (New Lynn, N.Z.). I hope all the others will spot this, and remember their promises. I'm still waiting, in lots of cases, to see what they look like!

If you don't know what to do with your old copies of the Old Paper—John W. Lowdell (Minster)—what about sending them round to the Ramsgate hospitals? You say you don't need any money for them, and I dare say some of the patients will be glad of the books—even though they are written by me!

I note that you are a keen supporter of Brighton & Hove Albion—James Ward (Brighton)—and that you are particularly anxious to see more footer stories in the Old Paper. In that case, what about supporting another Sussex club—the Blue Crusaders? Their adventures are duly recorded by Yours Truly every week in "The Boys' Realm." You'll meet the St. Frank's chaps in these yarns, too.

FOOTBALL AND DETECTIVE THRILLS! READ THIS WEEK'S FINE INSTALMENT NOW

What's Wrong with the Rovers?



Every day the mystery of the Northmouth Rovers becomes more baffling and complicated. Already two of the Rovers' players are implicated, and now Nelson Lee discovers that the manager is also concerned in the plot!

Nipper's Chance!

NELSON LEE was as keen on football as any man, and he told Nipper, as they left the hotel after lunch on the Saturday, that he was very glad he could watch the match with Broadwich, and combine pleasure with business. He had booked two front row seats in the stand, close to the seats reserved for the officials. Nipper, though he was glad enough to be going to see his colleagues play, wished that he was thirty miles away, playing with the reserves.

The sun was shining, but there was a nip in the air—an ideal afternoon for football. There had been no developments. Nelson Lee was inclined to agree with Nipper that Bert Barter was one of the men they had met in the drive, but they had no real evidence against him, and if they had, they would not have produced it at the moment. Lee had traced the numbers of the car, and found it rightly belonged to a doctor living sixty miles away. As his car had not been stolen, it was obvious that false number plates had been used.

One thing stood out clearly. Dick Ridley had been about late that night in a car, and had met Stephen Langton when he had descended in his aeroplane upon the football ground. Had there been a second car somewhere near Colton's house? Was Dick Ridley one of the three men they had met in the drive, and had he gone on from there to the

ground? From the point of view of time, it would fit in.

Nelson Lee was very silent, and that might mean that he was puzzling or had a theory that he was about to put to the test. For himself, Nipper felt convinced that the International centre-forward of the Northmouth Rovers was not the sort of man who would descend to any dirty game, however much appearances might be against him.

As Nelson Lee and Nipper neared the ground the pavements were thronged. Loaded trams passed them, and in the distance the turnstiles were clicking merrily. It was just the afternoon for football, and hundreds of disgruntled supporters of the Rovers, who had declared that they were fed up and would not patronise another fixture, had changed their minds, though they fully expected to see the home team go down before their powerful visitors, who were expected to make a bold bid for the championship.

Nelson Lee and his young assistant entered by the gate for ticket holders, and it was hard for Nipper to realise that he was officially a player for the club. He seemed just one of the several thousands assembling to watch the match, and again he wished himself thirty miles away with the reserves, wearing the blue and white of Northmouth.

They had walked briskly to the ground, and there was over a quarter of an hour to

wait before the kick-off. Instead of making for the stand, Nelson Lee strolled leisurely round the car park, watched a little suspiciously by an attendant. It was Morris Cowley four-seaters that interested the famous detective. He did not look at the numbers, but at the dashboards, and he had examined three cars in different parts of the ground, talking to Nipper as though he were a great Cowley enthusiast, and lulling any suspicion the attendant might have had, when the boy saw a little gleam come into his eyes, and he strolled carelessly round to the front.

"Pity to neglect a car like this," he said casually to the attendant, who had just finished parking another car. "Personally, I'd never drive without my speedometer working if I could help it. Pace is very deceptive, and the man who is careless with his car is generally a careless driver."

"Our manager wouldn't feel flattered, sir," said the man, with a grin. "And, as a matter of fact, Mr. Minter is a very good driver."

