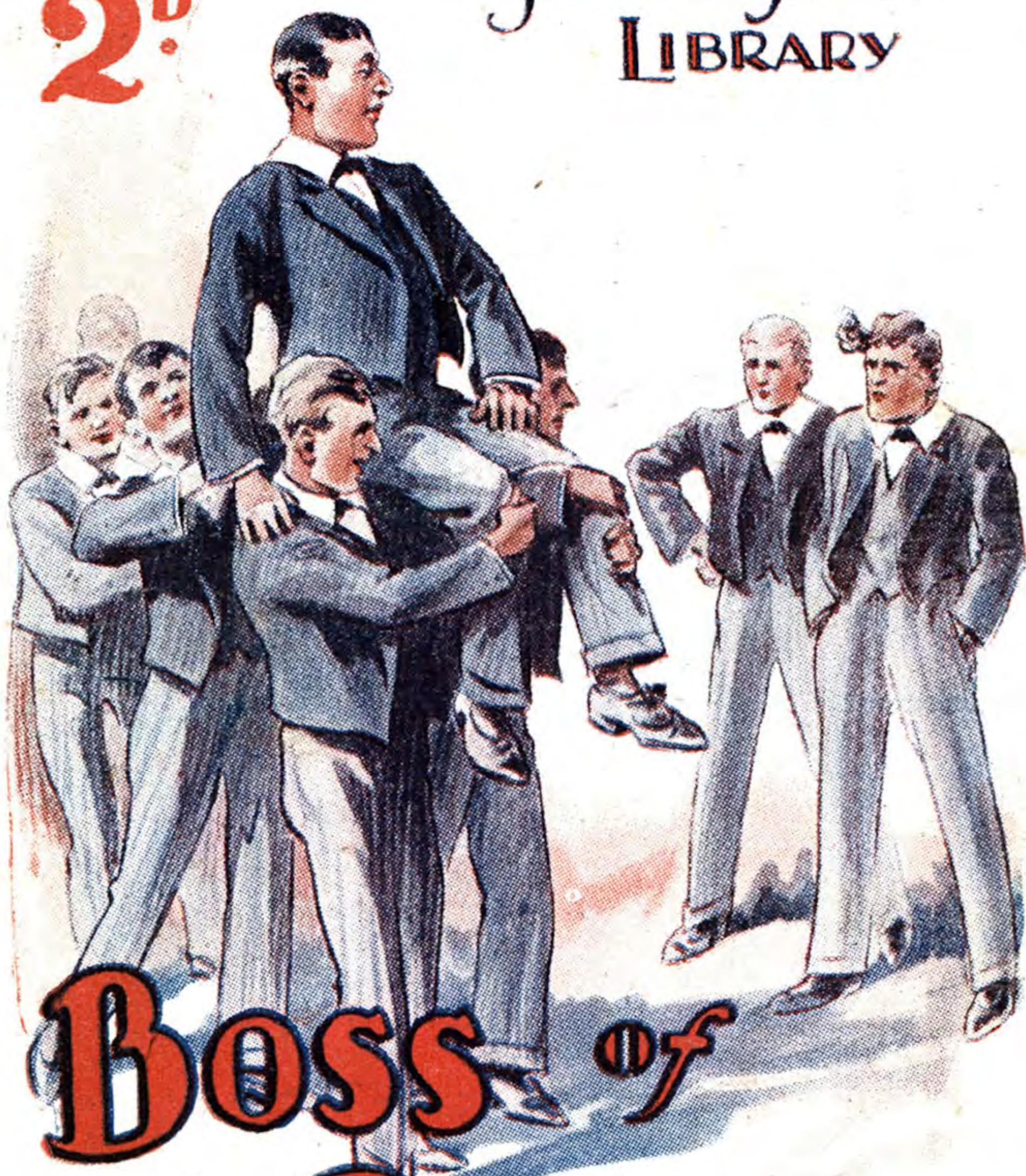


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BOSS of the REMOVE!

A powerful long complete yarn of schoolboy adventure
featuring the chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 154.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 13th, 1929.



Claude Gore-Pearce had stated he was going to start a new Movement at St. Frank's. As it happened, Edward Oswald Handforth started it for him—by seizing him by the arm, shoving his knee into the small of his back, and then shooting him forward. Oh yes, Gore-Pearce's new Movement was a great success!

BOSS of the REMOVE !



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Gore-Pearce may be a cad, but he's also an opportunist. With the advent of Dr. Nicholls into St. Frank's he sees the chance of achieving one of his ambitions—of becoming something big in the Remove. How he seizes that chance, and how his ambition is to a very large extent attained, is told in this stunning complete yarn.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

The Sneaks' Paradise!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE, of the Remove, leaned elegantly against the great stone gate-post, and looked thoughtfully down the lane. Yet it was obvious that his gaze was not fixed upon anything in particular. He was deep in thought. The gateway was further ornamented by the lounging, dandified figures of Gulliver and Bell.

"This evening, I think," said Gore-Pearce slowly.

"What about it?" asked Gulliver.

"Better start the ball rolling by a notice," continued the millionaire's son. "Something that'll make 'em sit up. Something they can't resist."

The far-away expression died from his eyes as he noticed that Bell was adjusting his tie. Bell was also pulling his waistcoat down, so that any possible creases should be eradicated. Finally, Bell was passing a hand over his well-brushed hair.

"What the deuce——" began Gore-Pearce.

He glanced round, following the direction of Bell's gaze. Then he understood. Four or five dainty figures were coming up the lane. Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, were practically within earshot, and Gore-Pearce had been so preoccupied that he had not noticed them. He gave Bell a severe glance.

"Why didn't you give us the wink?" he said.

"You've got eyes, haven't you?" retorted Bell.

Gore-Pearce and Gulliver followed Bell's example, and made certain that their neckties were straight, and that they were otherwise looking their best. It would have been unkind for anybody to come along and tell the cads of Study A that no matter how dandified their attire, how scrupulous their neatness, they would never be anything much to look at.

And yet they were foolish enough to imagine that they could make a hit with the Moor View girls. Times without number they had been coldly but politely rebuffed; yet they came up again, hoping for the best.

"Evening!" said Claude, with a beaming smile, as he raised his cap.

"Evening!" echoed Gulliver and Bell.

The girls could not exactly cut them dead. They acknowledged the salute, and prepared to stroll on. Irene Manners was arm-in-arm with Marjorie Temple and Doris Berkeley, her own particular chums. Mary Summers and Winnie Pitt were just in the rear. The girls were looking quite charming, in spite of the drawbacks of their school costume, which precluded such joys as silk stockings and *crêpe-de-chine* frocks.

"I say, there's no hurry, is there?" asked Gore-Pearce complainingly. "Can't you girls stop for a minute or two, and have a chat?"

"Awfully sorry, but I'm afraid we can't," replied Irene coldly.

"Why not? You don't seem to be in a hurry."

"We're not," said Doris pointedly.

"Then why can't you stop?"

"Well, there are several reasons—three, to be exact," said Doris, as she glanced from Gore-Pearce to Gulliver and Bell. "But do you really want us to say what these reasons are?"

Gore-Pearce wasn't a fool. The girl's glance had been sufficient; he knew very well that she meant that her "reasons" were himself and his two pals. He had the decency to flush slightly.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "You don't seem to understand that I shall soon be the most important fellow in the Remove—boss of the Remove, in fact. I'm going to be the leader of a great new movement——"

"By George!" came a bellow.

Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove, charged across the Triangle at full speed. Church and McClure, his faithful chums, were at his heels. All three of them were dressed for football, with light overcoats as an addition. They had just come off Little Side, after practice.

"Hallo, girls!" said Handforth briskly. "These fatheads bothering you?"

"Not much," replied Irene, with a smile.

"We were getting quite interested," put in Doris. "Gore-Pearce was telling us that he's going to start a new movement."

Handforth nodded.

"I don't know how he managed it, but for once he spoke the truth," he said promptly. "He certainly is going to start a new movement. Or, at least, I'm going to start it for him."

He seized Claude by the arm, shoved his knee into the small of Claude's back, and Claude immediately started his new movement—by shooting forward like a stone from a catapult.

"You silly fool!" roared Gore-Pearce. "What the——"

"Out of it!" hissed Handforth. "Your face gives me a pain, so what can it give

these girls? Clear off before you get hurt! It's like your nerve to foist your beastly company upon these young ladies!"

"You confounded idiot!" roared Gore-Pearce. "I was standing in the gateway when they came up! Take your hands off me, Handforth! You know what to expect if you forget yourself, don't you?"

Handforth breathed hard.

"Are you threatening to sneak?" he demanded thickly. "If I punch you in the eye, and give you a thick ear, and flatten your nose, will you have the nerve to report me?"

"I shall do my duty!" said Claude fiercely.

Handforth gave a bitter laugh.

"Nowadays, it seems that doing one's duty and sneaking are the same thing!" he said.

"Clear off! If you don't, I shall forget myself—whether you do your rotten duty or not!"

"You can go and eat coke!" snapped Gore-Pearce.

Handforth's fists clenched, and it was only in the nick of time that Church and McClure dragged him back. Fortunately, Gore-Pearce took the hint, and since it was impossible to have any sort of chat with the girls while Handforth was present he lounged off. Gulliver and Bell had already gone.

Gore-Pearce's new movement was a great success!

"THAT'S better!" said Handforth, ostentatiously rubbing his hands in the gravel and wiping them on his overcoat.

"What did you do that for?" asked Irene wonderingly.

"To clean 'em," explained Handforth. "I've been touching Gore-Pearce."

"Is he really as bad as all that?"

"Bad!" said Handforth. "He's worse! You don't know how bad he is! He's not just an ordinary cad. This term he's developed into a sneak—a tell-tale—a giddy informer!"

Handforth spoke feelingly, and his eyes were flashing with indignation. In the meantime Nipper had strolled up, with Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and Travers and one or two others.

"We spotted you, so we thought we'd come along to invite you to tea," said Nipper cheerily.

Handforth started.

"Clear off!" he said. "I've already invited 'em to tea."

"I don't remember it," murmured Irene.

"Eh? Oh, well, I was thinking about it," said Handforth hastily. "It was on the tip of my tongue——"

"It won't wash, old man," said Nipper gently. "I was first."

"You needn't argue, because we can't stay, in any case," chuckled Mary Summers. "We'd love to have tea with you boys, but there's something special on at our school this evening, and our passes expire within ten minutes."

"What rot!" said Handforth, disappointed. "I mean, hard lines!"

"What's that you were saying about Gore-Pearce?" asked Irene.

"You're not interested in him, are you?"

"No, silly!" laughed Irene. "But you were so furious, and so red in the face, that —"

"I always get like that when I talk about Gore-Pearce," said Handforth gruffly. "Haven't you heard the news? Hasn't anybody told you what's been happening this term?"

"But the term's only just started," said Irene.

"We're having a fine old time with our new Head!" said Edward Oswald, breathing hard. "I'm jiggered if I know why the governors appoint these freaks!"

"Is he really a freak?" asked Mary. "Isn't he the man you boys put on the back of a cow on Easter Monday?"

The juniors winced.

"Don't talk about Easter Monday, for goodness' sake!" said Nipper. "We've been trying to forget it ever since!"

The Moor View girls chuckled.

"And we've been trying to remember it," said Irene blandly. "In fact, we've put up a sort of memorial in our Common-room—'In Memory of the St. Frank's Remove; Spoofed and Diddled and Extinguished by Us on April the First!' Not exactly those words, but something to that effect."

There was more laughter, and Nipper looked rueful.

"All right—you can smile," he said. "One of these days we'll get our own back on you girls. But we're too busy just at present. We've got troubles enough within our own walls."

"We are outside troubles, I suppose?" asked Mary.

"Exactly," nodded Nipper. "The way you spoofed us on All Fools' Day was awful. We never knew that

girls could be so tricky. But it's taught us a lesson, and in future we shall be wary of you."

"We've been expecting you to retaliate ever since the term started," said Irene. "What's the matter with you? Haven't you any ideas? Or is this 'inside trouble' so really bad?"

"It's the Head!" explained Nipper frowning. "Dr. Morrison Nicholls. The trouble is, he's such a really decent sort. He's generous, in a way, and there's no doubt that he's a thorough gentleman—and a learned scholar, too."

"Is that what you call a trouble?"

"But he's got cranky ideas," said Nipper. "He's trying to bring a new order of things into force. Says that there's no such thing as sneaking."

"Oh, but that's silly!" ejaculated Doris.

"It's crazy!" said Handforth fiercely. "My only hat! He's turned St. Frank's into a Sneaks' Paradise—that's what he's done!"

IRENE & CO. listened with interest while their boy friends went into a few details concerning Dr. Morrison Nicholls' extraordinary campaign.

The new Head was sincere in his beliefs. He maintained that it was the duty of any and every boy to report the frequent irregularities that continually went on in a big Public School.

It was Dr. Nicholls' idea that these breaches of the school rules would be stamped out if the boys themselves helped in the good cause. The irregularities were those which the masters or prefects never saw. A hundred and one transgressions of school rules took place every week—perhaps every day. Nobody ever thought of saying anything about them, and they were mostly done behind the backs of those in authority.

If the boys co-operated with the headmaster and reported the culprits the evil would be stamped out. Unfortunately, the school regarded such a thing as sneaking.

"It's all very well for the Head to tell us that we're doing our duty, but we know different!" said Handforth fiercely. "He can urge us to become sneaks all he likes—but we're not having any!"

"Then why worry?" asked Irene. "The thing has failed, hasn't it?"

"It's failed with most of us," said Nipper. "That's just the point. All the recognised sneaks are having the time of their lives. They're in their element—and their influence is spreading. Weak-kneed fellows who were just nonentities before are now blossoming out into dangerous informers. They've soaked in this cranky doctrine, and they've got a good argument, too. If the Head says it's right, they consider that they're on safe ground."

The girls nodded understandingly. They themselves had no use for sneaks, and they were able to realise what an unenviable time their boy chums must be having under the new headmaster's rule.

"Poor chaps!" said Doris sympathetically. "You are in a mess!"



CHAPTER 2.

Backing Up Gore-Pearce!

HANDFORTH sighed. "It's worse than that—if you only knew," he said feelingly.

But Edward Oswald could never be secretive. He intended that remark to be cryptic, but he rather spoilt it by tenderly passing a hand over his rear at the same time, and then inspecting the palms of his hands, which were puffy.

"Did it hurt much?" asked Irene tenderly.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "How—how did you know—I mean—"

"I'm afraid you're frightfully sore, Ted," said the girl.

"Lots of us are sore," said Nipper bluntly. "We had the swishing of our lives a few days ago."

"You must have done something awfully bad," said Mary.

"Bad?" repeated Handforth. "We did nothing! Absolutely nothing! We only took Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell and slaughtered them!"

"And is that what you call nothing?" asked Irene politely.

"But they deserved it!" shouted Handforth. "We planned an ordinary jape on Corky & Co. of the East House, and those cads sneaked! We were caught red-handed, and although the Head went easy with us, we simply had to teach Gore-Pearce a lesson. Then he sneaked again!"

"With frightful and unmentionable results, eh?" said Doris, nodding. "Don't say any more. We can guess. I suppose the Head means to enforce his ideas? I expect you're afraid to touch the sneaks now, aren't you?"

"We're not afraid, but the game isn't worth the candle," said Nipper glumly. "As soon as we drop on one of these rotters, they streak to the Head and 'do their duty'! Some of us are already gated, and have had half-holidays cancelled. For our own sakes, we've got to be careful."

"I tell you, the place is a sneaks' paradise," insisted Handforth. "We're helpless! The Head's on the side of the rotters."

"And are all the other masters supporting him?"

"Well, they can't very well defy him, can they?" put in Travers. "It would be as much as their jobs were worth. But the cads are getting cunning. They know it's not much use sneaking to Form-masters or Housemasters, so they go straight to the Head."

"And this chap," said Handforth, pointing accusingly at Nipper, "is supposed to be the Form captain! The fellow with the ideas! And yet he can't think of any wheeze to put a stop to this rot!"

"Don't be so unreasonable, Ted," protested Mary. "How can Dick fight the Head?"

"If I were skipper, I'd do something!" said Handforth darkly.

Nipper grinned.

"I'm a reasonable chap," he said. "I'm willing to take any good ideas from anybody. Trot yours out, Handy. Imagine that you're skipper for a moment."

Handforth was done. He looked blank.

"I'll soon get ideas if I'm elected for the captaincy," he said, as a feeble get-out.

"It won't do, Ted," said Irene, shaking her head. "I don't see what you can do. It's hard lines on you fellows. Let's hope that the Head abandons this scheme. It can't do anything else but harm—I mean,

encouraging chaps to inform seems downright wicked."

"But Dr. Nicholls looks at it differently," said Nipper sadly. "In theory, the thing seems as easy as winking. Get the boys to co-operate, and there'll be no more breaches of rules. But in practice it's impossible. Half the breaches are innocent—trifles too small to bother about. We can't spend our lives in reporting each other. If we started it, we should become a school of spies, all watching one another."

"Can't you tell that to the Head?" asked Marjorie.

The Removites grinned.

"Might as well tell it to the marines!" said Nipper. "Besides, wild horses wouldn't drag these notions from Dr. Nicholls. He's got to find out for himself that the game is no good in practice—and while he's doing it, we're having a pretty bad time!"

THE girls, having duly expressed their sympathy, found it necessary to hurry on to their own school. The juniors went indoors for tea. It was a fine April evening, and they wanted to get out again before it was dark. Further football practice was indicated. The Remove was to meet the Fourth on the morrow—which would be a half-holiday.

But it is never quite wise to make outdoor plans in April. By the time tea was over, a hefty shower had rolled up, and rain was falling in torrents when a group of would-be footballers gathered in the Ancient House lobby.

"Rats!" said Nipper. "We're done!"

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "We're not going to take any notice of this sprinkle, are we?"

"It's a matter of opinion, old man," said Nipper gently. "It looks like a downpour to me—and you know the rules. No footer practice during hard rain. Somebody will report us if we go out and—"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth, clenching his fists. "Are we always going to be haunted by this rotten nightmare? Can't we have footer practice in peace?"

"We can have it in peace—but not in the rain," said Nipper. "Hallo! What's this? By Jove! Gather round, children!"

He had spotted something on the notice-board. It was very prominent—a double sheet of foolscap, affixed to the green baize with drawing-pins. The wording on it had apparently been executed with a paint-brush, using intensely black Indian ink.

NOTICE!

A meeting of the utmost importance to everybody in the Remove will be held in the Small Lecture Hall, at eight o'clock sharp. All cordially invited. Fail to come, and you'll miss something of vital importance. Speaker—CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE. Roll up! Support the New Movement!

(Signed) CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE.

"Nerve!" said Handforth hotly.

"Cheek!" said Church and McClure.

"The fellow means business, anyhow," remarked Nipper thoughtfully. "I rather think we ought to go to this meeting."

Handforth stared.

"What!" he protested. "Go to Gore-Pearce's rotten meeting? You're mad!"

"You don't mean it, Nipper?" said Watson. "Gore-Pearce is the worst cad of the lot! It would be idiotic to support him, even by attending his meeting. We ought to cut him dead!"

Nipper winked.

"But why?" he asked solemnly. "Why not attend this meeting and show Gore-Pearce that we're broad-minded?"

"Show him that we're dotty, you mean!" said Handforth tartly.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't give the fellow a chance," went on Nipper, waxing enthusiastic. "How do we know? He may have something important to say. I consider that the whole Remove ought to rally-round and attend his meeting in full force."

"You're rotting!" said Watson, staring.

"Am I?" said Nipper. "Anyhow, I think we ought to go to Gore-Pearce's meeting."

AND before long nearly everybody in the Remove had been advised by Nipper to "roll up" to Gore-Pearce's precious meeting. The fellows took it very seriously. They went about in clumps, and stood in groups, solemnly discussing the probable reason for Gore-Pearce's proposed gathering.

Claude himself was in Study A, and Gulliver and Bell were inclined to be sceptical. They had had very little faith in that notice, and they had still less faith in their leader's ability to gain the attention of the Remove.

"You can fool yourself if you like, but I'll bet there won't be a dozen fellows in the Lecture Hall at eight o'clock," said Gulliver. "You're dotty! You know thundering well that most of the chaps are Nipper's gang! They'll avoid the Lecture Hall like the plague!"

"Of course they will," agreed Bell.

Claude Gore-Pearce frowned.

"We'll see about that," he said sourly.

"Even if I only get half the Remove in, I shall be satisfied. I don't want Nipper's crowd, anyhow. All the better if they keep away."

Yet when he and his cronies sallied out they were astonished to find all sorts of eager inquiries fired at them. In the passages, in the lobby, in the Common-room, they were accosted by juniors who wanted to know what the speech would be about, and if Gore-Pearce would open the meeting promptly at eight.

It was evident, in fact, that an enormous amount of interest had been aroused. Gulliver and Bell were frankly astonished, and they said so.

"Rubbish!" said their leader. "It just shows you which way the wind is blowing, that's all. The fellows are beginning to realise that it's no good jibbing against the Head's ruling. They know that I'm the leading spirit in the new movement, and they're supporting me."

"Not yet," said Bell, shaking his head.

"Well, they're curious to know what I'm going to jaw about, anyhow," amended Claude. "After I've made my speech they'll support me right enough. And before long,



my lads, I shall be boss of the Remove!" he added smugly.

WHEN eight o'clock came, the small Lecture Hall was a place of animation and subdued excitement. Not only had the Ancient House Removites turned up in full force, but Reggie Pitt & Co., from the West House, had also rolled along. The enthusiasm was unbounded.