"Well, I beg his pardon!" said Nelson Lee, with a laugh, as he moved towards the stand, followed by Nipper, but as soon as they were out of earshot he turned and spoke in a low voice:

"That was the car in Colton's drive on Thursday night!"

"What!" gasped the amazed Nipper.

"I glanced at the speedometer, and made a mental note of the figures" explained Lee. "They were 6873 and three tenths. Perhaps you know that some of the earlier Morris' were apt to chew up the fibre wheel of the speedometer drive, and the drive was often disconnected. The one the other night was, so is the speedometer of Minter's car, and the figures are exactly the same."

Nipper whistled softly. The Rovers were implicated again, and it was clear his chief had expected to find the car on the Rovers'

ground. But before he could ask any questions they had reached the entrance to the stand, in front of which a band was playing, whilst there was a buzz of excited conversation in the stand itself.

"Mr. Parr!"

Nipper, about to take his seat, turned and saw Mr. Minter hurrying down the gangway after him.

"I'm very thankful you've turned up," panted the manager. "Jones, who was to have played at centre-half, was taken ill as he was about to leave for the ground. We've only just got the message. Our reserve is no good except in the forward line, and," went on the manager, with a hasty glance at his watch, "you've got just three minutes in which to change and turn out for us against Broadwich!"

Nipper on the ball!

NIPPER was not easily floored, but Mr. Minter, the manager of the Rovers, had him dazed. He had hoped to have a chance with the reserves, but had been passed over. Now he was being told that he was to play for the famous north country team against their equally famous midland rivals in an important First Division match.

He stared almost stupidly at the little man who was dry washing his hands.

"Play! This afternoon!" he gasped.

"Yes, yes! You must hurry. Fool of a landlady ought to have let us know earlier. Be as quick as you can!" urged the manager.

"Good luck!" said Nelson Lee, and moved off to take his seat.

"Crumbs!" murmured the dazed youngster under his breath, and made a bolt for the dressing-room.

He flashed past the manager, unbuttoning his overcoat, coat and waistcoat. He plunged into the dressing-room, colliding violently with David Williams, who was

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

NELSON LEE, the world-famous detective, and his assistant, NIPPER, have promised to assist

EDWARD COLTON, a director of Northmouth Rovers—the famous football club which is now doing badly in the English Football League—in clearing up the mystery surrounding the disappearance of James Ridley, the ex-chairman of the club. Colton thinks Ridley has been murdered, and that

DICK RIDLEY, the ex-chairman's nephew, and amateur International centre-forward of the Rovers, is concerned in the affair. Colton was the last man to see James Ridley before his disappearance, and the ex-chairman had told him that he was on the point of making a great discovery concerning the Rovers. Nipper signs on as an amateur for the club. He is now known as Nick Parr, and Nelson Lee has taken the name of Mr. Nelson; they are supposed to be surveyors. One night the famous detective and his assistant are attacked by three unknown men when entering the drive of Mr. Colton's house. During the ensuing scuffle one of the men is shot in the left arm. The men escape in a car. Next morning, during training, one of the Rovers' players appears with his left arm in bandages! He is Bert Barter, the centre-half, who is already suspected of being implicated in the mystery!

(Now read on.)



"Shoot!" roared the crowd excitedly. Nipper steadied himself and then shot, just as the opposing back crashed into him and sent him sprawling.

pulling on a pair of grubby-looking gloves.

"Land of my fathers!" gasped the goalie, as he saved himself from falling. "Why do you come in like that, and so late? We are just going out."

"Only just been told I've got to play!" said Nipper, rushing to his locker. "Hang on a tick, do!"

He had been in many tight corners in his young life, and had not turned a hair, but he was nervous now, terribly nervous. It would be a big ordeal to go out and play before that large, critical crowd, but to have to run out by himself would be too awful. His fingers were so awkward that he had difficulty in lacing up his boots. The sound of cheering reached the ears of the men in the dressing-room. That meant that Broadwich had taken the field.