As eight o'clock boomed out, Gore-Pearce strode briskly on to the platform, flanked on either side by Gulliver and Bell. They appeared from a screen at the rear—a dramatic movement.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Gore-Pearce!"

"Speech! Speech!"

The Lecture Hall rang with lusty shouts, and Gore-Pearce found himself looking down upon the multitude. Eyes were eager, cheeks were flushed. Gore-Pearce responded at once. He had never expected such a reception as this. In fact, he had never expected that half this number would turn up. He expanded visibly, and he decided to take his time.

"I'm glad to see that you have had the common sense to show up in full force," he began. "It proves to me——"

"Hurrah!"

"Go ahead, Gore-Pearce!"

"It proves to me——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Shut up, you idiots, and let me speak!" roared Gore-Pearce. "It proves to me that you've got more sense than——"

He broke off as the hall was suddenly plunged into inky darkness. The lights failed with dramatic abruptness. A confused hubbub arose from the body of the hall. Everybody began shouting at once.

"Hi! What's the matter?" yelled Gore-Pearce. "Gulliver! Bell! Who's been monkeying with those switches?"

"Lights! Lights!" came Nipper's voice. "How can we listen to Gore-Pearce in the dark?"

"Never mind listening!" came Handforth's voice. "How can we aim properly? What do you think I brought these dud oranges for?"

"All keep your places!" shouted Nipper. "We don't want any confusion."

Gore-Pearce fumbled his way across to the switches, which were at the back of the platform. He collided with somebody in the inky darkness. Gulliver's voice came to him.

"Out of my way, idiot!" snapped Gore-Pearce, who was thoroughly disgusted with this early mishap. "Where are those rotten switches?"

"I tried to find 'em," retorted Gulliver, "but somebody biffed into me and— Ah, here we are! I've got 'em!"

Snap-snap-snap!

He turned them all on, and the place immediately became flooded with light again. Gore-Pearce breathed a sigh of relief and turned.

"I don't know who monkeyed with the switches, but it wasn't funny!" he said severely. "This speech of mine is an important— Eh? Why, what the— Oh, by gad!"

The Lecture Hall was utterly and absolutely empty!

CHAPTER 3.

The Reformers!

"**H**A, ha, ha!" An echo of laughter, hilarious and noisy, came to Gore-Pearce's ears from the corridor beyond the closed doors. The leader of Study A started, closed his eyes, opened them again, and stared harder than ever. It made no difference. Unquestionably the hall was empty. His wonderful audience had vanished.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter sounded more aggressive than ever, and Gore-Pearce, turning, found Gulliver and Bell grinning. They quickly controlled themselves when they found Gore-Pearce's glare upon them.

"Very funny, isn't it?" snarled Claude.

"Well, we told you what to expect," said Bell defensively. "I thought that meeting was too good to be true. They were fooling you, that's all!"

"They never meant to let you give a speech," said Gulliver.

Gore-Pearce breathed hard. In his conceit, he had imagined that he was already gaining great power in the Remove. He had been brought to earth with a thud. He could almost feel a physical shock.

"The spoofing rotters!" he panted savagely. "A fine trick to come here and switch the lights off, and steal away in the darkness! If they think it's humorous, I don't!"

But nobody cared what Gore-Pearce thought. Outside, in the passages, the Removites were yelling with laughter. They felt that they had treated Gore-Pearce's meeting as it deserved—with contempt. It was like his cheek, anyhow, to call a Remove meeting and to expect any kind of attention. Not only was he a recognised cad, but of late he had become that most contemptible of mortals—a sneak!

"**P**RETTY good, wasn't it?" grinned Nipper, in the Common-room.

"Pretty rotten!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "Who turned the lights out so quickly? I wanted to pelt Gore-Pearce with a few oranges and things. My pockets are in an awful mess now!"

"Well, it was your own doing, Handy," said Church. "We told you not to bring the oranges. Nipper's wheeze was to turn the lights out as soon as Gore-Pearce started. And you couldn't very well pelt him before he started, could you?"

Handforth grunted.

"In my opinion, the whole thing was a frost!" he said coldly.

But nobody agreed with him. It was felt that Nipper's plan had been the best. Diplomacy was needed nowadays. Pelting Gore-Pearce might have involved trouble later, for Claude would undoubtedly have sneaked; but he couldn't run to the Head with the complaint that somebody had turned the lights off. There was no offence against the rules in that.

The Common-room was crowded when Gore-Pearce himself arrived, soon afterwards. Quite a number of the West House fellows had remained. A yell of derision went up as the cads of Study A came in.

"Clear out of here, Gore-Pearce!"

"You made your speech, and we thought it rotten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It got too long, and it was wearisome!"

Gore-Pearce glared round him as he forced his way across the room. He had a perfect right there, and he knew that the juniors wouldn't be rash enough to throw him out. The penalty was liable to be heavy. Now that the sneaks had so much official backing, the ordinary methods of schoolboy justice were in abeyance.

"You'd better keep your hands off me!" said Gore-Pearce sourly. "Very funny, wasn't it? I suppose you thought it clever to turn out those lights and to clear off?"

"It wasn't clever—it was diplomatic," said Nipper. "We were so afraid of being bored, Gore-Pearce. And as we should have to pain you by leaving the meeting under your gaze, we chose the darkness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you're a fine lot of sportsmen," sneered Gore-Pearce. "You pretend to be so confoundedly sporty, and yet you refuse to give a fellow a decent hearing. Is that what you call playing the game?"

"We don't want to hear you, that's all," said Nipper bluntly.



Lionel Corcoran & Co. of the Fourth were standing no bunkum from Gore-Pearce and his Reformers. The latter found themselves hustled along the passage and were then literally kicked out of the East House.

"Is there any reason why you shouldn't hear me?"

"It may not be a good reason, but it's a reason," said Nipper. "We're fed up with you, Gore-Pearce. You're a sneak, and we bar sneaks. You ought to be thankful you're not sent to Coventry."

"You daren't send me!" retorted Gore-Pearce, with a laugh. "That would amount to persecution—and the Head's down on persecution. But we won't argue over the point. Why don't you want to hear my speech?"

"Try to make one!" said Handforth thickly.

"I won't make one unless you want it," said Claude, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "But you needn't think I haven't seen through your game, Nipper! You're afraid to let me address the Remove! You're captain, and you're jealous!"

"That's a good one!" said Nipper coolly. "Go on!"

"You're afraid!" jeered Gore-Pearce. "You know darned well that your pedestal is getting rocky! If you weren't pretty certain that my speech would rob you of your supporters, you'd give me a hearing."

This was rather too much. It was a challenge.

"You can speak your head off if you like," said Nipper curtly. "But that! If you've got those ideas, Gore-Pearce, I'll soon knock

them out of your head! Make your speech, and blow you! I'm not afraid of you!"

"Let's give him five minutes," suggested Reggie Pitt.

"Hear, hear!"

"The fellow's a cad, but give him a chance!"

"No fear!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Chuck him out!"

"But he's said that we're not sportsmen," explained Reggie.

"Oh, all right—five minutes, then!" said Handforth, with a glare at Gore-Pearce. "And if we're still conscious at the end of that time, we'll chuck him out then!"

Gore-Pearce looked round keenly. In spite of everything he had won a hearing for himself, and he had hardly expected this much. It was his taunts that had worked the oracle.

"I don't know that I can put the facts before you within five minutes, but I'll try," he said, as he leapt upon a chair. "Now, listen to me!"

And the crowded Common-room, impatient and angry, prepared to listen, much as they hated doing so.

"GENTLEMEN, you may think that my views are all wrong—"

"We don't think—we know!"

"But if you do hold those views, then you must also take sides against the

headmaster," said Gore-Pearce. "My views are his views. I'd better warn you that it's a pretty risky thing to be up against the Head."

"We're not slaves!" said Handforth. "It's a free country, and we're entitled to our own opinions."

"We're not talking about the country—we're talking about St. Frank's," said Gore-Pearce. "This is a community of our own—where we're more or less compelled to toe the line. What's the good of jibbing all the time? Where do you think you'll get to if you oppose the Head?"

"One minute!" said Handforth grimly.

"Don't look at your watch—listen to me!" roared Gore-Pearce, exasperated. "You've called me a sneak—you've been down on me because I gave some information to Dr. Nicholls. But what about the Head's instructions? I simply did as I was told—I obeyed orders. In fact, I did my duty."

"Do you always do your duty?" asked Nipper contemptuously. "You're a humbug, Gore-Pearce! It's like your nerve to stand up here and preach to us under the guise of making a speech! But we've promised to listen, so you'd better say as much as you can in the specified time."

There were many other shouts of impatience.

"I tell you it's the Head's wishes that we should adopt the new order of things," shouted Gore-Pearce. "We shall have to give in ultimately, so why not now? Why knock our heads against a brick wall?"

Handforth brightened up.

"That's a good idea," he said. "As soon as this drivel is over, we'll take Gore-Pearce to the nearest brick wall and knock his head against it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've called me a sneak—and I'm ready to agree that according to our old ideas I have been a sneak," roared Claude. "But tell me this! Was I a sneak last term?"

"Give the devil his due, you chaps—he wasn't a sneak last term!" said Nipper. "He was only a plain, ordinary cad!"

"I've only adopted sneaking now because the Head has officially approved of it," went on the millionaire's son fiercely. "If I do it alone, or with only one or two other fellows to back me up, there'll always be trouble, but if we all toe the line it'll be simple. That's the whole point!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Teddy Long enthusiastically.

"We must all do the same," said Claude, "and under those conditions there can't be any trouble. If I sneak against you, you can sneak against me. What will be the natural result?"

"Chaos!" said Nipper bluntly.

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Gore-Pearce hastily. "The natural result will be that nobody will sneak at all—for the simple reason that there won't be anything to sneak about. All breaking of the school rules will cease automatically. The Head's scheme is a good one—a sound one—and it's up to us to give it a trial. And, although it

seems a rotten thing to do, we've got to become informers—one against the other—in order to put it to the test."

"All right," said Handforth, with a sniff. "I'll go straight to the Head and report you for smoking in your study this evening!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up as Gore-Pearce recoiled under that palpable hit.

"Those who live in glass houses gather no moss!" said Handforth firmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean, a rolling stone shouldn't throw stones!" murmured Travers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter!" roared Handforth. "I'm just trying to show Gore-Pearce what a fool he is. It takes a fool to know a fool, and that's why I'm telling him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh? No, not exactly!" said Handforth hastily. "I mean, it takes a wise man to know a fool. And Gore-Pearce is absolutely off his chump! He breaks more rules than any of us—and if we all became sneaks he'd be sacked in about five minutes."

"His scheme doesn't seem to be so bad, then," said Pitt. "Why not adopt it for five minutes, and after that we shall be rid of him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talking about five minutes, his time's up!" said Handforth. "By George! He's gone three minutes over!"

"Confound the time!" bellowed Gore-Pearce, disliking the hilarity of the audience. "How can I make my speech if you keep interrupting?"

"We've got to pass the time somehow," said Nipper defensively.



"I'm here to announce the inauguration of the Reform Party!" went on Gore-Pearce impressively.

"The which?"

The Removites pricked up their ears. This was something they hadn't heard of yet, and the time-limit was overlooked.

"THE Reform Party is to be a special body under my presidency," said Gore-Pearce, seizing his advantage. "We Reformers must pledge ourselves to stick hard and fast by the Head's orders. The Reform Party is already in being. I'm the president, and Gulliver and Bell are vice-presidents."

"That's wrong, to begin with," said Nipper, shaking his head.

"Why is it?"

"You ought to be vice-president," said Nipper. "You know more about vice than those other chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't try to be funny!" snapped Claude. "I want everybody here to support me in this enterprise. I want you to join up—and to become Reformers. There are no fees—no rules or regulations. You've merely got to pledge yourselves to support me, and thereby to support the Head. Adopt me as your leader, and we'll soon show the rest of the school how things should be run."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gore-Pearce is right!"

"Rather!"

Nipper looked round wonderingly. Not only Gulliver and Bell were giving Gore-Pearce their support, but Hubbard and Long and one or two others were joining in. Owen major, of the West House, seemed quite enthusiastic, and even Doyle and Canham were inclined to approve.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper.

"Surprised, eh?" said Gore-Pearce gloatingly. "You didn't think I should get any support, did you? But these chaps are sensible! They know that the old regime is dead! It's time there was a new boss of the Remove—a new order of things—and I'm the fellow to support!"

CHAPTER 4.

One Up for the Reformers!

GORE-PEARCE'S speech ended at that point.

He was not allowed any further hearing, but he was thoroughly satisfied. At least a dozen fellows had ranged themselves under his banner. They had joined the Reform Party, and they had promised to do all in their power to carry on the good work and to rope in further recruits.

"I'm ashamed of you!" said Reggie Pitt, as he glared at Doyle, after they had got back into their own House. "What's the idea of supporting that cad?"

"I'm not supporting him—I'm supporting the Head," replied Doyle.

Many of the other juniors were thinking in the same strain. They had come to the conclusion that if the Head wanted sneaking, it must be all right. They tried to convince themselves that their old notions of sneaking were all wrong.

"What's the good of jibbing?" argued Merrell, of the Fourth, in the East House. "We all ought to join Gore-Pearce's Reform Party. If we don't, we shall be open to unfair treatment. They can sneak against us, and we can't sneak against them. The only sensible thing is for us all to become sneaks, and then we shall all have the same power."

On the face of it, it seemed a sound argument, and it convinced many of the hesitating juniors. It was perfectly true that if they all became sneaks they would all have a similar "pull."

As things were, the Reformers had all the advantage. It was their avowed policy to "do their duty," and that phrase of the Head's was becoming a very powerful weapon in the hands of Gore-Pearce's supporters. The Old Timers, on the other hand, were prohibited, by their code, from sneaking on any point whatsoever, no matter how trivial or how serious. They barred sneaking, and for the sake of their principles they would suffer rather than inform.

This, as Gore-Pearce cunningly explained to his growing followers, gave the Reformers a tremendous advantage. For the headmaster was with them heart and soul, and would approve of anything they might do. The disease was spreading rapidly—so rapidly that Nipper became uneasy!

BY the next morning there were scores of Removites and Fourth-Formers in the Reform Party, and Gore-Pearce was triumphant. Sneaking was becoming so commonplace that it was already regarded as the right thing to be done. It was astonishing how quickly the nonentities had changed their views. Under official sanction, they were ready to jettison the code that had been instilled into them ever since they had been in the old school.

And it was Dr. Nicholls' influence, all the time, that brought about this effect. The Reformers argued that if the Head led the way, it was up to them to follow. Where was the sense in opposing the Head? The thing must be right, or he wouldn't advise its adoption.

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Handforth blankly, as he and a few others chatted on the Ancient House steps, after breakfast.

"Nothing!" said Nipper.

"And you call yourself skipper?"

"The more we do, the more we shall drive the chaps into joining the Reform Party," said Nipper. "Leave them alone, and they'll soon collapse. It's only a fever—and all fevers burn themselves out."

"That's a dotty way of looking at it!" grunted Handforth.

"Most of the masters and prefects are against it," continued Nipper. "Pycraft's about the only exception. The others are taking precious little notice of the sneaks."

This was true enough. The masters and prefects, in the main, extended no sympathy to those fellows who felt impelled to "do their duty." Impositions were inflicted upon the culprits who were reported; but these impositions were generally so insignificant as to be farcical. The Head's system was coming into force, but it meant nothing.

There was to be football that afternoon—Remove versus Fourth. The cricket

season was near at hand, and football was almost on its last legs.

However, Lionel Corcoran, the energetic leader of the Fourth, was very keen on this game. Not so long ago the Fourth had been unable to field a football team worthy of the name, but Corky was now convinced that he had got his men into such good shape that they would not only give the Remove Eleven a good game, but beat it.

Unfortunately, a snag occurred.

IT was Gore-Pearce's fault. He, supported by half a dozen other Removites, invaded the East House on a roping-in campaign. Merrell, of Study No. 15, had announced that many fellows were ready to join the Reformers, so Gore-Pearce went over to strike while the iron was hot.

But Corky & Co. struck first!

Corcoran and Armstrong and Griffiths and a few others happened to be racing along the passage when they met the Removites. The two groups came to a standstill.

"Well?" said Corky. "How did you worms get in? I didn't know there were any cracks in the floor!"

"Don't be an ass, Corcoran," said Gore-Pearce. "Stand out of the way! We've come here to—"

"Stir up mischief—eh?" said Corky grimly. "You've come to the wrong shop, my lad! We're a bit particular in this House. We don't stand insects here! You can clear out!"

"Look here—"

"Clear out!" thundered Corky. "The whole gang of you! My hat! Things have come to a pretty pass, I must say! Are you going to shift, or shall we chuck you out on your necks?"

Gore-Pearce laughed.

"Better not try it!" he said unpleasantly. "We're protected."

"Are you? Don't be too sure!"

"The Head's orders are plain," said Gore-Pearce. "If there's any persecution—"

"Persecution be hanged!" roared Corky. "You've no right in this House if you've come to stir up trouble. And we're going to chuck you out. Come on, you chaps! Lend a hand!"

Gore-Pearce & Co. were chucked out.

There was nothing gentle about that operation, either. The cads were hustled down the passage, they were hurled through the lobby, and they were literally pitched down the East House steps. They picked themselves up, torn, battered, and bruised.

"And keep out!" said Corcoran breathlessly.

"Wait!" snarled Gore-Pearce, struggling to his feet. "By gad! Just you wait!"

"Good gracious! What is all this?"

Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Fourth, raced out of the open doorway. He had been drawn from his lair by the sound of the commotion, and he had arrived with a cane.

"It's nothing, sir," growled Corky. "These fellows came here to stir up trouble, so we threw them out."

Mr. Pycraft looked suspicious. He had no love for Corky and his friends. Mr. Pycraft was more inclined to favour the wasters.

"Indeed!" he said sharply. "I regret, Corcoran, that I cannot accept your statement. It appears to me that you have treated these boys with gross roughness. Gore-Pearce, what have you to say?"

"It is my duty to report these fellows to you, sir," said Gore-Pearce, with assumed dignity. "We entered this House peacefully, our only object being to influence the Fourth-Formers to join our Reform Party."

"That's it," said Armstrong. "To stir up trouble."

"If these fellows like to regard it as stirring up trouble, sir, I'll leave you to form your own opinion," said Gore-Pearce. "But I think you know that we are only carrying out Dr. Nicholls' wishes."

"Quite so—quite so!" said Mr. Pycraft promptly. "If these boys actually came into this House on such a mission, Corcoran, your treatment of them was a palpable breach of the rules. You know perfectly well that brawls are not allowed."

"But it wasn't a brawl, sir!" protested Corcoran indignantly.

"Did you commence the hostilities?"

"Well, yes, sir, but—"

"Since you have made that admission, Corcoran, there is no need for you to say any more," snapped Mr. Pycraft. "These Remove boys made a peaceful entry, and I can see, with my own eyes, how brutal that attack was. You will be detained for the afternoon!"

Corcoran looked blank.

"All of us, sir?" he burst out. "You mean Armstrong and Griffith and Freeman and—"

"You are all equally guilty," broke in Mr. Pycraft. "You will report to me in the class-room immediately after luncheon. I, too, am desirous of carrying out the headmaster's wishes. That is enough! Go!"

"But we've got a football match on this afternoon, sir!" protested Corky.

"Your football match must be abandoned!" snapped the Form-master.

IT'S no good—we're dished!" said Corcoran hopelessly.

He was talking to Nipper, and morning lessons were over. More than once Corcoran had urged Mr. Pycraft to see reason, but the Form-master was obstinate. Moreover, it afforded him a certain amount of pleasure to ruin the Fourth Form's football match.

"We're not blaming you, old man," said Nipper. "You did the right thing in chucking Gore-Pearce out, and it's just your bad luck that Pycraft should butt in. Hard lines!"

"This sneaking is getting too awful for words," said Lionel fiercely. "It's—it's in—"

tolerable! Can't we do something? Can't we join forces and fight this rotten Reform Party? It's getting too powerful!"

"The only thing is to join it, and then it'll die of its own folly," said Nipper. "But we shan't do that. A few of us, I hope, will be strong enough to stick to a decent code."

"Rather!" said Handforth stoutly. "They'll never make me a sneak!"

"Isn't there some other way?" asked Corky. "Surely we can devise some wheeze that'll put a spoke in Gore-Pearce's wheel?"

There was a dreamy look in Nipper's eyes.

"There's something stirring at the back of my mind," he admitted. "Don't ask me what it is, because I don't know myself yet. I've got to think it out. But we can smash these Reformers—and, by Jove, we will! However, it won't do any harm to let them think they've got the upper hand."

"Come on!" urged Handforth. "What's your idea?"

But Nipper refused to be drawn.

"Wait till I've got it clearer," he said. "In the meantime, we'd better postpone this match, Corky. Half your best men are out of the team. We'll play it to-morrow afternoon, immediately after lessons."

"It might be pouring with rain," said Corcoran glumly. "It's going to be a glorious afternoon to-day, and——"

He broke off as Freeman, of the Fourth, came dashing up.

"Good news!" gasped Freeman.

"Has old Pycraft let us off?" asked Corky eagerly.

"Draw it mild!" protested Freeman. "This isn't the age of miracles. But old Pycraft has been called away suddenly. Didn't you see him go out in a hurry ten minutes ago?"

"Yes; but I expect he'll soon be back—he'll be back in time to watch over us in the class-room this afternoon, anyhow."