"Referee's gone out!" said a voice at the door, and the Rovers were going out into the corridor.

Nipper bolted after them, lacing up his brand new blue and white jersey at the neck. The goalie halted and pushed him in front of him.

"Do not be so worried," he said. "Look you, you will not be expected to do much. Indeed, you are very young and inexperienced, I tell you, and you need not worry if you do not play again."

"Well, I ought to be cheered by a nice, encouraging chap like you," replied Nipper, with a grin, but the grin faded from his face as the men left the tunnel to be greeted by a roar of welcome from the sup-

porters who lived in hope that the home team would soon find their true form and bring some points to Northmouth.

Dick Ridley and Sims had given him nods of encouragement. Rutherton, the veteran back, stopped beside him as they were lining up.

"Stage fright passes off if you think of the ball and forget the crowd, lad!" he said.

Nipper gave him a ghost of a smile. He felt he had been picked up and pitchforked into the arena. It was true he had achieved what had once seemed an impossible ambition of playing for a First Division team, but he had a horrible feeling that it would be his one and only appearance among the giants.

It struck him that Broadwich, in their blue knickers and white shirts, were a very formidable-looking lot, and their captain and centre-forward was a lanky man, certainly built for speed.

Pheep!

The whistle went as Nipper was trying to take his bearings, and the sudden excited shout from the crowd startled him.

"Now then, little 'un!"

Nipper vaguely realised that the man with the raucous voice was alluding to him, and he saw the lanky visiting centre-forward rushing upon him with the ball at his foot. Whatever Nipper might lack, he certainly did not lack pluck, and he went for the man with the ball. But the tall man swerved prettily, and left the youngster staring a little blankly after him. Two other men raced past; the tall centre-forward had

beaten Rutherton; the crowd was apprehensive. David Williams reminded Nipper of that famous cartoon of him as the Dancing Dervish, for he was jumping about in goal, his long hair like a disordered mane. Plop!

The ball sped for the goal, and up leapt the Welshman. There came a roar of relief. Those safe hands had got to the ball, it had been dropped to his foot and punted well out of danger.

"Well saved, Dave!"

And then an excited roar.

Two people had gone for the ball—a burly man and the youngster who had been brought into the Rovers' team at the last moment. And Nipper had the ball, went eel-like between two Broadwich men, and centred to Dick Ridley, who snapped up the leather, and was away.

"Well done, little 'un!"

"Go on, Ridley!"

"Shoot, man—shoot!"

Dick Ridley, quite unflurried, went on. The goalie rushed out—and the next moment the ball was bouncing in the net.

"Goal!"

It was a long time since the crowd had had anything really to enthuse about, and they made the most of it.

"Who's that youngster playing at centre-half?" people were asking each other.

Nelson Lee, sitting in the front row of the stand, knew that unless his pupil quite lost his head in the latter stages of the game, he would have justified his inclusion in the team. And though he had not told the youngster so for fear of making him over anxious, he had his own reasons for desiring him to become at least a more or less regular playing member.

Nipper found it very strenuous work. He was making himself a nuisance to the lanky centre-forward, who felt he would be falling over him. The contrast between them appealed to the crowd, and there was constant laughter. Though Nipper lacked the brilliance of the clever professionals, and certainly could not juggle with the ball as they did, he had a habit of being where he was wanted, and if his passes were not always accurate, they got very near; and if only for his pluck and determination, and having made the opening for Dick Ridley's fine goal, he was already a favourite with the spectators.

Pheeeeeeep!

"Thank goodness for that!" murmured Nipper to himself, as the whistle went for half-time. He had almost played himself to a standstill. Fit as he was, the speed at which the match was being played had taken it out of him. With flushed face, and panting a little, he made for the stand.

Rutherton and the goalie came up behind him.

"You've made a promising start, young fellow," said the veteran.