"That's where you're wrong," grinned Freeman. "He's gone to London—won't be back until the last train. I heard it officially from Payne of the Sixth. Payne's been told to deputise for Pycraft. He'll be in charge of us during detention."

Lionel Corcoran grinned.

"Nipper, old son, you can take it for certain that we shall play this match!" he said calmly. "Payne is the one ray of sunshine amongst our seniors! If we can't wangle a get-out, you can call me a Hot-tentot!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Wangling of Payne!

"**L**OVELY afternoon, Payne!"

"It's not so bad," admitted Payne.

"Beastly to be stuck indoors until tea-time!"

"Well, that's your own fault," said Payne.

The Fourth-Form class-room was looking empty and drab. Only a few juniors sat in

their places, and Payne, the prefect, was trying to make himself comfortable at Mr. Pycraft's desk. Outside, the spring afternoon was sunny, and the bright sunbeams were slanting alluringly through the windows.

Charles Payne had come well prepared.

First of all, he had no less than three books. If one proved dull, he was armed with the other two. The desk in front of him was more or less littered with various items of diet. There was a box of chocolates, a small tin of biscuits, a couple of apples, sundry oranges, and a whole bunch of bananas.

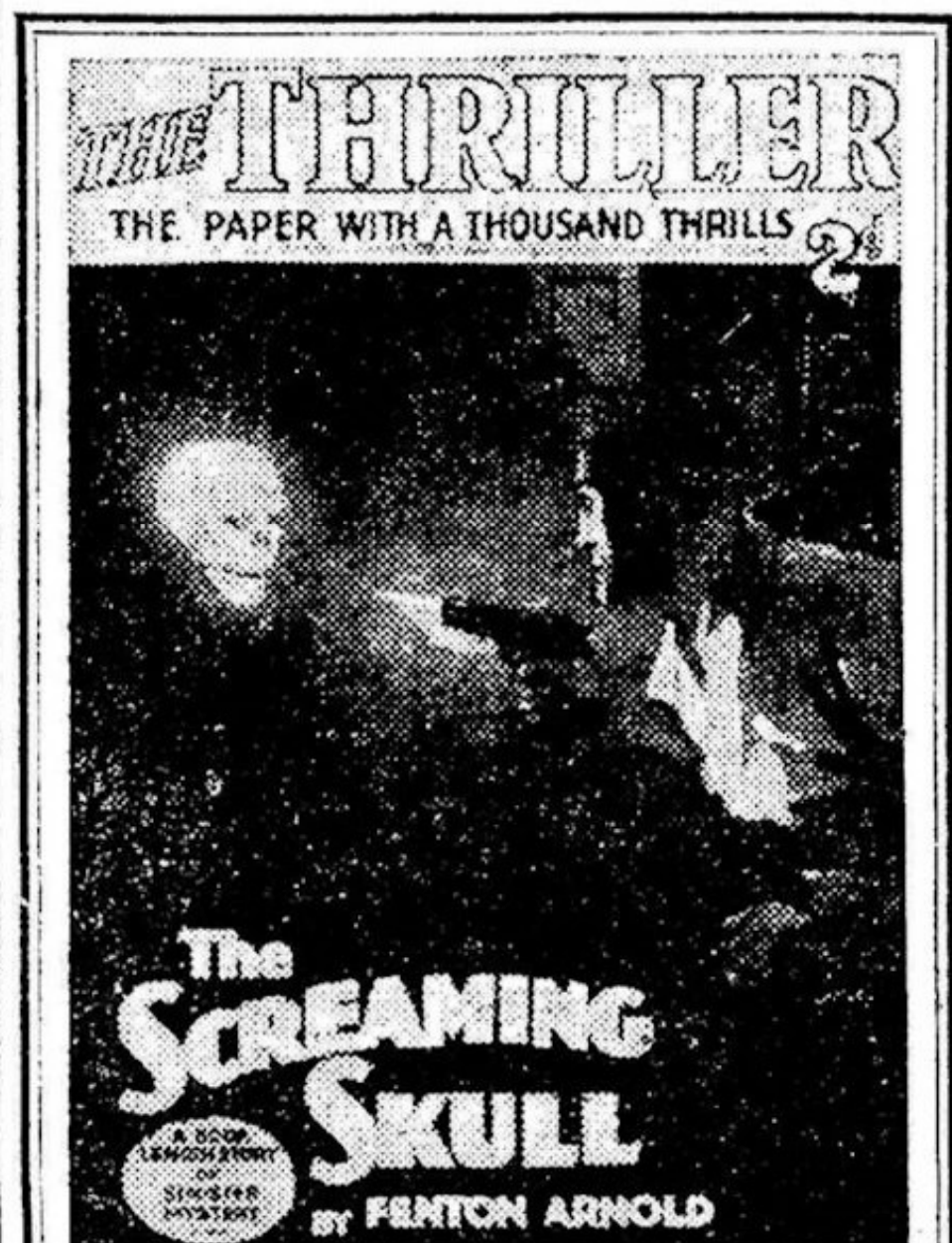
The detained Fourth-Formers had thought at first that Payne was starting the afternoon's proceedings by giving his charges a feed, but it appeared that all these edibles were intended for Payne's own consumption, to fortify him in his arduous task.

Payne was a very stout senior. He was popular with everybody, and he had never been known to show any real anger. Nothing seemed to disturb his calm equanimity.

"Glorious afternoon for footer, Payne," said Corky suggestively.

Payne thoughtfully peeled a banana.

"Better for cricket," he said, glancing out of the window.



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"Good luck!" said Armstrong as Payne took a bite.

"None of these facetious remarks!" growled the prefect, with his mouth full. "You kids aren't here to watch me eat, are you?"

"Didn't you have your lunch?" asked Corky, fascinated.

"Get on with that work!" retorted Payne severely. "Never mind if I had my lunch or not. Pycraft told me to watch over you kids, and I'm booked here for the whole afternoon. How do you expect me to live through it unless I have something to keep my strength up?"

"You won't need much strength to look after us," said Lionel Corcoran. "We won't give you any trouble, Payne. By the way, I suppose you know why we're here?" he added, as an afterthought.

"How should I know why?" said the fat senior. "I suppose you did something to upset Pycraft, and this is the result. It ought to be a lesson to you kids not to monkey about."

He cast his eye over them in a stern sort of way, and he noticed for the first time that the Fourth-Formers were dressed ready for football, with ordinary lounge jackets to give them an appearance of being prepared for the business in hand.

"What's the idea of this?" he went on. "You kids are in footer togs!"

"We had a match planned for this afternoon," sighed Armstrong.

"But you knew that you were going to be detained, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then what did you get into your playing things for?"

"Oh, they're nice and comfortable," said Corcoran casually. "It doesn't make any difference to you, does it, Payne?"

"I suppose not," said the prefect. "Well, that's enough of this jawing. How do you expect me to read my book—I mean, how do you expect to get on with your work if you spend your time in jabbering? Carry on with that history."

Payne had selected history as the subject because he was less liable to be interrupted. He reckoned that the juniors would read up their subject in peace, and then the latter part of the afternoon would be spent in exercise-book work.

"Just a minute, before we start," said Corky. "I don't know whether Pycraft told you about this detention, but it's a bit thick. This is what we get for doing the right thing. Pycraft's a vindictive beast."

"Very likely. But get on with that work."

"He detained us because we chucked Gore-Pearce out of the East House!"

"You ought to be more careful," said Payne. "I entirely approve of Gore-Pearce being chucked out, but why do you do it in front of Pycraft? Perhaps this'll teach you to be more careful."

"He wasn't there when we started," replied Corcoran. "In fact, if Gore-Pearce

hadn't sneaked, he couldn't have taken any action."

Payne paused in the act of selecting a chocolate.

"What's that?" he said, frowning. "Do you mean to say that you kids are detained because of Gore-Pearce's sneaking?"

"Of course," chorused the victims.

"If I had known, I wouldn't have taken on the job," said Payne, with a snort. "Pycraft said you had done something extra bad, and he warned me to keep a sharp eye on you."

"Gore-Pearce came in with a crowd of his rotten Reformers," explained Corcoran. "Trying to influence some of our fellows, Payne! Well, of course, we chucked 'em out. Gore-Pearce sneaked to Pycraft, and this is the result."

Payne leaned forward over the desk.

"On the strict Q.T., I'm a bit sorry for you kids," he said confidentially. "You can go easy with that history if you like. I shan't mind."

"It's a pity we can't play our match against the Remove," said Corcoran suggestively.

"Are you going to support this beastly New Movement, Payne, by keeping us in?"

"Support it?" said Payne. "I detest it."

"Then why not be a real sportsman, and go to the cupboard for something?"

"Why don't I do what?"

"Go to the cupboard for something," said Corcoran. "Or, if you like, you can fall asleep for five minutes. It doesn't matter much what you do as long as you take your eyes off us for a convenient minute or two."

"Be a sportsman, Payne!" urged the others.

Payne looked doubtful. He thought the thing over. He consumed a couple of chocolates, and looked abstractedly outside. It was certainly a glorious afternoon. There was no fun in having to stay in the Form-room.

"It's Mrs. Hake's afternoon for hot beef-pies," said Corcoran casually.

Payne started.

"By Jove, so it is!" he ejaculated. "I'd forgotten that."

"She only has 'em on Wednesday and Saturday," said Griffith. "and she's generally sold out by about half-past three."

This was not precisely in accordance with fact, for Mrs. Hake usually had plenty of her famous beef-pies in readiness for the tea-time rush. Payne had a weakness for these delicacies.

"Where's the ink?" he asked, looking up.

"In the cupboard!" answered his charges, in one voice.

Payne knew it was in the cupboard, and when he went to the cupboard it stared him in the face. But he apparently couldn't find it. He looked everywhere but on the right shelf. And he appeared to be singularly deaf. He took no notice of a quick scuffling movement, and even when the door closed he remained indifferent.

But at last he looked round, and a comfortable smile overspread his ample features.

"Oh, well," he said resignedly, "it wasn't my fault! Young beggars! Like their cheek to bolt while my back was turned!"

He glanced complacently at the empty Form-room, picked up his belongings, and sauntered out with the gratified feeling that his duty had been well done.

"It worked, then?" asked Nipper, grinning.

"Like a dream," chuckled Lionel Corcoran.

The junior footballers were on Little Side, and Corky & Co. had explained how easily they had "wangled" Payne.

"If we had asked him to let us off, he couldn't have done it," added Corky. "But a little diplomacy goes a long way. We may have one or two rotten prefects in the East House, but Payne makes up for them."



"What about Pycraft?" asked Reggie Pitt dubiously. "Won't he kick up the dust when he finds out?"

"Let him kick," said Corky. "The game'll be over then, and we shall have had the satisfaction of whacking the Remove."

"Rats!"

"Besides, Payne's no fool," continued Corky cheerfully. "He'll spin some yarn to Pycraft, and probably say that he looked after us with great care and attention. Or he may have to report that we skipped detention. In that case we shall cop out. But who cares? The game's the thing!"

There was a great deal of sound common-sense in Corcoran's philosophy. They were free for the afternoon, and there was no sense in meeting trouble half-way. As Corky truthfully remarked, worry was interest paid on trouble before it became due—so why pay it?

Two minutes later the game started.

Corcoran was very proud of his team. While the School Ship had been on its travels recently, he had done wonders with the Fourth. Armstrong and Griffith had improved out of all recognition. Armstrong had blossomed out into a first-class full-back, and Griffith was a very able goalie.

Corcoran himself led the forward line, and with the pick of the Modern House juniors included in the team—Boots and Christine and a few others—the Fourth Eleven was now a real force to reckon with.

Stevens of the Fifth was acting as referee, and considerable numbers of Removites and Fourth-Formers, having heard that the game was to take place after all, had gathered round the ropes.

Nipper came within an ace of scoring during the very first minute. He received a glorious pass from Reggie Pitt, and Nipper slammed the leather towards Griffith with such speed that the Fourth goalie only just managed to tip the ball over the bar.

"Oh, well tried!"

"Corner!"

"Now's your chance, Remove!"

Pitt took the corner kick with all his usual accuracy, but Armstrong got one of his hefty feet to the ball as it dropped, and cleared his lines with masterful coolness. Corcoran, who was in mid-field, trapped the ball as it came down, and off he went.

"Look out, Handy!" sang out Church.

"Rats! Look out yourself!" retorted Handforth.

The leader of Study D, of course, was in the Remove goal. Church and McClure were his backs, and they had seen something in Corcoran's activity that spelt danger.

Corcoran came on at tremendous speed, and it was obvious that he intended to run through on his own. Church and McClure converged on him. He side-kicked neatly, dodged round Church, and before McClure could prevent him he was through.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth.

He danced about like a monkey, all arms and legs. Slam! The ball left Corcoran's foot in a flashing, swerving drive—a glorious finish to that fine run. Handforth leapt, but Fatty Fowkes himself might have been baffled by that shot. The ball was in the net before Handforth could get within a foot of it.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Corky!"

"Poor old Remove!"

Gleeful shouts were going up from the Fourth-Formers, and Corcoran grinned with cheerful satisfaction. He had plenty of confidence in his own abilities, and he was now glowing with pride of achievement.

"Well done, Corky!" said Nipper.

"Luck more than anything else," replied Corcoran. "A forward doesn't often get the chance to streak off like that. But that's only just a sample, my son! Handy is going to have a busy afternoon!"

Stevens blew his whistle, and the teams lined up again.

"ROT!" said Claude Gore-Pearce.

He was standing in the Triangle, and Merrell, of the East House, had just come running up to him. Merrell was looking flushed and excited. A group of other Reformers stood near, staring with equal scepticism.

"I tell you it's true!" said Merrell. "They're playing! Can't you hear 'em?"

"I can hear a noise," said Gore-Pearce, "but it must be some of the other chaps who are playing. Corcoran and Armstrong and those others can't be in the Fourth team. Pycraft gave them detention for the whole afternoon."

"I don't care what he gave them—they're playing!" said Merrell. "Do you think I'm blind? I've just seen 'em! It's a certainty that Pycraft didn't let them off—he's not that kind—so they must have skipped detention!"

"By gad!" said Gore-Pearce savagely.

He was annoyed at this piece of news. He had been gloating over the fact that the junior game had been more or less "messed up." He had assumed that the Old Timers had contented themselves with a consolation game. Now he learned that Corky & Co. were playing.

"I'm darned if I can understand it!" he said, frowning. "Pycraft told me that he would keep his eye on those blighters all the afternoon."

"Yes, but Pycraft went out directly after lunch," said Marriott of the East House. "Payne was looking after those chaps."

"Payne!" yelled Gore-Pearce. "That explains it then! Payne's a fat fool! He must have let them off! Against Pycraft's orders, too!"

"Payne's not so bad," said Merrell, with a grunt. "We're pretty thankful for him in the East House, anyhow. Life wouldn't be worth living without him. Thank goodness he's slack!"

Gore-Pearce scowled.

"He'll be sorry for his slackness this afternoon," he said sourly. "Merrell, you're going straight to the Head, and you're going to report him!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Interrupted Game!

DAVID MERRELL looked startled. An ugly air of resentment came into his unpleasant features. He shifted his burly figure awkwardly, and prepared to move away.

"Go and eat coke!" he retorted, glaring at Gore-Pearce. "I'm not going to do your dirty work! Report Payne, eh? Report him yourself!"

Gore-Pearce flared up.

"I'm president of the Reformers, aren't I?" he shouted.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything!" snapped Claude. "You've joined the party, and you've got to obey orders! Payne's an East House prefect, and you're an East House chap. It's up to you to go to the Head and tell him that Payne has allowed those chaps to skip detention. We're not going to have these rotters triumphing over us! The Reform Party is gaining strength, and it's got to keep firm."

Merrell's reluctance to go to the Head was not dictated by any feelings of decency. He had always been a sneak, so his new rôle came naturally to him. But he was very much of a funk, and the idea of going to the Head scared him.

"I don't like going!" he muttered. "The Head might swish me for disturbing him, or something."

Gore-Pearce laughed scornfully.

"You've been so scared of old Stafford in the past that you're afraid to go near the Head's house," he said. "Dr. Nicholls is different. He's with us. It's your duty to report anything against the rules. Payne's a prefect, and he's absolutely failed in his duty. The Head will welcome you with open arms. Don't be a fool!"

Merrell was somewhat reassured.

"All right," he said reluctantly. "I'll go."

THE leather sped from Nipper's foot with such velocity that Griffith had no chance. He flung himself full length, only to see the ball whizz past his outstretched fingers and strike the net.

"Goal!"

"That's the stuff, Nipper!"

The Remove had equalised, and there was general satisfaction amongst the Remove spectators. The game had been fast and keen from the beginning, and was now even more so. Corky & Co. were determined to take the lead again.

They were all enjoying the game to the full. Never before had the Fourth proved such a stern opposition. Corky and his companions, in particular, were tremendously bucked.

"Seems a pity that the footer season's nearly over," said Nipper, as he and the others lined up. "We've had so little footer this season that we'd like it to go on for a few weeks more."

"Never mind—there's always cricket," said Fullwood. "And we're going to do big things in cricket this season—after our practice in Australia. It ought to be a record one for us."

"Bother cricket!" said Stevens severely. "This is football!"

He blew his whistle, and the game restarted. But it was not allowed to continue for long. Dr. Morrison Nicholls was already watching from near the pavilion. Gore-Pearce & Co. were now amongst the interested spectators, too—not that they had the faintest desire to follow the football.

"Well, he's come," said Merrell breathlessly.

"What did you tell him?" asked Claude.

"I said that Corky and Armstrong and four or five other chaps had been detained by Pycraft, and that they had broken detention," replied Merrell. "I told him that I felt it was my duty to report the matter."

"What did he say?"

"Praised me for doing the right thing," replied Merrell, with an air of insufferable conceit. "Oh, he was quite nice to me! In future, I shall be as bold as brass when I go to him."

"I told you there was nothing to be afraid of," said Gore-Pearce. "He's with us. Didn't you say anything about Payne?"



Corcoran & Co. watched the advance of the headmaster on to the field with alarm. They had broken detention to play this match—and now they were going to pay for their daring!

"I only said that Pycraft was away, and that the chaps must have escaped from detention," replied Merrell. "It's up to him to do the rest."

They watched Dr. Nicholls with interest and eagerness. The Head was following the game and apparently he was taking a keen interest in it, too. But not for long. As soon as Stevens blew his whistle for an infringement—somebody was off-side—he strode on to the field.

"Just one moment!" said the Head loudly.

Everybody turned and stared at him.

"Crumbs!" said Corky, in alarm. "The Head! I wonder if—"

"He can't touch us!" said Armstrong, running up. "If anybody cops out, it'll be Payne."

"Well, that won't be fair," said Corky. "Payne mustn't be allowed to get it in the neck. Great Scott! Who the dickens could have expected this?"

Stevens, very cold, looked at the Head in a severe way.

"Anything wrong, sir?" he asked stiffly.

"I regret the necessity to stop this game, young man, and you will observe that I waited for a favourable moment," said Dr. Nicholls. "I have been informed that several of these players have broken detention in order to appear on the field. Is that correct?"

Stevens, who knew all the details, did not feel that he was called upon to answer that question, or to make any statement.

"How should I know, sir?" he temporised. "I'm the referee."

The Head frowned.

"Come here, boys!" he commanded, indicating the players. "The Remove boys can keep back; my remarks are to be addressed to the Fourth-Formers."

The Removites gladly backed away.

"I have been told that several Fourth Form boys should be in detention," said Dr. Nicholls. "I now call upon those boys to stand forward."

Without hesitation Corky obeyed, and immediately afterwards the others followed his example. The rest kept their distance.

"Ah!" said the Head. "I am glad that you have acted sensibly. Are there any more?"

"No, sir!" said Corcoran. "We're not like the Reformers, sir—we try to be decent. You've called upon us to stand forward, sir, and here we are."

"Mr. Pycraft sentenced you to detention for the afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Playing football until you came, sir."

"Don't be insolent!" said the Head sharply.

"Sorry, sir. But you asked me."

"I meant, why are you playing football when you should be in detention? Is it because Mr. Pycraft has been called away from the school? Is it because you have taken advantage of Mr. Pycraft's absence?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You admit it?"

"What else can we do, sir?" asked Corky impatiently. "We're bowled out, and there's an end of it. We're not the kind of chaps to tell lies over a thing. But I hope you'll

let us finish the game, sir, and do our detention some other time. It wouldn't be fair to the Remove to——"

"Silence!" commanded the Head sternly. "You have brazenly admitted that you have broken detention, and I cannot possibly allow this breach of the rules to pass."

The Fourth-Formers were looking hot and angry. Yet they could do nothing but support Lionel Corcoran in his frank admissions. There was certainly no sense in denying a fact that was perfectly obvious.

"Be a sport, sir!" urged the Fourth leader. "We look like winning the game and——"

"I tell you I cannot condone this offence!" broke in the Head. "I am amazed that you should so glibly confess to such a palpable offence."

"Would you rather us deny it, sir?"

"Certainly not, Corcoran!" snapped Dr. Nicholls. "In confessing you have acted sensibly. But I am amazed at your boldness. Did you imagine that this offence would pass unnoticed?"

"We hoped it would, sir," said Corcoran frankly.

"Indeed!"

"But somebody must have sneaked, sir," added Corky, in a sad voice.

"Don't use that word!" commanded the Head. "How dare you? Have I not distinctly made it clear that there is no such thing as sneaking? I was informed that you had broken detention, and I must, of course, send you back—and add to your punishment!"

There were groans from the culprits.

"It's too thick!" came a protest from Handforth in the rear. "Messing up our game like this! Who sneaked? I'll bet it was Gore-Pearce, or——"

"Easy, Handy!" whispered Church. "This won't do any good!"