"Look you that was a fine pass to Ridley, yes, indeed it was, I tell you!" declared the

Welshman. "But you are not likely to get such a chance again whateffer!"

Nipper grinned; he had no breath for speech. He saw a sea of faces and clapping hands. He wondered what the guv'nor thought of him, and that reminded him of the business that had brought them to Northmouth, and the fact that he was playing with a team that was involved in some big mystery. But he put the thought aside, stumbled into the dressing-room, and sat down thankfully on his locker. He had a horrible fear that he would never last the second half.

The surly trainer offered him the plate of cut lemon, but made no comment on his play. The young international came over to him.

"That was a jolly good pass of yours," he said enthusiastically. "Don't let them fluster you in the second half."

"They'll have taken your measure by now, look you," said Dismal Dave, brushing back his damp hair.

"Don't you take any notice of our little ray of sunshine!" was the big young man's laughing comment. "You keep your head, and you'll be all right."

Nipper wondered whether he would be able to keep his wind. He had watched fast games on many occasions, but this was the first time he had played in one, and after school football it was amazingly fast and terribly accurate.

Then the teams were going out again after a breather that seemed all too short. In this half the visiting forwards changed their tactics, adopting the swift, short passing game that troubled Nipper. Ten minutes after the resumption they equalised.

Then Sims nearly scored after a fine run down the wing, and excitement became intense. Dave saved what seemed a certain goal, and Nipper sent the ball out to Sims, who got through, but failed to centre. After that Broadwich were pressing again.

Only five minutes to go, and all the play round the Rovers' goal. It looked odds on them losing even the solitary point, but Rutherton, the veteran, rose to the occasion, and with a wonderful punt sent the ball up to the centre line. It fell a few yards from the Broadwich left-back, who had come well up the pitch, and he and Dick Ridley made a rush for it. Nipper who had been sent flying in the rush upon the Rovers' goal, had now jumped to his feet, and was racing after the young international, with friend and foe dashing up behind him.

And then an amazing thing happened.

Both Ridley and the Broadwich back were over eager. They met heavily, and both went down. The ball moved about a couple of yards, and in a flash Nipper was upon it and racing along with it, with only the right-back and the goalie to beat.

A roar of excitement and amazement broke from the crowd at the sight of the youngster dashing off with the ball, only

two men in front of him, and a little crowd of panting men surging up behind him.

Nipper was panting, too, and his heart seemed to be leaping up into his mouth. He wished he had Dick Ridley to pass to. Where was Sims? He dared not look round. Only two or three minutes remained for play, and he knew that if the Rovers were to win he must score that goal. Somehow he must last out, though his breath was coming in painful, panting gasps, and his feet felt like lead.

The burly back was rushing upon him, another man was almost on his heels.

"Shoot!"

The shout seemed an hysterical scream. The one thing to do was to shoot. He steadied himself, and took a shot for the corner of the net. The back pulled himself up, someone crashed into Nipper, and down he went as the goalkeeper made a wild spring to the left.

"Goal!"

Panting on the ground like an expiring codfish, with what little breath he had left almost knocked out of him, Nipper heard that great roar, and now he did not care. He lay on his back blinking at the grey sky.

He had scored a goal in first-class football!

"Jolly well done! Are you all right?"

Dick Ridley was bending over him. All around was pandemonium.

"Quite—all—right!" panted Nipper.

Pheeeeeeeeeeep!

And at the long, shrill blast of the referee's whistle, the excited roar became louder and louder. The Rovers had won at home!

Nipper staggered to his feet. The field seemed to be going up and down, the stands and the crowded banks and terraces were a mere blur.

"Land of my fathers!" said a voice in his ear. "It was lucky Bert Barter dislocated his shoulder. Indeed, you are a promising player, I tell you."

"Don't you get cheerful, Dave, or we shall think that something's wrong!"

Dick Ridley's speech recalled Nipper to earth, and with the plaudits of the big football crowd ringing in his ears, he remembered the real reason for his presence in Northmouth. Remembered that Bert Barter had not dislocated his shoulder, but had been shot by Mr. Colton when visiting his house with two experts with sandbags; remembered Nelson Lee's sensational discovery in the car park, the discovery that practically proved that Mr. Minter, the manager of the Rovers, was involved in the attempted attack upon the director.

"Crumbs!" murmured the youngster to himself, as he went for his hot tub. "This is a giddy awful game; you can't trust anyone. You don't know who's behind this rum game."

He was feeling quite fit as he left the dressing-room, and in the corridor he met the manager and chairman. Stephen Langton, in a heavy belted overcoat and soft felt hat, did not look quite so hawk-like, but

Nipper was a little disconcerted by the penetrating stare of those strange dark eyes.

"You played an excellent game for us, Mr. Parr," said the flying chairman of the Rovers in his peculiar harsh voice. "Where have you played before?"

Instantly Nipper was on his guard. He and his chief were supposed to be in Northmouth on an ordnance survey. To mention St. Frank's would be to give away their secret, and the man beside the chairman—the man who had just given him his chance—was very much under suspicion.

"Oh, I've only played with junior teams. My surveying work doesn't give me much chance to get settled, you see."

"Where were you last?"

"London," said Nipper vaguely. "Excuse me, Mr. Nelson is waiting for me."

But as he hurried to join his chief, Nipper wished to goodness he ~~had not~~ scored that winning goal.

He had come into the limelight; he had so distinguished himself that the management of the Rovers would be bound to play him again. But had he, in doing so, aroused the suspicions of the men he and his chief were out to bring to justice?

(Look out for many startling developments in next week's stunning instalment. And, by the way, have you told your pals about this great serial? Do your Editor a favour by showing them this week's issue of the Old Paper.)

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More Stories by E. S. Brooks!

AS I write this Chat, I have before me a separate heap of letters, distinct from my other correspondence, from enthusiastic readers of the N.L. These letters are all written in the same strain; boiled down to hard facts, they say: "We want more yarns by Edwy Searles Brooks." Sensible lads and lassies! And their wants are easily supplied.

A story by Mr. Brooks appears every week in our companion paper, "The Popular," which comes out on Tuesdays. These yarns are about the early adventures of the St. Frank's characters, so they should have a special appeal to all N.L. readers.

Mr. Brooks also writes every week in "The Boys' Realm," which is published on Wednesdays. These stories—and they are long 'uns!—are about a famous football team known as the Blue Crusaders. The players are a cheery, likeable bunch of sportsmen, and they have many amazing and thrilling adventures, both on and off the footer field, which Mr. Brooks describes in his usual vivid and brilliant style.

So there's your opportunity, you readers who are asking for more yarns by Edwy Searles Brooks. Two opportunities, in fact! "The Popular" and "The Boys' Realm," both cost only twopence, and they're real good value for the money.

Dreams of Trouble.

Albert C. writes from Chorley to say he is troubled by bad dreams. Perhaps his best course will be to give supper a miss altogether, or, at least, to have a simple one. His dreams take the queerest form. At one time the hunt is up, and he is being chased by a mighty animal as large as a row of villas, at others he finds himself travelling on the roof of a railway carriage, and is in dread of being scraped off his perch every time the express dives into a tunnel.

Most likely Albert does not get enough exercise, but anyway there is no need for

him to worry. Some people prefer to dream. They go on their travels in dreamland, and find the experience far more thrilling than what they meet in the ordinary way. It is a matter of taste.

Dreams, they say, go by contraries. This must be disappointing to the fellow who dreams that he has come into a huge fortune and is doing the generous to everybody he knows. That is a dream to tell before breakfast so as to give it a chance of coming true. The amazing thing about many dreams is the photographic exactitude of the pictures you see in this nocturnal sort of cinema show. People you have not spotted for donkey's years turn up as large as life with every peculiarity definitely marked.