The Head affected to hear nothing.

"Corcoran, I take it that you are the ringleader in this escapade?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Certainly not, sir!" put in Armstrong. "We're all in it!"

"How did you get away from detention?"

"We dodged the prefect, sir," replied Corky.

"And who was the prefect?"

"Payne, sir."

"I shall have to have a word with Payne," said the Head, nodding. "Apparently he is incapable of fulfilling his duties. A prefect who can mislay a number of detained boys is obviously lacking in keenness."

"Don't blame Payne, sir," said Corcoran earnestly. "It wasn't his fault at all. We took advantage of him while his back was turned——"

"Enough!" said the Head. "Follow me at once. I have a strong suspicion that Payne acted in collusion with you. A most disgraceful disregard of the school regulations. I shall see Payne at once."

TO protest would have been a waste of breath—as Nipper fully realised. The headmaster could not possibly have allowed this game to proceed in the circumstances. The maintenance of discipline was essential. Those Fourth-Formers had broken detention, and they had to go back.

They went back—fuming and furious.

They were fuming because they had caught sight of Gore-Pearce & Co. grinning in a gloating manner. Any inquiry was needless. They knew that they had to thank the cads for this fiasco.

In order to make quite sure, however, Corky asked the Head who had given the information. Dr. Nicholls saw no reason why he should withhold the name, and he took particular note of the grim looks that came over Corky & Co. when he mentioned Merrell.

"But have a care!" he added. "In no circumstances must you persecute Merrell for his faithfulness to duty. If that boy is in any way touched, he will complain to me. I have instructed him to do so. I may find it necessary to expel the ringleader of any violence. So let this be a stern warning. Dutiful boys shall be protected. It is my determined command."

So Corky & Co. were doubly dished. It would have been worse than rashness to get hold of Merrell and scrag him. To flout the Head, after such a warning, would have been asking for trouble with a vengeance.

"It's no good," said Corky sorrowfully. "The sneaks have got the best of it. Ye gods and little fishes! Things have come to a pretty pass at St. Frank's! Who'd believe it?"

CHAPTER 7.

Not Quite Successful!

PAYNE, of the Sixth, happened to meet the Head in the Triangle. Or, to be more exact, Payne of the Sixth was pointed out to the Head by Gore-Pearce, and the Head immediately button-holed him.

"Your name is Payne, I understand?" said Dr. Nicholls curtly.

Payne brushed a few pastry flakes off his waistcoat.

"Me, sir?" he said hastily. "Yes, sir!"

"I think you were instructed to take charge of a number of boys who were sentenced to detention this afternoon?"

Payne's face was blank.

"That's right, sir," he said, after a startled pause.

"Why did you allow them to get away?"

"Well, you see—— The fact is——" Payne paused, totally unable to think of any adequate explanation. "They escaped, sir," he added feebly.

"I know perfectly well that they escaped, Payne," said the Head. "But how did they escape?"

Payne couldn't very well answer this—knowing, as he did, that he had deliberately

connived at their release. He regarded the Head's interference as an outrage. It was a pity if a prefect couldn't be trusted to take charge of a few juniors without this sort of thing cropping up!

"It's a funny thing, sir, but they dodged out while I was at the cupboard," said Payne, with no attempt to depart from the truth—or, at least, the partial truth. "I went to the cupboard for some ink, and when I looked round the kids had gone."

"Oh, when you looked round they had gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"And didn't you make any attempt to find them?"

"No, sir!"

"Why not?"

"Well, you know what these juniors are," said Payne evasively. "Once they've bolted, you might as well try to find a needle in a haystack."

"A plausible excuse, Payne, but very weak," said the Head. "The briefest of inquiries would have informed you that the boys were on Little Side, playing in a game of football."

"I didn't go anywhere near Little Side, sir," protested the prefect.

"For the obvious reason that you desired those boys to remain at liberty," said Dr. Nicholls sharply. "I have come to the conclusion, Payne, that you helped them in their enterprise. Not deliberately, perhaps, but at least you took no pains to find them after they escaped. You failed in your duty, and such slackness, in a prefect, is inexcusable."

Payne was silent.

"I shall have a word with your Housemaster at the first opportunity, and it may be necessary to deprive you of the privileges of prefectship," said the Head. "The boys you should have guarded are now in charge of a prefect—Sinclair—who has a greater regard for discipline. That is all, Payne."

The Head walked on, and Payne was left standing like a stranded fish. Gore-Pearce & Co. strolled off, gloating over this new triumph. Nipper and Handforth and a crowd of others came swarming round the stout Sixth-Former.

"Hard lines, Payne!" said Nipper feelingly.

"Eh?"

"It'll be hard lines if you have to suffer for acting so decently," went on Nipper. "Corky will be frightfully cut up."

Payne grunted.

"Well, he needn't be," he retorted.

"Great Scott! Do you think I care?"

"But you might have your prefectship taken away."

"All the better!" said Payne cheerfully. "Do you think I want to figure in Nicholls' rotten administration? I'm glad to be out of it! I shan't be put into any more awkward positions!"

There was a lot to be said for Payne's point of view. He generally made the best of everything. He disliked responsibility of any kind, and it was particularly distasteful to him to be compelled to punish fellows with whom he sympathised. He regarded the situation with serene equanimity.

It was a great relief to Corcoran & Co. when they heard.

THAT evening, Gore-Pearce swaggered about, more arrogant than ever.

"We're getting on, you fellows!" he said, as he talked to a crowd of his supporters in the Triangle. "I'm the boss of the Remove now! In fact, I'm the boss of the Junior School! I'm growing in power!"

"Growing in conceit, you mean!" snorted Handforth, who happened to be within earshot. "You silly, over-inflated gasbag! If anybody touched you with a pin you'd burst!"

Gore-Pearce turned red.

"You'd better be careful what you say!" he snapped aggressively. "Don't forget that I'm boss of the Remove now—"

"Piffle!" said Handforth. "For two pins I'd knock you down!"

"But you daren't!" sneered Claude.

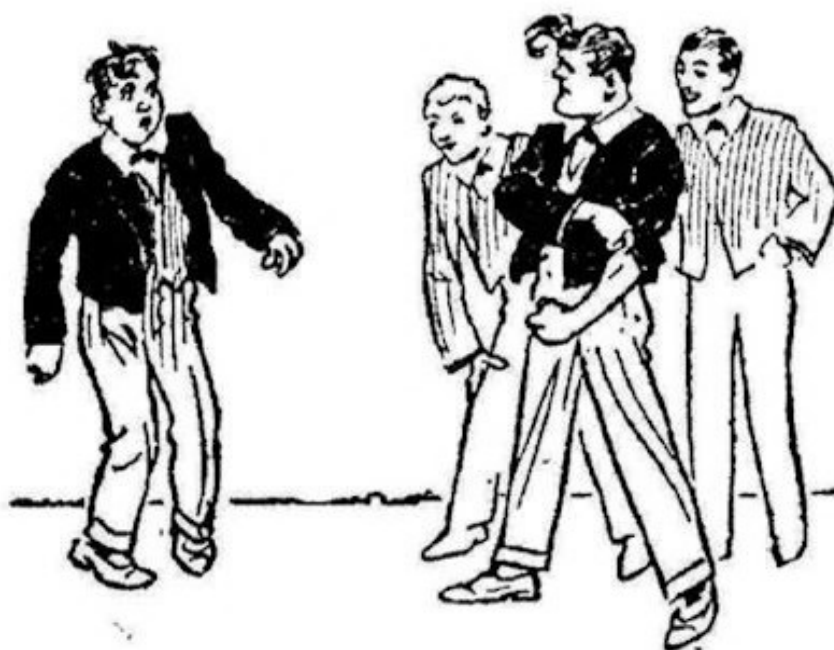
"I dare—and you know I dare!" roared Handforth. "Why, you confounded worm, I'll—I'll—" He pulled himself up with an effort. "But I'm not going to fall into any of your rotten traps!" he added. "You tried the same thing on Nipper this morning, and he just let you blather on. So I'll do the same. I don't see the fun of getting swished for nothing. You sneaks have got the upper hand for the time being—but you won't hold it long!"

It cost Handforth a great effort to restrain himself. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that it cost Church and McClure a much greater effort to restrain Handforth. They were holding on to him like glue; and but for that detail he would certainly have knocked Gore-Pearce flat.

His restraint was more compulsory than voluntary.

"What's more," he added, "you can't report me for giving you my opinion of you! It's no good sneaking because I call you names!"

"Isn't it?" snarled Gore-Pearce. "If you insult me, it constitutes a reasonable cause for complaint."



"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth, looking round. "So it's got to that now! We couldn't biff these chaps before, and now we can't even slang them. Before long we shan't be allowed to breathe!"

Teddy Long came swaggering past.

"Yes, I'm safe now!" he said, with insufferable boldness. "If you touch me, Handforth, I'll report you! And if any of you chaps call me names, I'll report you, too!"

"By George! I'll—I'll——"

The sight of the swaggering Teddy nearly proved too much for Edward Oswald. He commenced rolling up his sleeves preparatory to "wiping up the floor" with Teddy, and then, just in time, he remembered. Teddy was a Reformer; a sneak. Therefore it was wiser to leave him alone. Reluctantly Handforth unrolled his sleeves again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Reformers laughed loudly in their complete triumph.

"Well, well," said Travers sadly. "Things are frightfully bad, Handy. I wonder what Gore-Pearce and Long would do if we started to call them the names that they deserve?"

"We'd report you!" retorted Gore-Pearce.

"Supposing I called you a pair of contemptible cads? And what if I were rash enough to class all the Reformers as a bunch of weak-kneed, insignificant reptiles?"

"Let's report him!" yelled Long excitedly.

"And what if I were insane enough to suggest that you are no better than toads?" went on Travers thoughtfully. "Perhaps you'd dash to the Head if I called you a set of dirty, crawling, despicable, low-down, sneaking, contemptible, blackguardly cads?"

Gore-Pearce nearly choked.

"Wait!" he snarled. "I'll tell the Head."

"Eh?" said Travers, in surprise. "For the love of Samson! What are you going to tell the Head? I haven't called you any of these things?"

"But you just said——"

"I asked you what you'd do if I did talk like that," interrupted Travers blandly.

He strolled off amid shouts of laughter from the Old Timers. And Gore-Pearce & Co. realised, with a bit of a shock, that they had no case. Yet Travers had given them his opinion of them in the plainest of plain terms.

DURING the evening, Corky & Co. learned that Payne's reduction from office was confirmed. Mr. Goole, his Housemaster, had not been able to justify his slackness, so Payne's privileges were removed. In all probability Mr. Goole was in full sympathy with the ex-prefect, but he kept his opinions to himself. Mr. Goole had a comfortable job, and he had no desire to lose it.

Corcoran tried to sympathise with Payne, but Payne wasn't having any.

"My dear kids, you can save your breath," he said, as a crowd of juniors met him in the corridor. "Who wants to be a prefect nowadays? If the Head's satisfied, I am. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to get out of a position I didn't like. I should have resigned, anyhow."

"You're a brick, Payne!" said Corky feelingly.

Payne's generous attitude was appreciated by all in the Fourth. Another prefect, no matter how decent, might well have felt some resentment against the juniors who had influenced him to break the rules. Payne, however, treated the whole thing so lightly that the Fourth-Formers felt no remorse.

In the Ancient House, Gore-Pearce & Co. went about like conquerors. They swaggered in the corridors, and in the Common-room. They talked of the big things they would do in the immediate future, and Gore-Pearce was calling himself Boss of the Remove.

Just before this, the Reformers had held a little procession in the Triangle. Gore-Pearce had been seized by his followers and, shoulder-high, he had been marched triumphantly round.

"Gore-Pearce is our new leader!" the Reformers shouted excitedly.

"Down with Nipper!"

"Gore-Pearce is Boss of the Remove now!"

"Hurrah!"

Perched somewhat precariously on the shoulders of Bell, Gulliver, Marriott, and a few others, Gore-Pearce superciliously surveyed Nipper and Handforth and the other Old Timers as the procession passed them. A tremendous exultation gripped the cad of Study A. This was his triumph! In his self-conceit he imagined that he actually was Boss of the Remove!

"Your days are numbered, Hamilton!" he called out tauntingly. "I'm Boss of the Remove now, and before long I shall be Boss of the Junior School!"

Nipper said nothing until the procession had passed, and even then he said very little. Handforth—who had been restrained from dashing into the procession only by force—wanted to get up to all sorts of wild and woolly schemes. He was impatient; his main desire was to get hold of Gore-Pearce on the quiet and fight him to a standstill.

"I can appreciate your feelings, old man, but it won't do," said Nipper, shaking his head. "The sneaks have got the upper hand. There's no sense in playing into the hands of the enemy. Let's wait a bit."

"You always want to wait!" snorted Handforth. "I've never known such a laggard! Why can't we do something now?"

"Because we should only make the position worse," replied Nipper. "These cads have gained power so quickly that it can't be lasting. It seems that the Head's wheeze is working."

"Well, isn't it?" asked Fullwood.

"It is—for the moment, anyhow," agreed Nipper. "But it won't last long. Let's be patient—let's give these cads a good bit of rope. And don't do anything to help them. They're anxious for us to start a rag, so that they can report us, but we won't give them any satisfaction."

Nipper's assumption was correct. Gore-Pearce & Co. deliberately went about singly or in pairs, inviting assault. They were ready to suffer the pain of being ragged so that they could have the satisfaction of reporting the culprits to the Head. But nothing of the sort happened.

AND the next morning Gore-Pearce & Co. suffered a further set-back in the class-room. Mr. Crowell was looking impatient and irritable as the Remove fellows took their places. Mr. Crowell was generally sharp first thing in the morning; but to-day he was unusually acid.

"Less noise!" he snapped, glaring at the Form.

The shuffling of feet ceased, and the Remove recognised that it would have to go wary. The truth was, Mr. Crowell was thoroughly fed up with the way things were going. He detested sneaking, and the present glut of it made him fear for the ultimate welfare of the school.

First lesson had not been going long before Handforth surreptitiously produced a bag of toffee. There was nothing unusual in this, and it was a commonplace occurrence in the class-room.



Handforth's bag went round generously, passing secretly from desk to desk. Edward Oswald was always lavish in such matters. He often brought a bag of sweets into the class-room, passing it round before helping himself, only to find an empty bag returned to him. On this occasion he made certain of at least one chunk of toffee by inserting it into his mouth to begin with.

"Give us a piece!" whispered Teddy Long, from a desk further back.

Handforth glanced round, and glared.

"Not likely!" he hissed. "I'm not treating any of you rotten Reformers! Go easy with the bag, Churchy! Mind who you pass it to!"

Teddy Long jumped to his feet.

"Please, sir!" he shouted shrilly.

"My only hat!" breathed Handforth, nearly swallowing his lump of toffee.

"Well, Long?" said Mr. Crowell, looking up. "What is it?"

"Handforth's eating toffee, sir."

Mr. Crowell's face became dark.

"Sit down, Long!" he snapped. "I must congratulate you upon your high sense of duty. It is gratifying to know that some boys in my Form, at least, have a correct sense of how the school rules should be abided by. Handforth, bring that toffee to me at once."

Church shoved the bag into Handforth's hand, and Handforth was startled to find that it was already empty. He stood up.

"It's all gone, sir," he said. "I've got a chunk in my mouth, but—"

"Leave it there, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell hastily. "You know perfectly well that toffee and other eatables should not be brought into the class-room. You will take ten lines, Handforth. Sit down."

"Thank you, sir," said Handforth gratefully.

Mr. Crowell took a deep breath, and seized his cane.

"Long!" he commanded. "Come here!"

Teddy Long, who had been congratulating himself upon his high sense of duty, gave a yelp of terror. He rose to his feet shaking.

"But—but please, sir—"

"Come here!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

Teddy Long went out in front of the class, and the Old Timers watched with glee—whilst the Reformers exchanged glances of dismay.

CHAPTER 8.

The Reformers Strike a Snag!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE bristled with anger.

Here was a case of open defiance—and by a Form-master, too! Rank opposition to the Head's wishes! Gore-Pearce was so astonished that he actually started to his feet, and began to shout.

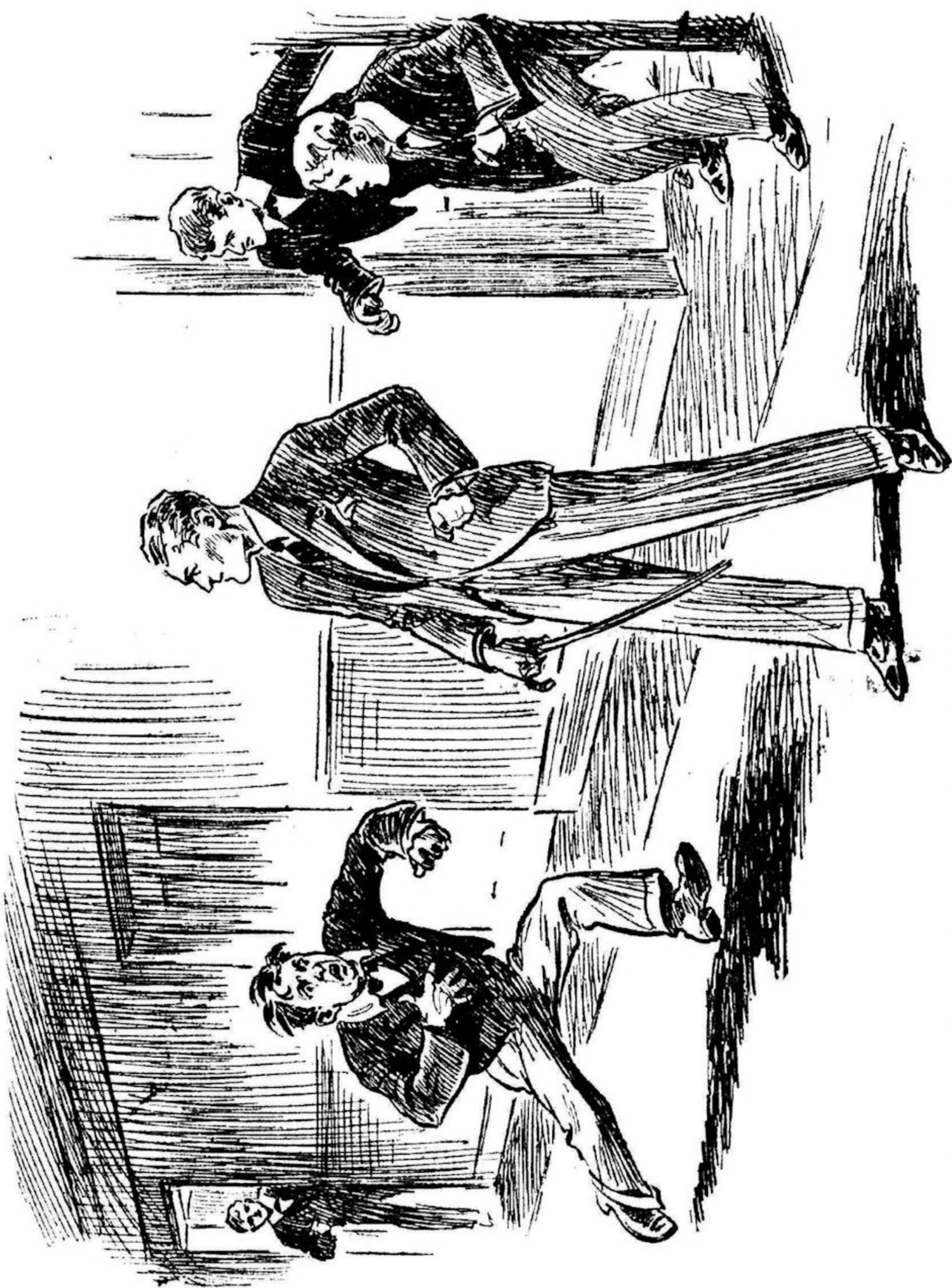
"Gore-Pearce!" roared Mr. Crowell. "Go to your place!"

"But Long has only done his duty, sir!" protested Gore-Pearce. "Handforth was breaking the rules and Long reported him! You mustn't cane Long for that—for upholding the Head's authority."

Mr. Crowell looked positively tiger-like. "Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "Am I to be questioned and dictated to by my own boys? How dare you, Gore-Pearce? Take five hundred lines for this act of unexampled impertinence!"

Gore-Pearce turned pale.

"Five hundred lines, sir!" he babbled. "But—but—"



Fenton of the Sixth halted, frowned, and then gripped his cane more tightly as the shrieking Teddy Long came dashing madly down the passage. "Help! I'm poisoned! I'm dying! Where's a doctor!" shouted the terrified Teddy.

"Sit down, sir!" roared Mr. Crowell. "I have never heard of such insolence in my life! I'll deal with Long as I think fit—without your interference! Upon my word!"

Gore-Pearce wanted to say something else, but he was so dumbfounded that he sat down with a thud. Nipper and Handforth and Travers and all the other Old Timers were hugging themselves with glee. Mr. Crowell was worth his weight in gold.

"Now, Long!" said the Form-master. "At last I am able to give you some attention. Gore-Pearce has been good enough to permit me to have authority in this room. Hold out your hand, Long!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold out your hand!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "And since you appear to be unaware of the reason for your punishment, I will tell you. You complained of Handforth eating toffee, and I have punished Handforth for the offence. But how did you know that Handforth was eating toffee?"

"I saw him, sir."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Crowell triumphantly. "You have confessed, Long, that you were inattentive. Instead of confining your abilities, such as they are, to your work, you were watching Handforth eating toffee. I will not sanction inattention, so I am going to cane you!"