Too Much Consideration.

An odd letter reaches me from Glasgow, and after reading it I felt that there is such a thing as overdone kindness. A chum of the writer seems to be shaping badly. From the account given he is a terrific bounder, and this is because people have been too gentle with him. They said he must not have his feelings hurt! The consequence is that he has been permitted to bully and bounce as if he were the only pebble on the beach.

This fellow has made mincemeat of other folks' susceptibilities; he is quite great at sarcasm, and is never more happy than when he can "catch out" somebody. But he, being a rather handsome individual and spoiled all the time, must never be ruffled, dear no! All jolly easy for him, but this kind of thing won't go on, you can bet your boots. There will come a rough and rude awakening, and the conceited joker will get it in the neck. He can bank on that, and it's a pity his real friends have not saved him the big jolt in store by prudent treatment. For who in the world has any use for the cocky bounder, with his self-assertive, masterful ways, and his assumption of knowing all there is to know?

THE REMOVE CRUSADER!

(Continued from page 35.)

work as the barge drove hard against the side of the other vessel. With her engines still going to full pressure, and with the tiller hard over, the *Gladys* was pushing both herself and the houseboat out of the current—off the main stream and into the flooded zone.

For a moment it seemed that she would not succeed. They were near the bridge now, horribly near. Failure in this plan would mean disaster for both vessels.

"We're going—we're getting out of the grip of the river!" said Corcoran calmly. "Good man, Nipper!"

"Hurrah!"

Everybody was shouting in wild excitement. With a last tremendous effort the *Gladys* forced herself and her charge out of the Stowe's clutches, and the two craft went charging towards the rising ground near the bridge, but now completely out of the actual river.

"Hold tight!" bellowed Handforth.

Both the barge and the houseboat struck bottom at the same moment. There was no crash, as many had expected, for the ground rose gently and it served as a brake. There was a shock, a loud creaking of wood, and then a moment later both vessels came to a full stop. The barge was in no way harmed, and even the houseboat had come off nearly scot-free.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "That was a near thing, you chaps!"

"It was marvellous!" panted Reggie Pitt. "Nipper, old man, you deserve a dozen medals for this!"

"Rats! I deserve to be kicked!" retorted Nipper. "We got the Fourth-Formers into that fix, so it was up to us to get them out."

The air was full of cheering, and the Fourth-Formers, now that the danger was over, rapidly recovered themselves.

"Corcoran, old man, I hope you'll forgive us!" said Nipper, leaping on to the houseboat's deck. "You, too, Boots, and all the rest of you. We didn't mean to—"

"Ass!" said Lionel Corcoran. "There's no need to tell us that. You've saved us from a nasty mess, and we're so pleased that we're ready to forgive anything."

"Yes, rather!" chorused the Fourth-Formers.

"How did the match go?" asked Corcoran, with his usual supreme coolness.

But nobody wanted to talk about the match then. The situation had been saved, and that was all that mattered.

As for Captain Joshua Pepper, he behaved like a brick. He approved heartily of what the juniors had done, and as his barge had come to no harm everybody was well pleased.

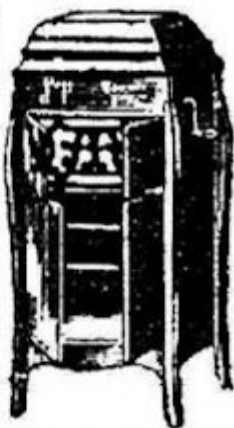
But it would be many a day before the Remove and the Fourth forgot those tense, dramatic moments when tragedy had seemed so near!

THE END.

(A jolly fine yarn, that, eh? Next week's is just as good, chums, so be sure not to miss reading it. It's entitled, "The Prefect's Secret!" and Nipper, Corcoran and Handforth are well to the fore. Simon Kenmore, the rascally Sixth-Former, is also introduced.)