And Teddy Long was caned—a stinging cut on each hand.

He went back to his place writhing with pain and mortification. He had meant to be so clever—and this was his reward!

The Old Timers went on with their work happily.

Mr. Crowell had acted in full conformity with the Head's wishes. He had punished Handforth in a fitting manner, and Teddy Long, who had unquestionably been inattentive, had no case.

All went well for perhaps twenty minutes, and then Hubbard felt that it was up to him to re-establish the prestige of the Reformers. There had been too many triumphant glances, too many surreptitious chuckles from the Old Timers, and it was exasperating to note that Mr. Crowell neither saw the glances or heard the chuckles.

"Please, sir," said Hubbard, holding up a hand.

Mr. Crowell eyed him suspiciously. Perhaps he didn't know whether Hubbard was a Reformer or an Old Timer. It was difficult to tell; but he would soon know.

"Well, Hubbard?" he said.

"Please, sir, Singleton is asleep!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton wasn't asleep, but he was certainly pretending to be. He lounged in the next desk to Hubbard, a picturesque figure in his elegant attitude of repose. The Hon. Douglas, in fact, had

felt that it was time to start something. He had been hoping that somebody would sneak.

"Singleton!" shouted Mr. Crowell.

Singleton sat up with a start.

"Sorry, sir," he apologised. "I believe I was dozing."

"It is a pity, Singleton, if you cannot obtain enough rest in bed," said Mr. Crowell. "I should like to point out that this apartment is not intended as a rest-room. Take twenty lines."



Fenton of the Sixth halted, frowned, and then dashing madly down the passage. "Help! Help!"

"Thank you, sir," said Singleton.

"Hubbard, sit down—and take fifty lines!" snapped Mr. Crowell.

Hubbard and all the other Reformers were startled. Hubbard had thought himself safe.

"But why have you given me fifty lines, sir?" he gasped hotly. "I reported Singleton because he was disturbing me."

"I fail to see how Singleton's misdeemeanour could have affected you, Hubbard," retorted Mr. Crowell. "If you had been attending to your work, you would not have seen that Singleton was asleep."

It was palpable that Mr. Crowell was favouring the Old Timers. But Hubbard was ready.

"You're wrong, sir!" he said triumphantly. "I didn't even see Singleton. It was his snoring that disturbed me. How can a

no snoring. However, I do not question your statement, Hubbard," he added tartly. "Sit down. I shall still require the fifty lines."

"What for, sir?"

"For your intolerable shuffling!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "Ever since you have been standing up, Hubbard, you have been shuffling your feet in the most irritating, disturbing fashion. How many times must I say that I will have no shuffling in this Form-room?"

Hubbard sat down, completely winded. It was a fact that he had been shuffling his feet. He knew it. He had no answer. Once again Mr. Crowell had scored.

THE Reformers didn't try it on again that morning. It was painfully clear to them that Mr. Crowell, at least, was not prepared to help them in their campaign of sneaking. He had taken sides against them.

After lessons, Nipper & Co. chuckled hugely over the joke. Throughout the morning Mr. Crowell had treated them leniently and had smiled upon them. Throughout the morning Mr. Crowell had been like a bear with a sore head in dealing with the Reformers.

"Good old Crowell!" said Nipper delightedly. "He's a brick! And he's on safe ground, too, the wily old rascal! Not once did he do anything that the cads could complain about."

"They couldn't complain anyhow," said Fullwood. "Even the Head wouldn't stand that. He'd soon put Gore-Pearce in his place if the ass was rash enough to complain about his own Form-master."

"They're not having it all their own way, anyhow!" said Handforth. "By George! I'm going to enjoy lessons this afternoon! How about getting up some stunts—on purpose to trap the Reformers?"

Nipper shook his head.

"That wouldn't be fair to old Crowell," he replied. "Those rotters will get into trouble, without any help from us. There's something more important to talk about, too. We've got to hold a meeting."

"What for?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"You'll soon see," said Nipper. "We want a full gathering of the Old Timers, and I don't think we can do better than hold it behind the gym. No need to be stuffed away indoors on a fine day like this."

Within five minutes the gathering had collected. All the principal fellows of the Remove and Fourth were there. The Reformers consisted mainly of the rotters and the nonentities. Unfortunately, there were a good many of these—particularly the latter. They had been easily influenced by Gore-Pearce's bluster, and particularly by the knowledge that the Head was on their



more tightly as the shrieking Teddy Long came in dying! "Where's a doctor!" shouted the

fellow work properly with somebody snoring near his elbow?"

Mr. Crowell was nearly beaten—but not quite.

"If Singleton was snoring, you certainly have an excellent excuse," he replied. "I shall have to consult my doctor. My hearing must be repaired, for I certainly heard

side. It was the latter fact which had influenced them more than anything.

The Old Timers, nevertheless, formed a goodly throng.

"Well, are we all here?" said Nipper briskly. "I don't want you fellows to get the idea that I'm going to suggest any stunt against the Reformers, because I'm not."

"Then what are we here for?" asked Handforth.

"I think it's up to us fellows to pull together," said Nipper, looking at Corcoran. "A sort of alliance pro tem. Let's call House rows off until we've beaten the common enemy."

"We're game," said Corky promptly. "We shall only be copying the Reformers, anyhow. They've called a truce. Fourth-Formers are joining Gore-Pearce's gang in crowds, so it's up to us to unite our forces in the same way. Down with the Sneaks' League!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"We've got to work hand in hand," said Nipper, nodding. "There ought to be some sort of system, too. If any one of us hears of something that sounds promising, he's got to send the word round. We don't know how we can aim a blow at the Reformers, but something might crop up at any minute."

"That's beastly vague," said Handforth discontentedly. "Now that we're all together, why can't we decide on something? Let's lure Gore-Pearce & Co. into Bellton Wood, and then pulverise 'em."

"And get reported—and perhaps sacked?" asked Nipper.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "What can we do, then?"

"Well, we mustn't act as rashly as all that," said Corky. "If we pulverise Gore-Pearce, and we're hauled before the Head, we shall have to confess. We've got to stick to our principles. And we shan't get far if we play into their hands, and ask for expulsion."

"Let's pledge ourselves not to scrag any of the Reformers, no matter how great the provocation," said Nipper. "It'll be hard, I know, but we mustn't give them any chances. And we must be jolly careful not to transgress any of the school rules. These sneaks are on the watch, and they'll spot every little thing that we do wrong."

"Do you mean to say that we can't punch anybody on the nose?" asked Handforth, aghast.

"You can punch Church, or you can punch

McClure," grinned Nipper. "There's no danger of them sneaking on you, I hope."

"Yes, that's a consolation," said Handforth feelingly.

"Idiot!" said Church and McClure, in cold unison.

"But we musn't touch these Reformers, although we're longing to give them the hiding of their lives," continued Nipper. "It'll be a good test of self-restraint. Sooner or later we shall get the upper hand, but just now let's be patient."

The meeting broke up somewhat discontentedly. The fellows felt that it had been a failure. Nothing had been planned—nothing decided upon. It really seemed that they were helpless!

CHAPTER 9.

Gore-Pearce's Invitation!

IF Nipper & Co. were worried, so was Claude Gore-Pearce.

He was alarmed at the attitude of the masters. This was a development which the Reformers had not counted upon. Mr. Pycraft was about the only man they could "bet on" in safety. Mr. Crowell was openly antagonistic; and reports were coming in that Mr. Suncliffe, of the Third, was just as firm—his sympathies were all with Willy and a staunch band who stuck to the old code of honour.

It was the same with Mr. Pagett, of the Fifth, and Mr. Langton, of the Sixth. These latter two masters, however, and the Housemasters, were not in such close touch with the new order of things as the others.

The movement was more or less confined to the Junior School. The seniors were expressing their opinions on the whole matter, of course, and there was a lot of solemn head-shaking, and many a discussion in the senior day-rooms. First and foremost, however, it was a junior affair.

"If we could only tip the wink to the Head, he'd do something about it," said Gore-Pearce, frowning. "It's intolerable."

"What is?" asked Bell.

"The way Crowell is openly defying the Head, and sympathising with those Old Timers," said Gore-Pearce. "It's no good taking any reports to Crowell; it's no good carrying on the new system in the Form-rooms. He's rottenly unjust. He punishes us more than he punishes the rule-breakers."

"Simply flouting the Head's authority," said Gulliver sourly. "What are you going to do about it? You're the president, my son—you're boss of the Remove—so it's up to you. Why not go and tell the Head?"

"Why not talk sense?" snapped Gore-Pearce. "The Head will take action if I report any breach of the rules, but he'd kick me out on my neck if I went there and complained about my own Form-master."

"But he'd make inquiries afterwards," said Gulliver. "As President of the Reform

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Party, you ought to be willing to take these chances."

"Idiot!" said Gore-Pearce sourly.

He decided to leave the problem for a bit. Perhaps it would adjust itself. Perhaps Mr. Crowell would give himself away, and bring Dr. Nicholls' wrath down upon his head.

Gore-Pearce happened to meet Merrell & Co. in the Triangle a little later on. Notes were compared. So far, everything was going well. The Old Timers were subdued. None of them dared lay a finger upon the Reformers.

"We've got them where we want them," said Gore-Pearce complacently. "I'm boss of the Remove now—boss of the Junior School, in fact. I think we ought to celebrate our triumph, you fellows. How about a little party to-night?"

"Any old thing," grinned Marriott.

"I'm having a spree in my study, after lights out," said Gore-Pearce calmly. "If you East House fellows like to come, you're welcome. Don't make it too early. Turn up about eleven, and you'll be in nice time."

"A bit risky, isn't it?" asked Merrell doubtfully.

"Where's the risk?"

"Somebody might spot us, and——"

"My dear ass, you don't seem to realise that we're on velvet," said Gore-Pearce. "Our own chaps won't sneak on us; and we needn't be afraid of the Old Timers. They refuse to accept the new system."

In this remark Gore-Pearce confessed, without appearing to know it, to the fact that he was an arrant humbug. There was utterly no sincerity in his campaign; his motives were selfish from first to last. The majority of his followers, too, were similarly constituted. They had their own ends to serve, and, privately, they considered that the Head was a silly old fool.

"I don't think we'd better come," said Marriott, after a pause.

"Just as you like," replied Claude. "I'm not going to press you. But I'll mention that I'm getting a special box of 'smokes' in, and there'll be a first-class feed, and perhaps a bit of sport to follow. No reason why we shouldn't play cards for a bit, or something like that. We've never been so safe before. Why not take advantage of it?"

Again he was giving himself away. Curiously enough, the East House cads did not seem to appreciate the contemptible nature of their leader's attitude, or their own hollowness in supporting him. If they had commenced sneaking amongst themselves the whole movement would have soon crumbled to pieces. But they only sneaked against those juniors who stood aloof from the Reform Party; and in this fact alone the movement was labelled as a swindle.

Here they were, these bright youths who professed to be so concerned for the maintenance of discipline—making plans to hold a midnight party!

"Oh, well, that makes a difference," said Merrell, grinning. "A feed, eh? We'll be there, Gore-Pearce. Thanks, old man! Eleven o'clock—eh? Good enough! How many of us can come?"

"Well, don't make the party too big—not more than six," replied the millionaire's son. "We don't want to be too crowded."

"Just a minute, Gore-Pearce!"

Claude frowned as Teddy Long came sidling up. Gore-Pearce was becoming fed up with the podgy, insufferable Teddy. He was giving himself such airs that even his own crowd wanted to slaughter him.

"Did I hear you chaps saying anything about a feed?" asked Long eagerly.

"No, you didn't!" said Gore-Pearce. "Clear out, Long! If you want a feed, go and help yourself from one of the Old Timers' studies."

"Too risky," said Teddy dubiously.

"You fat idiot! There's no risk at all," retorted Claude. "You're on velvet. You can raid as many studies as you like—as long as you don't raid ours."

"How can I?" asked Long, staring.

"The fellow's a born imbecile!" said Gore-Pearce, exasperated. "If you're collared, the Old Timers won't sneak on you—it's against their principles, if you please!—and they daren't scrag you, because they'll be afraid of being reported. Can't you get that simple fact into your chunk of concrete?"

Teddy Long took a deep breath.

"My hat!" he panted. "I hadn't looked at it like that!"

SO Teddy Long calmly sneaked into Study E, in the Remove passage, while Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent were absent. He selected Archie's study as being the most promising.

"This is easy!" he grinned to himself.

He had a feeling of the utmost security. In the old days he had been compelled to keep the door slightly ajar, so that he could hear the first sound of approaching footsteps, and so that he could dodge for liberty.

Now he had the glorious knowledge that he was safe whether he was caught red-handed or not. It did not occur to him that he was only safe because of the splendid code of honour which the Old Timers still cherished.

"Not so bad!" gloated Teddy Long.

He had sampled some little white tablets he had found on the table. They looked like sweets, and they tasted like sweets—only they had a rather pungent flavour when Teddy chewed them up. However, all was grist that came to his mill, and, having demolished these, he investigated the cupboard.

"Great pip!" he breathed, his eyes growing round.

He beheld a dream of a cake—a glorious affair, with lots of icing on the top. In former days he would have tucked that cake under his coat and bolted. But now he grabbed a handy knife, ruthlessly hacked

a chunk out of the cake, and set his teeth into it.

"Mmmmmmm!" he mumbled ecstatically. And then the door opened, and Archie and Brent came in.

"Good gad!" said Archie, adjusting his eyeglass, and examining Teddy Long with horror. "Alf, old lad, we forgot to stuff the holes up! Look what's come up out of the floor!"

"You fat burglar!" roared Alf Brent hotly. "Put that cake down!"

Teddy nearly choked. He looked wildly at the door, and tried to make a bolt for it; then he remembered his secure position. He swallowed frantically and glared defiance.

"Better not touch me!" he said shrilly. "If you do, I'll report you!"

"Odds reptiles and insects!"

"Why, you—you miserable worm!"

"Touch me, and you'll be sorry for it!" jeered Teddy.

"Get out of this study!" said Brent thickly. "You know we shan't report you, and you think we're afraid to kick you out, but we might forget ourselves! Clear off while you're safe!"

Teddy's alarm subsided. It was exactly as Gore-Pearce had said. He was as safe as houses. He collared the rest of the cake, and boldly marched towards the door.

"There are some things," said Brent, "that flesh and blood can't stand. If you don't put that cake down, Long, I'll smash you!"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie, with a shudder. "Let him take it, laddie!"

"What!"

"Absolutely! I mean to say, we can't touch the dashed cake after he's been mauling it about," said Archie. "Better let him take— Good gad! Odds horrors and tragedies!"

"What's the matter?" asked Brent, staring.

The elegant Archie clutched at the table, and he was gazing fascinatedly at the cloth. Under the cover of the table he gently gave Alf Brent a tap on the shin.

"Those tablets, laddie!" he gasped. "It can't be possible that this blighter has absolutely scoffed them!"

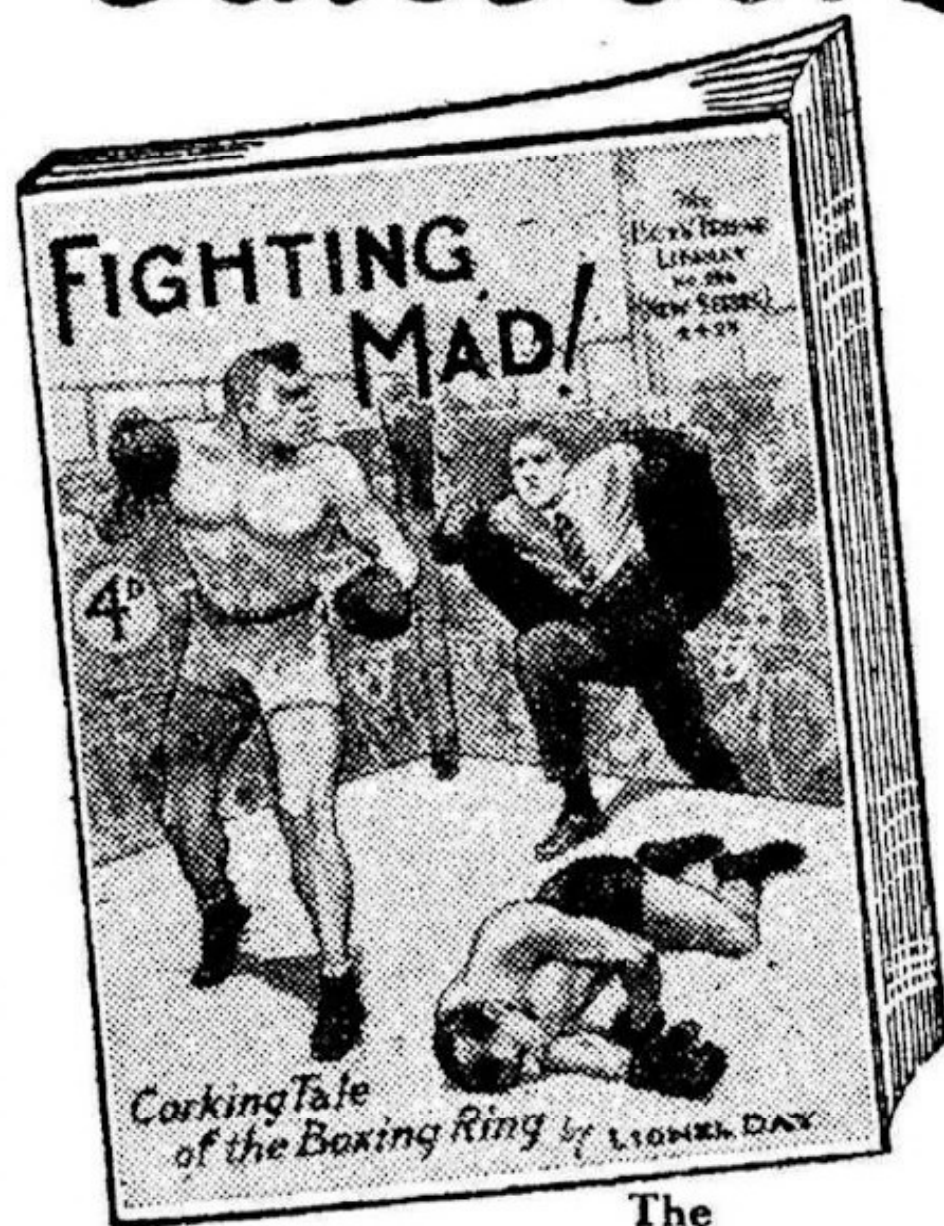
There was a world of horror in Archie's tone. Brent hadn't the faintest idea what his aristocratic chum was getting at, but he took his cue.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "They've gone!"

"Ta-tablets!" said Teddy Long, fascinated.

"There were four or five of them!" panted Archie, clutching at his arm. "Odds agonies and horrors! Don't tell me that you've eaten them, you blighter! Don't say that you've absolutely swallowed the frightful things!"

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Teddy was rapidly getting the wind up. There was something dreadfully significant in Archie's tone, and in Alf Brent's stare of horror.

"But I did!" he gulped. "I ate them!"

"Alf, laddie, he ate them!" said Archie dazedly. "Didn't I say that it was frightfully risky to leave them lying about?"

"Did you?"

"Good gad!" muttered Archie, sagging, and sitting limply in a chair. "How long do you think it will be before the effects begin to show? I mean, wouldn't it be a ripe idea for some energetic chappie to see an undertaker?"

"Undertaker!" howled Teddy Long.

"Well, it was your own fault, Long," said Brent sadly. "You've nobody to blame but yourself. If you *will* go into fellows' studies and eat any tablets that you see lying loose, you mustn't grumble at the consequences. Any chance of the doctor doing any good, Archie?" he added hopefully.

Archie looked tragic; his eyes had a glassy appearance.

"When did you eat those dashed tablets?" he asked.

"Five minutes ago."

"Five minutes!" gasped Archie. "Absolutely too late!"

"I'm poisoned!" shrieked Teddy Long, clapping his hands to his ample waist. "Oh! I can feel horrible pains already! You—you dangerous rotters! You left those tablets on the table on purpose! You've poisoned me!"

"Take it calmly!" urged Brent, whose chief desire was to shriek with laughter. "You'll only make things worse if you go on like that! Archie—Archie, isn't there any antidote?"

Archie shook his head.

"I've heard that ink is frightful stuff to drink, but one never knows," he said vaguely.

"Ink!" gurgled Long, horrified.

"Of course, if you'd rather die——" began Brent.

Teddy Long seized Archie's ample inkpot, and swallowed the contents at a gulp. He had failed to observe a quick movement on Brent's part.

"Feel any better?" asked Brent anxiously.

"I'm worse!" moaned Teddy, quite truthfully.

"You look a bit funny," said Alf, examining him closely. "Here, let's wipe your face."

He rubbed his handkerchief over Teddy Long's perspiring visage, and then he took a deep breath of resignation.

"Your face looks terrible!" he said hopelessly.

Long staggered to the mirror and gave a shriek of fear. His face was as white as a sheet. It was ghastly white.

"I'm poisoned! I'm dying!" he shrieked. "Help! Help!"

He bolted from the study, and, considering the dread nature of his ailment, he moved with remarkable rapidity.

CHAPTER 10.

The Spy!

FENTON of the Sixth halted in his stride and frowned.

"What the deuce——" he began.

A screaming, shrieking junior was flying towards him down the corridor. Doors were opening, and fellows were shouting inquiries. The commotion was not merely alarming, but hideous.

"Have you gone mad, Long?" demanded Fenton as Teddy dashed up.

"Let me go!" screamed Teddy. "I'm poisoned! Where's a doctor? I tell you I'm poisoned!"

"Rubbish!" said Fenton sharply. "Any fellow who was poisoned couldn't make all this noise! What on earth have you been drinking? Ink?"

"Yes."

"What!"

"It's an antidote!" gasped Teddy.

"Somebody's been fooling you," said Fenton grimly. "Now then—that's enough! Hold still, confound you! You're no more poisoned than I am!"

"Let me go!" wailed Teddy Long. "I've got to find the doctor——"

"You'll find my cane round your legs unless you pull yourself together!" snapped the school captain. "Now then! What's all this piffle about poison?"

"Tablets!" muttered Teddy. "Glenthorne's study! I thought they were sweets—and I'm poisoned!"

"Come along!" said Fenton curtly.

He seized the terrified sneak by the scruff of his neck, and forced him back to Study E. Interested crowds gathered in the corridor. When Fenton entered, he found Archie and Brent preparing the table for tea.

"Anything wrong?" asked Brent politely.

"This young idiot says you've poisoned him!" said Fenton.

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie. "I mean, what frightful rot! I'm not saying that the young blighter doesn't deserve to be poisoned, but it's a bit thick to accuse us of such a dashed thing. I mean to say, Fenton——"

"Yes, cheese it," said Brent.

"But I am poisoned!" howled Teddy. "What about those tablets?"

"Did he eat any tablets here?" asked Fenton.

"I believe so," said Brent. "But they weren't poison. They were only a patent kind of yeast tablet that old Phipps gave Archie for heartburn. They'll do him good, if anything."

"I thought as much," said Fenton contemptuously. "You young donkey! So you came in here and raided the place, did you? Those tablets weren't harmful."

Teddy looked blank.

"But—but they told me I was poisoned!" he shouted.

"Absolutely not!" denied Archie. "I ask you, Alf, old scream, did we tell him he was poisoned?"

"We did not," replied Alf firmly. "He may have imagined it from our conversation, but surely he can't blame us for that?"

Fenton fully appreciated the situation.

"Cut off!" he said curtly. "And be thankful that you haven't been tanned."

"But I'm as white as a sheet!" babbled Teddy.

"Oh, that!" said Brent. "I must have got some French chalk on my handkerchief. Funny how these things happen."

Teddy Long suddenly realised that he had been spoofed. He recovered with remarkable rapidity. His interior pains vanished. He glared at the two grinning juniors with hot indignation.

"You rotters!" he yelled. "You made me drink that ink, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter came from outside.

"Nothing of the sort," said Brent. "You drank it on your own accord. Archie merely said that ink is frightful stuff to drink. Nobody told you to drink it!"

Teddy turned to Fenton in a furious rage.

"Fenton, I report these two chaps!" he said, with ridiculous importance. "They've assaulted me——"

"Wait until I start assaulting you—and then you'll have something to complain about!" said Fenton, exasperated. "Get out of here, you young sweep! And be thankful that I haven't tanned you!"

"But—but I tell you——"

"Get out!" thundered Fenton.

Teddy Long, concluding that there was no such thing as justice, got out.

BUT the lesson was quite wasted on him. For five minutes later, after the Remove passage had settled down again, he sneaked into Study C, and commenced a vigorous investigation in the cupboard. His appetite had returned, and he saw no reason why he should not continue with the good work. It wasn't likely that he'd be caught napping a second time. He was on his guard now.

He found a plentiful supply.

By the time he had demolished three or four meat pies, and had scoffed half a dozen jam-tarts and four doughnuts, he felt decidedly better. But his luck seemed to be out after this point. Just as he was on the point of retiring, he heard the tramp of feet in the passage, and he recognised Nipper's voice, too.

It was pure instinct which caused Teddy Long to dive under the table.

That was the sort of thing he had done in the old days. There was really no need for him to do it now. Hadn't Gore-Pearce told him that he could raid the studies with impunity?

All the same, he was glad that he had dived under the table. After his experience in Study E, he felt that it would be better to be on the safe side. Nipper & Co. might clear out after a minute or two; and if they didn't he would still be all right, because

he could boldly emerge and tell them to go and eat coke. They wouldn't be able to serag him, anyhow.

Almost the first words he heard, however, caused him to grip himself with cunning glee.

"Good!" said Nipper. "Close the door, Montie. We'll fix this thing up now, and we don't want any of those rotten Reformers to overhear."

"Look at this!" came Watson's voice, charged with alarm and indignation. "Somebody's been raiding our cupboard! They've boned our meat pies and doughnuts——"

"Never mind them!" said Nipper. "This thing is important—and we've got to settle it. I dare say Long's been in here—the burglar! But there are more important things in life than doughnuts."

Teddy Long shivered between fright and eagerness.

"Really, old boy, I can't understand you," came Sir Montie's voice. "It's a bit rotten when we find our tea wolfed. What's the idea of being so mysterious? Have you got an idea or something?"

"Yes!" said Nipper, dropping his voice. "I think you'd better fetch Handy in here. He's next door—we can hear him. It's a good chance for us to get this matter clear."

"But why fetch Handy?" asked Tommy Watson. "You're never likely to get anything clear with him in the room!"

"If we don't invite him to the conference he'll only get wind of the thing afterwards, and then he'll go shouting about and let those Reformers know that there's something doing," replied Nipper shrewdly. "We've got to be tactful with Handy. Bring him in at first, and we can manage him."

Teddy Long could hardly believe in his good luck. By sheer chance, without in any way scheming for it, he was in a position where he could overhear the secret plans of the Old Timers! The only trouble was that he might be discovered at any moment. Such a hiding-place as his was not ideal. If the fellows sat round the table, they would be almost certain to kick him.

But, so far, Nipper & Co. had shown no inclination to sit down.

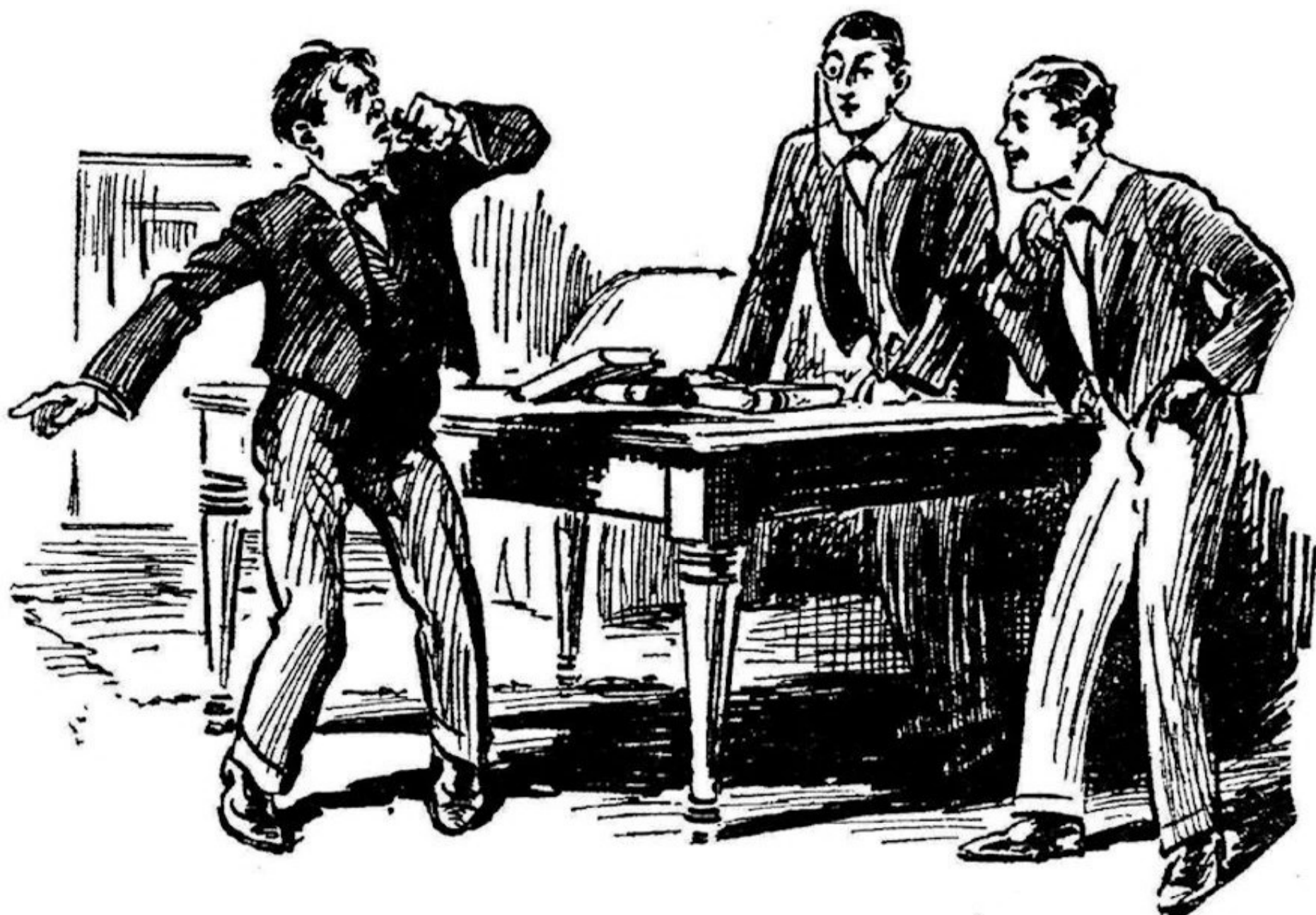
HANDFORTH came in, hot and flustered. Church and McClure followed him, not only hot and flustered, but somewhat battered. Church was wiping a smear of red from the corner of his mouth, and McClure was dabbing his nose.

"Trouble?" asked Nipper politely.

"Only a trifle," said Handforth. "What's the matter here?"

"A trifle!" yelled Church. "This fat-head sloshed us without any reason! Absolutely went for us bald-headed! And we hadn't said a thing!"

"Well, I must go for somebody!" argued Handforth. "I met a couple of those rotten Reformers in the lobby, and they checked



Teddy Long, under the impression that he was poisoned and that ink was an antidote, seized Archie Glenthorne's ink pot and swallowed the contents at a gulp. "Feel any better?" asked Brent anxiously.

me. These fatheads kicked up a fuss because I scragged them!"

Nipper chuckled.

"Never mind" he said gently. "If we start any argument about it, you'll probably try to scrag us. I want to talk to you about a little wheeze. How about stealing down after lights-out to-night?"

"What the dickens for?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Gore-Pearce's study is too neat," said Nipper firmly. "What price wrecking it?"

"I'd rather wreck Gore-Pearce!" said Handforth.

"But that's not feasible, old man," said Nipper, shaking his head. "Gore-Pearce would report us, and then we should only get into further trouble."

"And don't you think he'll report us for wrecking his study?"

"How can he report us if he doesn't know who's done it?" grinned Nipper.

"By George! That's true!"

"What can he do if he finds his study upside-down?" asked Nipper. "He'll suspect us, but he won't have any proof. Even if he makes a report, it'll be no good."

"Nipper, old man, it's a wheeze!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "Let's sit down at the table and get it all planned out!"

Teddy Long's heart nearly jumped out of his mouth, but Nipper's next words brought him relief and he breathed freely once more.

"We can't all sit at the table," he said impatiently. "I'm restless, too. Look here, can't we do something special?"

"In the way of wrecking Gore-Pearce's study?" asked Church.

"Yes," said Nipper grimly. "To use the old saying, 'Desperate ills need desperate remedies.' I don't believe in doing wilful damage to anybody's property; but there are exceptions to every rule."

"We don't want to be too destructive, old boy," said Sir Montie.

"No, perhaps you're right," said Nipper thoughtfully. "As a mere suggestion, what do you think of taking a saw and cutting off the legs of the chair? And how would it be to pull all the stuffing out of the seats? Then we could chop his mahogany desk up and leave it in the hearth for firewood!"

Handforth stared.

"Of course, we may have different ideas of destructiveness," he said pointedly, "but it seems to me that you're going to make a pretty nasty mess of Gore-Pearce's study."

"Don't you approve?"

"You silly ass! If it's up against Gore-Pearce, it's permissible," said Handforth promptly.

"As for the carpet, we might get some special sticky stuff," said Nipper. "By Jove! There's a barrel of tar round at the back. As a final touch, we could smear the walls with tar, and pour two or three gallons over the carpet. Imagine Gore-Pearce's face

when he walks in and finds himself in the middle of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the plotters went into a few further details.

FORTUNATELY for Teddy Long, Nipper & Co. didn't remain in Study C for more than another five minutes. Then they cleared out, and the spy under the table took a deep, deep breath. It was too good to be true!

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper, as he went into Study D with the others. "My sons, there's going to be some fun over this!"

The others stared.

"Over what?" asked Handforth.

"My dear ass, you don't think I meant all that about wrecking Gore-Pearce's study, do you?"

"Eh?"

"Teddy Long was under the table!" said Nipper cheerfully.

"Wha-a-at!" gasped the others.

"I spotted him there as soon as I entered the study," grinned Nipper. "So I thought I might as well give him something to report to Gore-Pearce. It seemed a pity to disappoint him."

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie. "Well I'm bothered!"

"Then all that talk about wrecking Gore-Pearce's study was spoof?" asked Handforth indignantly. "We're not going to do it at all?"

"Of course we're not," said Nipper. "I didn't say we were. If you'll remember, I was pretty careful. I made suggestions—I said we *could* do this and that. I didn't say we *should*! Not that Long will tumble."

"If you think this is funny, I don't!" said Handforth coldly.

"My dear chap, we couldn't really do all that destruction," said Nipper, becoming serious. "Hang it, there's a limit! To do what I suggested would be a downright outrage!"

Handforth was sobered.

"Perhaps you're right?" he admitted. "I hadn't looked at it like that. But where does the joke come in?"

"Why, Long will dash to Gore-Pearce—he's with him already, I expect—and Gore-Pearce will inform the Head!"

"Great Scott!"

"He'll sneak," grinned Nipper. "Don't you see? And when the Head comes he'll find us all in bed, like good little boys. Gore-Pearce will be diddled, and probably the Head will be a bit peeved over the whole silly business."

And Nipper & Co. chuckled with satisfaction as they thought of the coming fun!

CHAPTER 11.

A Little Misunderstanding!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE breathed hard.

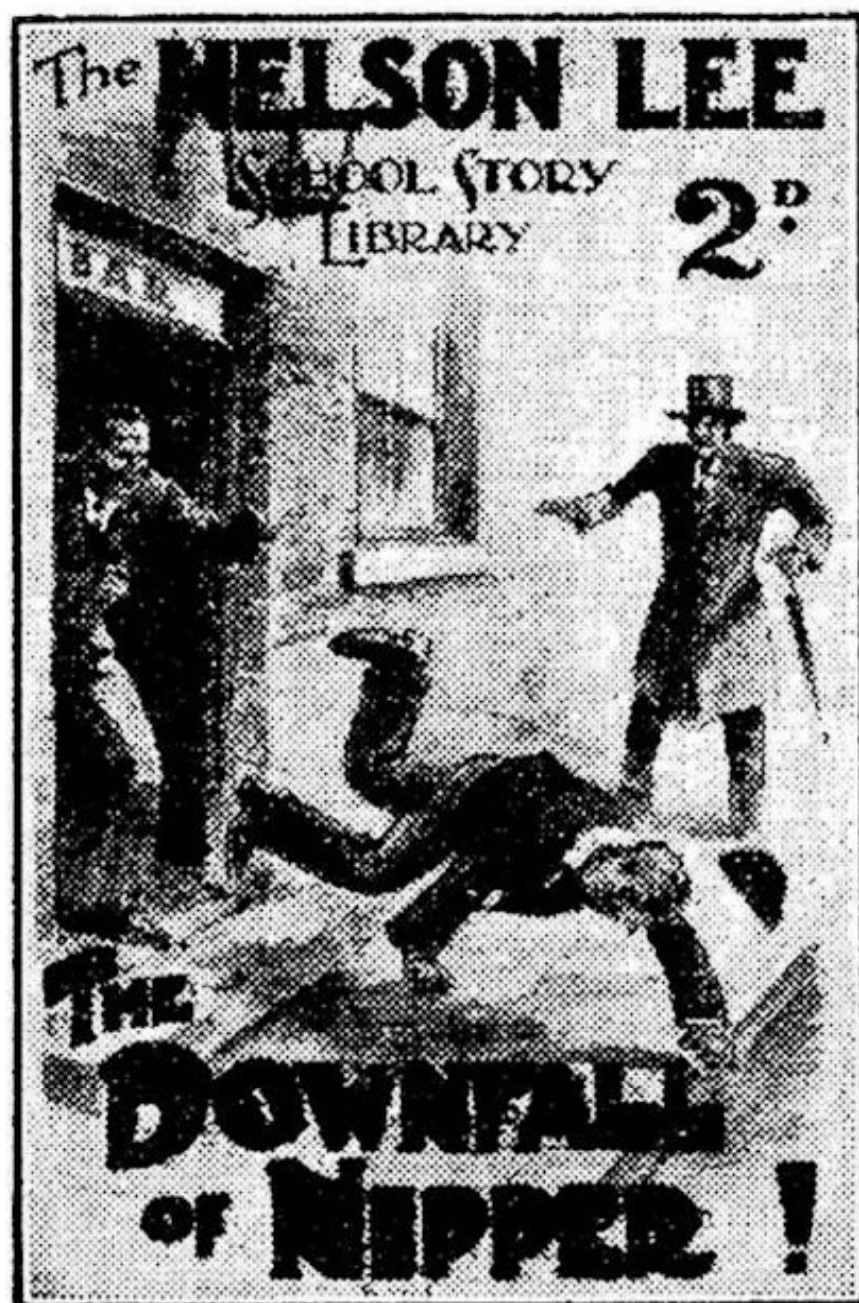
"By gad!" he ejaculated. "You heard all that, Long?"

"Yes!"

"You haven't been exaggerating?"

"Not a bit!" panted Teddy Long. "I was under the table all the time, and they didn't even suspect it. They're going to creep down after lights-out—at half-past ten—and ruin your study. Put tar all over the place,

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and smash up the desk, and saw the chairs to pieces."

"You told me that once," said Gore-Pearce, frowning. "The dangerous ruffians! Things are a bit thick when they descend to such destructive methods! But it proves how desperate they are!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Gulliver.

"Rather," agreed Bell. "They're so stumped for ideas that they've got to sneak down after lights-out and turn hooligans! What are you going to do about it, Gore-Pearce?"

"I'm going straight to the Head!" replied Claude.

The ease with which he fell into the trap was beautiful. Exactly as Nipper had anticipated, so Gore-Pearce decided.

"What's the good of that?" asked Gulliver. "The thing hasn't been done yet! And

if the Head comes over and questions them, they'll deny it, and abandon the whole thing."

Gore-Pearce sniffed.

"I'm not such a fool!" he snapped. "I shall tell the Head that— Well, leave it to me! But you can be pretty certain that I'll arrange things so that Nipper's gang gets it hot. By gad! There's more than a chance that Nipper will get the sack over this!"

"That would be pretty good," gloated Bell.

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"He's bound to get the sack," added Gore-Pearce, taking a deep breath. "And once we're rid of him, these rotten Old Timers won't have a proper leader. Pitt or Corcoran might try to step in, but they wouldn't be the same as Nipper. By gad, we'll get rid of him this time! I'm boss of the Remove now, of course, but once Nipper's gone my position will be more secure than ever!"

And Gore-Pearce, hugging himself with glee, prepared to depart.

"What about me?" asked Teddy Long. "Don't I get something?"

"You'll get a thick ear if you don't move away from that door!"

"Aren't you going to treat me?" demanded Long indignantly. "I think you ought to give me at least ten bob, Gore-Pearce!"

"You—you blackmailing young rotter!"

"Blackmail be blowed!" said Teddy, realising the strength of his position. "I've brought you some valuable information, and I deserve a tip! If you're going to be so jolly mean, I might forget to keep mum—and then Nipper will get to know that the cat's out of the bag!"

Gore-Pearce went red with rage.

"Why, you confounded rat!" he shouted. "If you breathe a word about this to anybody, I'll—I'll—"

"Besides," said Teddy, "there's my duty!"

"Your what?"

"I might consider it my duty to sneak if you lay your hands on me!" went on Teddy. "So you'd better keep your fists to yourself, Gore-Pearce! It's your own teaching, anyhow! If any of the Old Timers biff you, you sneak. So if you biff me, I'll sneak! And unless you give me ten bob, I'll tell Nipper that I overheard his plans, and that you're telling the Head!"

Gore-Pearce nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"Wait until this affair is over!" he said thickly. "Here's your rotten ten bob, you young crook! Take it, and get out of my sight!"

Teddy Long, triumphant, grabbed the ten-shilling banknote, and bolted. He felt that on the whole he was doing well.

DR. MORRISON NICHOLLS frowned.

"Really, Gore-Pearce, I am surprised to see you here again," he said, in a troubled voice. "How is it that you have so many reports to make? The other boys do not bother me to this extent."

Gore-Pearce, who stood in front of the Head's desk, looked pained.

"Bother you, sir?" he protested. "But it's your own wish!"

"Ahem! Perhaps so—perhaps so," said the Head. "All the same, is it really necessary to run to me with every complaint? Where is your Housemaster? Why could you not approach him?"

Gore-Pearce was prepared for this.

"Ordinarily, sir, I should do so," he replied; "but this is so serious that I felt I had to come straight to you. I dare say you know, sir, that many of the fellows are jibbing against your authority. They say that your ideas are crazy, and that you are little better than a lunatic."