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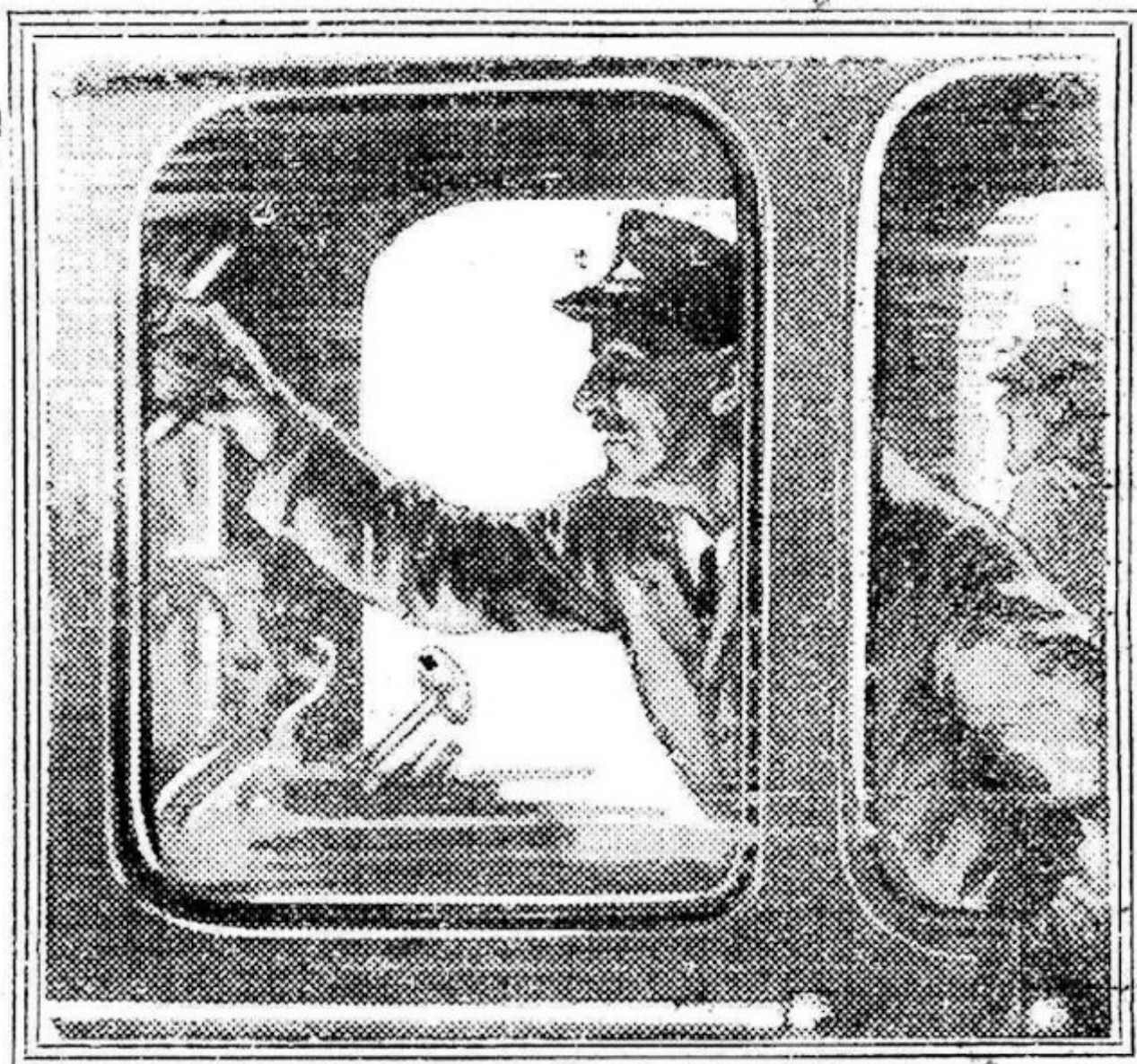
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Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/- per annum; 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited.



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