Dr. Nicholls started.

"Are they, Gore-Pearce?" he asked concernedly.

"Yes, sir!"

"I must say that you are painfully frank."

"I'm only telling you the truth, sir," replied Gore-Pearce. "These chaps refuse to toe the line. They're still persecuting the rest of us, and as they can't do it openly, they're doing it secretly."

"This is indeed serious," said the Head. "Explain exactly what you mean."

"I've heard that six fellows of my own House, sir, have planned to raid my study after lights-out," said Gore-Pearce coolly. "They're going to smash the furniture up, and smother the whole room with tar."

"Good heavens!"

"I hope this will convince you what we're up against, sir," said Gore-Pearce earnestly. "These chaps hope to escape punishment by doing the thing in secret, after lights-out. I thought I'd better come straight to you, sir, so that you can take the necessary measures to prevent the destruction."

The Head rose to his feet.

"I will investigate it at once," he said earnestly.

"If you'll excuse me, sir, wouldn't it be a mistake?" asked Gore-Pearce. "The fellows are Hamilton, Watson, Tregellis-West, Handforth, Church, and McClure. If you tax them with it, they're bound to deny it."

"H'm! Perhaps you are right," muttered Dr. Nicholls, frowning. "You are suggesting that I should wait? Yes, of course! I'll catch them red-handed, Gore-Pearce. I'll be in your study at the appointed hour."

"That's just what I was going to suggest, sir," said Gore-Pearce eagerly. "I'll have a screen in there—up in one corner. How would it be for you to get behind that screen and wait until the young hooligans start their game?"

"I hardly like to take such a step," said the Head dubiously.

"I know it's a bit thick, sir—but how else can you catch them at it?" asked Gore-Pearce. "This sort of thing might get worse and worse, sir—unless you nip it in the bud. You don't realise what we're up against in the Junior School, sir!"

"I think I am beginning to realise it, Gore-Pearce," said the Head grimly. "You are absolutely sure of your facts?"

"Positive, sir. These cads will start at half-past ten."

"Very well—you may go," said the Head. "Thank you for your timely warning, Gore-Pearce. You are doing your duty well. I quite agree with you that these wretched boys must be caught red-handed if there is to be any lasting result."

GORE-PEARCE was light-hearted and gay as he sauntered into Study A five minutes later.

"Well, it's fixed!" he said calmly. "The Head's coming himself—at half-past ten. He'll catch those beauties like rats in a trap! I hope he'll sack the lot!"

He went into details, and Gulliver and Bell and Teddy Long grinned.

"It's all my doing!" said Teddy unctuously. "You've got to thank me for this, Gore-Pearce."

"Confound you!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "I thought I told you to clear out? What are you doing back here?"

"I thought you might have another ten bob to spare," said Long coolly.

"You—you shark!" shouted Gore-Pearce. "You won't get another cent out of me! By gad! If I lay my hands on you——"

He broke off abruptly, a startled look coming into his eyes.

"What's up?" asked Gulliver.

"I've just remembered something," said Gore-Pearce. "We've asked those East House chaps to come over here to-night—for a spree."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Not that it matters," went on Gore-Pearce, cooling down. "Plenty of time to postpone it. This other thing's more important. Here's half-a-crown, Long, you fat jellyfish! Buzz over to the East House, and tell Merrell that he and his pals had better not come to-night. No need to go into any details. Tell Merrell I'll see him to-morrow."

Teddy Long seized the half-crown greedily.

"Shan't I explain about what's going to happen to-night?" he asked.

"No. Better keep mum about it," retorted Claude. "The less we talk the better. We don't want any hitch."

DAVID MERRELL was having a heated argument with Marriott and Snipe, in Study No. 15, when Teddy Long put his head in the doorway.

"I've got a message for you, Merrell," said Long.

"Clear out!" snapped Merrell, looking round. "Who told you to come into this House, you Remove worm? Clear out, quick! Clear off!"

"Not likely!" snorted Teddy Long, positively arrogant in his newly-found importance. "Gore-Pearce asked me to come over——"

"Well, I'm asking you to go back!" said Merrell curtly. "In fact, I'm ordering you to go back! And unless you take your grubby face out of this study within ten seconds, I'll chuck something at it!"

Merrell turned to his study-mates.

"You're both mad!" he went on sourly. "I tell you that the thing wouldn't work. Corcoran's too keen. He'd spot the trick in no time. We don't want to ask for trouble——"

"There's something important going to happen in our House at half-past ten," said Teddy Long, in spite of Gore-Pearce's instructions. "The Head's coming over, and he's going to catch Nipper's gang red-handed!"

"Haven't you gone yet?" roared Merrell, looking round.

"It's a pity you can't listen to me!" snapped Teddy. "Gore-Pearce says that you mustn't come over to-night. You might get into trouble if you do. The Head's going to be there at half-past ten——"

"Why should we suffer this fat-headed idiot?" asked Marriott sourly. "Kick him out, Merrell! Snipe, throw us that cricket stump!"

"We'd better not be too violent," said Snipe. "Long might sneak on us, and——"

"Let him try it!" broke in Merrell, seizing the cricket stump, and advancing towards the door. "We can't even have a decent row in this study without being interrupted. Now then, Long——"

"Oh, all right! I've given you the message, and you can jolly well go and eat coke!" yelled Teddy Long, as he dodged out into the passage. "Hi! Mind what you're doing with that cricket stump!"

Slam!

The door closed, and Teddy Long sallied forth. He made a bee-line for the School Shop, where his half-crown was soon reposing in Mrs. Hake's till.

THE argument in Study 15 was over. Merrell & Co. had cooled down, and they were getting ready to start their prep.

"What was it that Long came here for?" asked Merrell, frowning. "Did you chaps hear what he was babbling about?"

"Yes," said Marriott. "He brought a message from Gore-Pearce."

"I didn't hear any message."

"Yes, he said that we've got to be over there at half-past ten instead of eleven, as originally planned," said Marriott. "All the better, really. We shall have more time for the spree."

Merrell nodded.

"Well, let's get down to this rotten prep," he said. "Half-past ten, eh? Good! We'll be there to the minute!"

AND Claude Gore-Pearce, lounging in Study A, had not the faintest suspicion of this tragic misunderstanding. He was dreamily pondering over the possible consequences of the night's forthcoming activities.

He certainly did not take the trouble to ponder over the possible consequences of trusting an unreliable deputy to deliver a message that he could much better have delivered in person!

CHAPTER 12.

The Germ of a Doubt!

DR. NICHOLLS nodded curtly to Nelson Lee as he happened to meet the latter in the main lobby of the Ancient House at about a quarter-past ten, after the school had retired to bed.

"I wondered who had put the lights on," explained the Housemaster-detective.

"I—er—find it necessary to visit this House in person to-night, Mr. Lee," said the Head awkwardly. "There is something mischievous afoot."

Nelson Lee looked at Dr. Nicholls steadily.

"Can you wonder at it?" he asked.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"It is not for me to criticise your methods Dr. Nicholls, but I certainly think that your policy is conducive to mischief," replied Nelson Lee. "I am very much afraid that many of the boys are developing into wrongdoers, without any care or thought for honour. With the destruction of the old code, they are floundering in——"

"Really, Mr. Lee, it seems that I was justified in coming here personally to investigate this matter," broke in the headmaster angrily. "It is a matter of much concern to me that some of you gentlemen are openly opposed to my experiment. How can I hope to gain success in the face of such opposition?"

"You are quite wrong, sir," said Lee quietly. "I am neither acting for or against your experiment. I am attending to my normal duties, and am quite neutral as regards this other matter. To be quite candid, I prefer to have nothing to do with it. I am hoping that you will soon change your mind."

"Then you will be hoping in vain, sir," retorted the Head. "The school needs cleansing. There is too much violation of the rules and regulations, and the only way to put a stop to this irregularity is to gain the co-operation of the boys themselves. I am glad to say that many of them are entering wholeheartedly into the scheme."

"The better boys are holding aloof," said Nelson Lee significantly. "Perhaps you don't realise, Dr. Nicholls, that your supporters are mainly composed of the boys who are irresponsible and easily misled."

"Are you suggesting that I am misleading them?"

"I certainly am," said Nelson Lee promptly.

"Really, sir!"

"Please don't misunderstand me, Dr. Nicholls," said Lee. "I am quite satisfied that you are very sincere in your efforts. I have not presumed to express any opinion until now, but since you have practically forced me to do so I can only tell you that, in my opinion, you are heading for trouble."

"I shall certainly have a hard fight before me if I have to fight down the prejudices of the masters as well as those of the boys," replied Dr. Nicholls stiffly. "It may interest you to know, Mr. Lee, that I have received information that six Remove boys have planned to wreck Gore-Pearce's study to-night."

"The term 'wreck' may mean anything or nothing," said Nelson Lee. "Such incidents frequently occur, but they are generally quite innocuous. That's just the trouble, sir. You are inclined to regard these trivialities as matters of importance."

"Do you call it trivial for the furniture in this study to be smashed up, and for the whole room to be smothered in tar?"

"Which boys are going to commit this outrage?" asked Lee sceptically.

"Hamilton, Watson——" And the Head reeled off the names, after consulting his shirt-cuff. "Those are the names, Mr. Lee."

"I am very sorry, but I think you have been misinformed," replied Lee. "These boys would never commit such a grave offence. I know their characters too well. Hamilton, indeed, is my own ward, and I will certainly vouch for his sense of fairness."

"You will see, Mr. Lee—you will see!" snapped the Head. "I will take it as a

favour if you will leave this matter entirely in my hands. But I should like you to remain in your study, so that I can bring the boys to you after I have caught them red-handed at their vandalism."

"I shall await in my study with interest," said Nelson Lee dryly.

THE Head found everything very handy for him in Study A. It was unusually tidy to-night, and Gore-Pearce had thoughtfully placed an odd magazine or two about. They were not the kind of magazines that Gore-Pearce habitually patronised; there was a monthly review, a religious weekly, and a scientific periodical. The sporting papers, which usually littered Study A, were conspicuous by their absence.

There was a screen in one corner, very handily placed. The Head moved over towards it, after closing the door. As he did so, he heard the school clock chiming out the half-hour.

He snapped off the electric light, and quickly placed himself behind the screen. He was aware of an uncomfortable twinge. He felt rather like a spy, and it occurred to him, with something of a shock, that this activity of his was altogether discreditable, and far beneath the dignity of a headmaster.

"Good gracious!" he muttered.

Now that it had come to the actual point, he realised that his enthusiasm had led him away. He decided then and there to abandon the project. It would be quite sufficient if he waited in the study, openly. He would then be able to catch the culprits with dignity, and their guilt would be quite obvious if they arrived with hatchets and saws and a quantity of tar.

He was really amazed that he should have carried out Gore-Pearce's despicable suggestion. This screen business was certainly undignified. He prepared to move out from behind it—and at the same moment the door opened!

"Nobody here," came a whispered voice. "All dark."

"Lazy beggars haven't come down yet, I expect," said another voice.

Dr. Nicholls gripped himself hard. Then his information had been correct! Here were the vandals—arrived at ten-thirty, exactly as Gore-Pearce had foretold! His information had obviously been reliable.

The Head swiftly moved out from behind the screen. He wasn't going to be caught in that undignified position! As it happened, he might just as well have stayed there, for he was not immediately discovered.

"Better put the light on," said one of the voices. "Where's the switch?"

"Leave it alone, you idiot!" hissed another. "Somebody might spot the light from the West House, and then we should be collared! Let's wait here until Gore-Pearce comes."

The Head started. What was this he was hearing?

"Gore-Pearce won't be long," came Merrell's voice. "It struck half-past ten two minutes ago. Blow this darkness! We might have whiled away the time by starting a little game. If Gore-Pearce wants bridge, I'm going to jib against it. Poker's a lot better, especially with a crowd."

"Better not play for high stakes," said Marriott. "I can't, anyhow. I've only got five bob to lose."

"Why the dickens don't those idiots come?" asked Snipe uneasily.

Dr. Nicholls fairly quivered with anger and amazement. These boys were certainly not here for the purpose of wrecking the study. That much was already obvious. And they appeared to be friends of Gore-Pearce's, too! Gore-Pearce—the informer—the fellow with a high sense of duty!

"Better shut that door," came one of the voices. "By gad! Gore-Pearce is a wily bird! It's a scream how he's spoofed the Head!"

"We're all spoofing the Head," chuckled one of the others. "The old fool thinks that his rotten wheeze is working like a dream, but we're the chaps who're getting all the benefit. What a lark!"

There were many chuckles.

"Unfortunately, the old fool is on the spot!" said Dr. Nicholls, in a thunderous voice. "Switch that light on, one of you!"

There came a series of frightened gasps. The Head himself leapt to the switch before any of the staggered juniors could escape. He pressed it down. The study became flooded with light.

Merrell stood there, a cigarette in his fingers, and there was a "plop" as the packet from which he had taken it fell to the floor. Marriott actually had a cigarette in his mouth, and as his jaw had dropped, and the cigarette was sticking to his lips, the effect was ludicrous.

"You young reprobates!" said the headmaster harshly. "So you thought you had deluded me? I am an old fool, am I? And you are here to smoke and play cards with Gore-Pearce? Good heavens! It is a fortunate thing that I came here to-night."

The East House juniors were utterly dumbfounded. They felt, too, that the Head had played a dirty trick on them—hiding there in the darkness, listening to their conversation! Actually, the Head had had no intention of eavesdropping; he had expected the light to be switched on within the first moment or two.

"Pup-please, sir, we were only fooling!" babbled Merrell, making a big effort to pull himself together.

"Only fooling!" repeated the Head. "Can you expect me to believe that when I find you here with cigarettes in your hands?"

"I—I mean, sir—about playing cards with Gore-Pearce," added Merrell. "It's only a lark, sir—no harm in it!"

"You may think that I lurked in this study on purpose to trap you," said the Head quietly. "If so, let me disabuse your minds

of that fallacy. I am here because of information that Gore-Pearce himself gave to me. He did not expect you, but some boys of his own House. It appears that there has been some misunderstanding between you," he added grimly. "You may be sure that your sins will always find you out. I need ask no questions. I have seen sufficient."

He produced a cane, and swished it.

The East House juniors received the biggest hiding of their lives. Not only a six-hander each, but painful cuts elsewhere. They crawled back to their own House in agony.

AND the Head, having paid a visit to the dormitories of Nipper & Co., and Handforth & Co., and having found these juniors sound asleep, was more than ever convinced that something had gone wrong that night.

He went to Gore-Pearce's dormitory, and opened the door cautiously.

"Hallo! Who's that?" came an eager whisper. "You ass! Get back into your own dormy! The Head's about! He's downstairs, swishing Nipper and Handforth and those other rotters!"

"You are wrong, Gore-Pearce. He is here!" said Dr. Nicholls.

Gore-Pearce nearly fell out of bed. Gulliver and Bell gave two yelps, and were on the point of fainting.

"I require an explanation from you, Gore-Pearce," said Dr. Nicholls harshly, as he switched on the light. "What do you mean by telling me that six boys of this House had planned to wreck your study? They are soundly asleep in their own beds."

In a flash, Gore-Pearce realised that he was on thin ice.

"Then they must have got wind of your coming, sir," he retorted quickly. "What I told you was the truth, sir."

"How do you account for the fact, then, that Merrell and some other boys of the East House came to your study while I was there?" demanded the Head. "What will you say when I tell you that they confessed to an arrangement with yourself to smoke and play cards?"

Gore-Pearce was nearly beaten. He knew, in a second, that Teddy Long had made a mess of that message. But he still had a loophole. He managed to put on an air of amazement and injured innocence.

"Really, sir, that's not fair!" he said protestingly. "I never made any arrangements with the East House boys! You came here and found me in bed, sir. I hope you won't believe those lies, sir?"

"It is strange that those boys should be so confident," retorted Dr. Nicholls. "I am afraid, Gore-Pearce, that I must give you the benefit of the doubt. You had better be more careful in future. Your information was not only unreliable, but your accusation was unwarranted. If anything like this happens again, I shall deal with you very severely."

The Head did not forget that he had obtained some of his information during those first few vital moments, when Merrell & Co. had been unaware of his presence. Yet, in justice, he could not accuse Gore-Pearce of being involved. The circumstances were very suspicious, but there was no actual proof.

When the Head went, Gore-Pearce gritted his teeth with rage, and swore to Gulliver and Bell that he would "take it out" of Teddy Long on the morrow. The escape had been a very, very narrow one.

NELSON LEE made very little comment when Dr. Morrison Nicholls gave him an account of what had happened.

"I knew you were wrong, of course, about the six boys you mentioned," he said. "I can only conclude that Gore-Pearce himself was bluffed—as he probably deserved to be. Do you really think that Gore-Pearce is as honest and as reliable as you have imagined? The boy has a very bad record?"

"I must confess that I am doubtful," admitted the Head.

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"You appear to be surprised over this little affair, Dr. Nicholls," he said. "I hope you are realising that your policy is inciting the boys to become dishonourable and untruthful? It is the natural result of your teaching."

"I protest, Mr. Lee, against that statement."

"I am sorry, but I must be allowed to have my own view," replied Lee quietly. "In theory, Dr. Nicholls, your plan may seem ideal, but in practice it must inevitably lead to the kind of thing that you have experienced to-night. I repeat that the boys are becoming dishonourable and untruthful."

"I entirely disagree with you," said the Head coldly.

Yet when he went away there was the germ of a doubt in his mind. He slept badly that night. He was wondering. Was this incident a true index of what was developing, or was it merely a false alarm?

Somehow, he could not entirely convince himself that the situation was satisfactory. For years, however, he had dreamed of putting this theory into practice, and he was certainly not going to be diverted from his purpose so easily. This scheme should have a full trial!

In the meantime, things looked pretty black for St. Frank's!

THE END.

(As it turns out, things look pretty bad for Nipper, too, as you will see for yourselves when you read next week's amazing long complete yarn entitled, "The Downfall of Nipper!" This magnificent yarn is full of dramatic situations, and you will vote it the best in the series so far. There's only one way to avoid being disappointed, chums—order your next week's copy of the Old Paper NOW!)

Have You Told Your Pals about this Magnificent Serial Written by E. S. Brooks?

RIVALS OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.



"Cheats never prosper." Peter Burke has good reason to remember that old adage. He tries to cheat Rex Carrington—but instead comes a nasty cropper himself!

The Cheat!

INWARDLY Burke was quivering with excitement—but he showed no sign of it outwardly.

"Hope that fool isn't going to be long," he muttered, speaking to Curly.

Out in the hall, Rex was talking to Fatty Fowkes.

"Nothing to worry about, Fatty," he was saying. "Keep your hair on, old man. I shan't be late. Awfully sorry the Blues lost this afternoon—"

"Never mind that!" interrupted Fatty Fowkes. "What are you doing in Burke's house?"

"Playing cards."

"What!"

"Poker, to be exact," said Rex, taking a kind of delight in shocking his sixteen-stone friend.

"You're mad, Rex!" shouted Fatty, over the wires. "You know as well as I do that Burke is a crook, and yet you admit that you're in his house, playing cards! Have you gone off your head?"

"If I'm mad, as you say, I must be off my head."

"I'm coming there straight away!" declared Fatty. "I'll bring Dave Moran and Ben and Andy and all the others, too!"

"Better not do that!" said Rex quickly. "Don't be a fool, Fatty! Can't you trust me?"

"No, I can't!" snorted Fatty.

"Well, have a shot at it," said Rex calmly. "I know that Burke is a crook, and I'm on my guard. I'll see you later, Fatty; and if you want to do me a favour, be patient. Please don't start any bother."

"All right!" said Fatty grimly. "I'll give you an hour, but no more! If you're not

here within an hour's time I'll get the boys to come with me and we'll drag you out by force."

And Fatty hung up, feeling that any further words would be useless.

Rex went back into the sitting-room. He picked up the pack of cards, which he had left standing on the table.

"Sorry if I've delayed the game," he said. "Anybody want any cards?"

"Give me three," said Curly Hankin. "Wouldn't be a bad idea to have a new deal altogether."

"No, certainly not," said Burke, trying to speak casually. "It might upset the whole run of the game."

When it came to his turn he took one card, having discarded the five of diamonds. Burke's exchange card proved to be the ten of clubs, and was of no value to him. But he held those four kings, and he vowed that this hand would be the finish of the game. He would get Rex Carrington's hundred pounds—and then pitch him out of the house.

In spite of Rex Carrington's watchfulness, the game was now crooked—and Peter Burke looked like bringing off his contemptible cheating!

High Stakes!

REX CARRINGTON had not looked at his own cards yet; but now he gave them a glance. He was pleasantly, but not greatly, surprised. He held two aces and three odd cards.

Burke watched him covertly, but there was no sign in Rex's face to betray the goodness or badness of his hand. Burke, secure with his four kings—one of them stolen from Rex—was confident that he

could clear the board. His one anxiety now was that Rex would get a fairly good hand so that he would be willing to bet. It would be a sheer tragedy if Rex got nothing, and threw his cards in.

"I'll take three," said Rex shortly.

He discarded the three odd cards, and dealt himself three more from the pack. He picked them up, looked at them, and nearly had a fit. He did, indeed, give a slight start, and Burke felt his heart give a leap. Rex had picked up something good. This was going to be worth playing!

As a matter of fact, Rex could hardly believe his eyes. The first card he saw was the jack of spades. But the other two were aces!

Two aces!

And he already held two in his hand! This gave Rex four aces. Little did Rex dream that he had to thank Mr. Peter Burke for this amazing hand. Three aces would have been good, but four aces constituted something phenomenal. And Rex didn't even have to rely upon the Joker to make up his four. He lowered his cards and looked round.

"Anybody betting?" he asked casually.

"A quid," said Curly Hankin, selecting a chip.

The betting was slow for a bit, and then, as usual, Hankin and his companions dropped out of the game. It became a tussle between Burke and Rex, and this time it looked like being a really grim one.

Burke was gloating over the fact that Rex had a good hand. Naturally, he couldn't have anything that could compare with his four kings! That was out of the question! Probably had three of a kind, or perhaps even "a full hand"—three of a kind and a pair—or a straight, or a flush.

But Mr. Burke didn't care what he had. He—Burke—held four kings, and he would be able to knock spots off Rex as soon as the show-down came. He felt that Rex's hand was good enough to justify a little gambling.

"This is too slow," said Burke. "There's your five pounds, Carrington. I'll raise it twenty."

"Phew! Pepper!" said Rex, with a whistle.

"What do you mean?"

"Getting hot, isn't it?"

"Afraid to bet?" sneered Burke.

"There's your twenty quid!" said Rex, as he shifted the pile of chips across the table. "I'm in a bit of a reckless mood myself, too, Mr. Burke. I'll raise you another twenty."

"Gosh! That's the style!" said Burke, inwardly gloating. "I thought you were a sportsman, Carrington. There's your twenty—and another twenty!"

"Right-ho!" said Rex. "If you're feeling that way, Burke, I'll give you a run. Twenty more on the top of yours."

"It's pounds, remember!" ejaculated Burke.

"Of course."

Hankin & Co. watched, fascinated. They had played a few games in their lives, but they had never seen such reckless betting as this. In almost as many seconds, the money on the table represented sixty or seventy pounds—in each pile. The reserve players watched with a growing awe.

Mr. Burke was perspiring. For the first time a shadow of doubt began to creep into his mind. Was it possible that Rex held a better hand than his four kings? His betting was so reckless that one might have been justified in supposing that he held a royal high flush—the master-hand of poker.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

ULYSSES PIECOMBE—more commonly known as Piecan—manager of the Blue Crusaders—is worried. Not because the Blues are doing badly, but because a dirt-track has been opened nearby. The players, however, seem unperturbed. Especially

REX CARRINGTON, the Blues' brilliant centre-forward. Rex is keen on dirt-track racing, and he enters for some of the races. His clever riding considerably impresses

PETER BURKE, manager of the Speedway. Burke holds an I O U from Rex for £150—a debt incurred through gambling—and he suggests that if the centre-forward throws up footer and goes in for track racing he—Burke—will destroy the I O U. Rex knocks the manager down, who retaliates by sticking the ferrule of his umbrella through the centre-forward's toe, thus crocking him for footer. Burke reports this to

JULIAN HARDING, owner of the Speedway. Angry at such villainy, Harding sacks his manager. Burke goes away, vowing vengeance. Rex, although crocked for footer, can ride a motor-cycle as of old, and he fixes up with Harding to appear at the Speedway regularly. In a moment of weakness, Rex again plays cards with Burke. With them are Curly Hankin, Brewer and Parr—three rascally Blues' reserves—who are in Burke's pay. They play poker. While Rex is called away to the telephone, Burke, unknown to Curly Hankin and Co., takes a king from Rex's hand, and substitutes an ace. Burke now holds four kings—which is one of the highest possible hands to be had.

(Now read on.)

But such a hand as that comes only once in a lifetime.

Besides, Mr. Burke realised with a sense of his own idiocy that such a hand was impossible. For how could Rex hold a royal high flush when all the four kings were in Burke's hand? This gave Burke fresh heart.

"I'm game to keep on if you are!" he panted. "There's your twenty, Carrington—and another twenty!"

"This is getting awful!" said Curly, wiping his brow.

"Somebody's going to lose a lot!" said Parr hoarsely.

"I'll go on as long as you will," said Rex. "And why bother with mere twenties? I'll raise you fifty pounds, Burke."

"Gosh!" said Burke shakily.

Rex himself was wondering what Burke could hold. Evidently something extra good. But then, Rex was in the ideal position of not caring a jot. He himself held the highest possible hand—next to a royal high flush—and as Mr. Burke couldn't have the latter, unless there were five aces in the pack, Rex was prepared to go on all night.

Again Burke felt a twinge. What was it that Rex could have? And why did he remain so cool?



Fatty Fowkes stared in amazement. He had thought Rex Carrington was crooked—and yet here was the centre-forward dribbling a football down the field with all his old skill!

Nobody took any notice of this remark, which was chiefly noticeable for its obviousness. Somebody *was* going to lose a lot—and Mr. Burke knew perfectly well that that somebody would be Rex Carrington. The fool! He was probably betting up like this on a mere flush, or something equally silly.

Rex was as cool as ice—a great contrast to the hot, flabby, perspiring Burke. The hotter the play, the cooler Rex became. His nature served him well under such conditions.

"How much is there on the table now?" he asked, with a grin. "If I lose this hand, Burke, I shall have to give you my hundred quid, and another I O U, by the look of it. You're making the fur fly this time."

"I'll take an I O U," replied Burke promptly. "Or are you getting cold feet?"

"I'm not afraid of your infernal fifty pounds!" snapped Burke. "I'll raise it the same, and be hanged to you."

"Go ahead!" grinned Rex. "This is getting a bit monotonous."

Every chip on the table had been used—and more had been pulled out of the box by Curly Hankin, who obligingly kept tally, too.

"Better be careful!" said Curly uneasily. "You're mad, both of you! There's something like five hundred quid represented on the table! You can't pay for it, either of you!"

Burke brushed the perspiration from his brow.

"I'm not giving in!" he croaked.

"Well, I've had my bit of fun," said Rex.

"I'll put you out of your misery, Burke. There's your last fifty—I'll see you."

Burke uttered a shout of relief, and slapped his cards down on the table.

"Four kings!" yelled Curly Hankin.

"Yes, four kings!" shouted Burke. "Now, Carrington! I'll trouble you for that hundred pounds of yours, and another I O U to cover the balance!"

Rex grinned.

"What about my hand?" he asked sweetly.

"Have a look at this, Mr. Burke. Hankin, grab some water. I fancy our mutual friend will need it. Does this give you a pain, Mr. Burke?"

He spread his four aces out, and Peter Burke sagged in his chair like a pricked bladder. For the shock was a double one, and he knew, with a pang of horror, that it was he himself who had given Rex Carrington this master hand!

A Clean Sheet!

NO wonder Mr. Burke crumpled up!

His petty villainy had recoiled on his own head. Seldom had there been such a complete case of the biter being bit! Burke had cheated in order to rook the Blues' centre-forward; and, through his cheating, Rex had won!

Without that ace, he would never have made those enormous bets—and Burke had given it to him. Furthermore, it was quite impossible for Burke to make any mention of the fact, for to have done so would have been to label himself a cheat.

Rex had no right to that money. He had won by cheating, but not his own cheating! That was the bitter pill that Mr. Burke was required to swallow.

"You win!" he snarled.

"No need to be so ill-tempered about it," said Rex. "You're the host, Mr. Burke. I think I'll take that I O U, if you don't mind, and there's a little sum of money you owe me on top of it—to square up!"

"You won't get any money out of me!" roared Burke.

"No? Do you always treat your gambling debts like this?"

"Hang you!" snapped Burke.

He took out the I O U for £150, and Rex picked it up, tore it into shreds, and tossed the fragments in the fireplace.

"Well, that's that," he said complacently. "I've got a clean sheet now, Burke. You needn't trouble about the rest of the money, I don't want it."

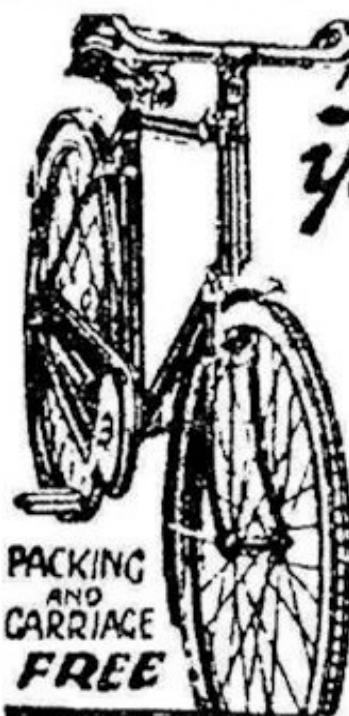
"Don't want it?"

"Of course not," said Rex contemptuously. "I've cleared that debt, and I'm satisfied. Do you think I need your confounded money? If you're so tremendously honourable about your gambling debts, you can send a cheque to the Bannington Hospital in my name," he added sarcastically.

Burke tried to pull himself together.

"Aren't you going to stay?" he ejaculated, as Rex gave indications that he was ready to depart. "We've hardly started yet."

(Continued on next page.)



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(Continued from page 39.)

"Don't you believe it," said Rex. "We've finished."

"Win all you can, and then clear out, eh?" jeered Burke.

"I've got out of your clutches—and that's what I was aiming for," replied Rex coolly.

Burke said nothing. In a measure, he was relieved. He had expected Rex to demand an I O U.

"Look here," said Burke, going out into the hall, where Rex was putting on his overcoat. "Don't be in such an infernal hurry, Carrington. We'll change the game. Let's try a real game like bridge. Or if you're keen on a proper gamble, there's pontoon——"

"Shall I twist or burst?" murmured Rex.

"Plenty of time yet," said Mr. Burke boisterously. "And I don't feel comfortable about that money. I'd pay you if I had the cash, and I want you to give me the chance of winning it back, and squaring things up."

"What for? I've let you off, haven't I?"

"Hang you, I don't want to be let off!"

"No, you want to get that cash of mine, don't you?" said Rex pleasantly. "You thought you'd have it long before now, eh? But things haven't gone quite as you expected, have they, my beauty? I can see through your little game! I wasn't born yesterday—although I might have been born the day before."

And Rex turned towards the hall door.

"You insulting hound!" shouted Burke thickly. "What do you mean to imply?"

"Oh, go and boil yourself!" retorted Rex.

He opened the door, went out, and slammed the door after him. He strode down the little path, and it wasn't until he reached the road that he suddenly realised that he was walking almost normally. He had forgotten his injured foot. Unconscious of it, he had scarcely limped.

"By Jove! I wonder?" he muttered.

A thought had come to him—a thought that stirred the blood in his veins. He felt very light-hearted as he walked away. He had completely finished with Peter Burke, and he could now start again with a clean sheet.

"No more fooling about for me," Rex decided. "What a fool a chap can be! Poor old Blues! Pity they lost to-day. Hope it won't mean the end of their promotion dreams. Wonder if I can help again?"

Musing, he set himself to walk to Bellton. The Blues had not yet shifted to their new quarters at the Stronghold, although they would be going very shortly.

The walk was quite a long one for a fellow with an injured foot, but luck came Rex's way. A lorry lumbered up, on the way to Caistowe, and Rex obtained a lift. The walk from Bellton to the school was a mere trifle—and Rex chose to go along the towing-path by the river.

He did this deliberately. He had an idea that Fatty Fowkes would be on the war-path—he had been expecting to meet Fatty ever since he had left Bannington—and by

taking the tow-path he hoped to avoid his fat friend.

In this way, it so happened that Rex cut across the St. Frank's playing fields. It was quite moonlight, and Rex paused thoughtfully on Little Side. The Speedway was all very well, but football was in his blood, and it was impossible for him to disguise his bitter disappointment at being temporarily out of the game.

"Jove!" he muttered.

He had suddenly caught sight of an old practice ball, which some of the boys had evidently carelessly left lying about. He jumped upon it joyously, and punted it across the turf. Then, swerving in towards the goal, he steadied himself. He was aware of a great exhilaration.

Slam!

With all his old accuracy, he sent in a shot that would have tested the finest goalie.

"Phew!" he whistled, hopping on one leg.

In his exuberation he had forgotten his foot again, but he remembered it now. Yet, although he was in considerable pain, he realised that this was mainly due to the fact that he was wearing walking-shoes. His injury had not caused him half the agony he had every reason to expect it would.

"Where's that ball?" he muttered grimly.

He retrieved it, and commenced another dribble—this time right across the field to the farther goal. As he was in the middle of his run a stout figure appeared in the moonlight, and stood watching in blank amazement.

Rex's Resolve!

FATTY FOWKES stood aghast.

He had heard the unmistakable "thud" as Rex had slammed the leather into the net. It had come to him from afar, but Fatty was too accustomed to that sound to be deceived. To hear it so late at night, however, coming from the deserted playing-fields, was a surprising circumstance.

Fatty had been on his way out to search for Rex Carrington, but he went straight along to Little Side to find out who on earth was fooling about with a football in the moonlight.

"Good glory!" said Fatty.

He could easily recognise the tall, litho figure of Rex Carrington as the latter sped across the turf, with the football in perfect control at his feet. Fatty had the impression that he was looking upon some miracle. For there was not the slightest sign of limping in Rex's run.

"Hi!" roared Fatty. "Rex!"

Rex heard the shout, but he took his kick before replying. It was another glimpse of the old Rex, and the Blues' centre-forward was overjoyed to find that he could use that foot almost normally. However, he had hurt himself a bit by now, and when he approached Fatty he was limping in earnest.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said the big goalie. "What the dickens do you think you're doing out here? Are you mad, Rex?"

"Just having a kick, old man," said Rex. "I found a ball lying about, so I thought I'd see what I could do. I'm not half so bad as I feared."

"Bad!" said Fatty. "You're in tip-top form! I've never been so surprised in all my life! I thought you were crooked."

"I thought so, too," said Rex. "It just shows you, Fatty, that you never know what you can do until you try. I really believe that I shall be fit to play again within a few days."

"You might be able to take a couple of kicks, and that's surprising enough, but it'll be a long time before you can stand ninety minutes of gruelling play," replied the big goalkeeper. "I've never known such a mad-man in my life!" he added hopelessly. "You ought to nurse that foot—not fool about like this! And what about Burke? How did you manage to tear yourself away?"

Rex took Fatty by the arm.

"Don't be so bitter, old man," he said quietly. "I haven't done my foot any harm. And I just couldn't help taking those kicks. When I came across that football I forgot everything else. It's in my blood, Fatty. If I was doomed never to play football again, I think I'd fade away!"

Fatty softened.

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd better excuse you," he grunted. "But for goodness' sake be careful! We came an awful cropper to-day. Two more points gone west!" he added gloomily. "No First Division for us next season."

"It's not too late!" said Rex fiercely. "Fatty, we're going to win the championship, and I'm going to help! The Speedway can go hang—and all its gold helmets and fat money prizes! As for my foot, I'm going to play in our next League match!"

"Good man!" said Fatty Fowkes breathlessly. "By glory! Won't old Piecan be pleased? I tell you, Rex, he's going positively white with worry. The whole forward line is going to pieces. Without you, it's a joke."

"Don't tell Piecan," said Rex dreamily. "Let's keep it dark, Fatty. Let the others think that I'm still crooked—right until the day of the match. Then give old Piecan a pleasant surprise. I wouldn't have told you, only you happened to come along and spot me."

"It's a bit hard on Piecan—and Grouser, too," said Fatty. "They'll go mad with joy when they know that you're getting fit again. But that isn't the most important point."

"No?"

"No!" said Fatty firmly. "The most important thing is that you've realised that football is the only game. Never mind your rotten Speedway! If you've lost your interest in dirt track racing, you'll soon find your old form."

"I haven't lost interest——"

"Look here!" broke in Fatty, turning and grabbing Rex by the shoulders. "If you're going to do any more racing, I'll lock you up somewhere! You might have a spill, and break a leg, or something! Our next match

is against Denton City. We must win that match, or we're sunk."

"Denton City, eh?" whistled Rex. "They're running up for the championship, too! It's going to be a close thing, Fatty."

"Denton City won to-day. They're a point higher than us—top of the table," said Fatty soberly. "We're second, and likely to drop down the table with a thud unless we keep up our winning form. Everything depends upon the next two or three matches, and most of all upon the Denton game."

"We'll win!" said Rex confidently. "We'll win—because we've got to!"

"And you'll chuck up the Speedway?"

"You can rely upon me to take no chances," replied Rex vaguely.

"That reminds me," said Fatty, his voice becoming stern. "What do you mean by going to Burke's house and gambling? I didn't believe it when somebody told me that you were there, and when I heard your voice over the 'phone I nearly had a fit."

"I wasn't such a fool as you thought, Fatty," said Rex quietly. "You know that IOU? Well, I've cleared it off. I'm out of Burks' clutches, and I've finished with him."

He gave a few details, and Fatty was relieved.

"Thank goodness for that," he said at length. "If you'll only finish with the Speedway, too, there'll be some hope for us. I suppose you realise that Piecan's worried about the gate money, too? Is it fair to the club? Is it fair to young Corcoran? You're the star man—and you're taking the crowds away from the Stronghold to the Speedway."

"Don't worry, Fatty—I'll put things right," said Rex quietly.

They went indoors, and they would certainly have been surprised had they known that Curly Hankin & Co. had been watching from the shadows. The three rascally Reserves had left Burke's house almost immediately after Rex, and Burke himself had driven them into Bellton.

They had heard that "thud," too; they had seen Fatty, and had followed him. They had seen Rex on the field.

(Continued on next page.)



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(Continued from page 41.)

The next day they mentioned the matter to Mr. Peter Burke, whom they met in the billiard-room at the Wheatsheaf.

"So Carrington is not crooked, after all?" said Burke savagely. "Not that it matters now. I don't care a hang about the Speedway; but, by thunder, I'd like to get even with Carrington!"

He sat for some time pondering over his imaginary grievances. He considered that Rex had done him out of his job. He felt that Rex, too, had swindled him over that game. Rex, apparently, was responsible for all Mr. Burke's troubles.

And since Mr. Burke had no work to occupy him, he had time to nurse his hatred. It has been well said that the devil provides work for idle hands to accomplish.

"Rather than have Carrington help your confounded club to promotion, I'll crook him again!" snapped Burke savagely. "He's making money at the Speedway, too, and he's thick with that old fool, Harding. I'd like to get square with both of them."

Curly Hankin shrugged his shoulders.

"Better forget it," he said. "It's nothing to do with me, anyhow. I don't think I want to help in any more of your plans, so you'd better not suggest any—"

"Wait!" broke in Burke. "If I work it right, there's a way in which I can get even with Carrington, and smash Harding at the same time—smash him completely."

"That'll please old Piccombe," said Curly, with a grin.

"Yes, smash him!" muttered Burke, his eyes full of evil purpose. "He's kicked me out of my job, and Carrington has been the main cause of it. I'll get square with the pair of them—but I'll need help."

"We're not joining in any of your tricky plans," said Hankin curtly.

But after Mr. Peter Burke had talked for a matter of twenty minutes, Hankin and Brewer and Parr were looking flushed and excited.

"It can't fail!" said Burke tensely. "We'll ruin Carrington and Harding, smash up the Speedway, and make a pile for ourselves at the same time! You'll get your share, boys."

"There'll be trouble if we don't," said Hankin pointedly.

"We shall be safe, too," said Burke. "It can't fail—it's bound to come off!"

And the rogues continued their evil scheming. What was this new plot against Rex Carrington that Burke had evolved?

(This plot must be something very drastic obviously, if one is to take any notice of Burke's words. Rex and Harding will be ruined; the Speedway smashed up! Will Rex discover all about this cunning scheme before it is too late, or will Burke be able to carry out his threats? This serial is now reaching an exciting stage, chums, so don't miss reading next week's gripping instalment.)

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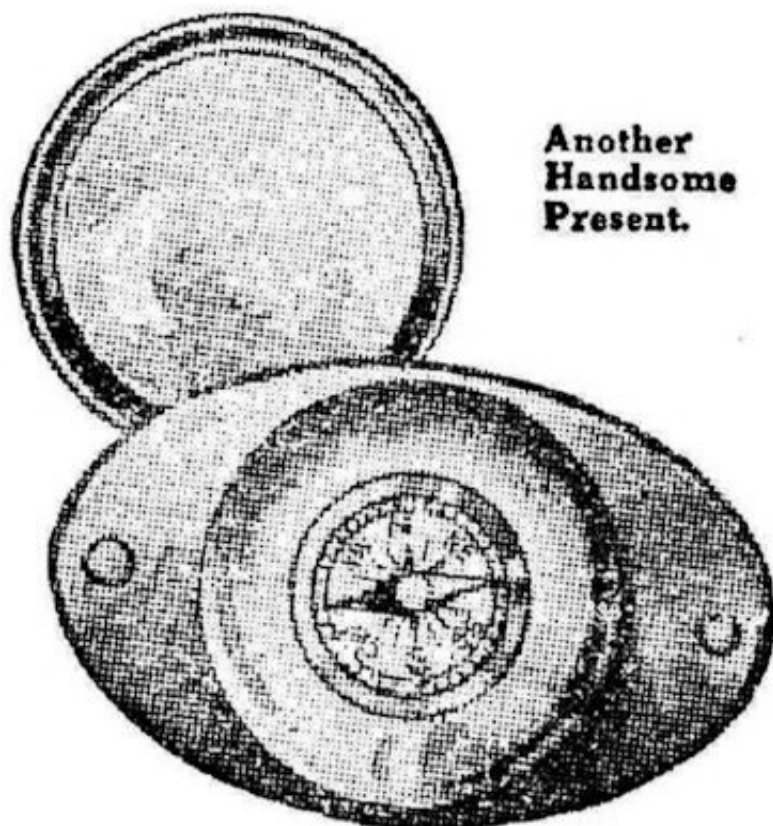
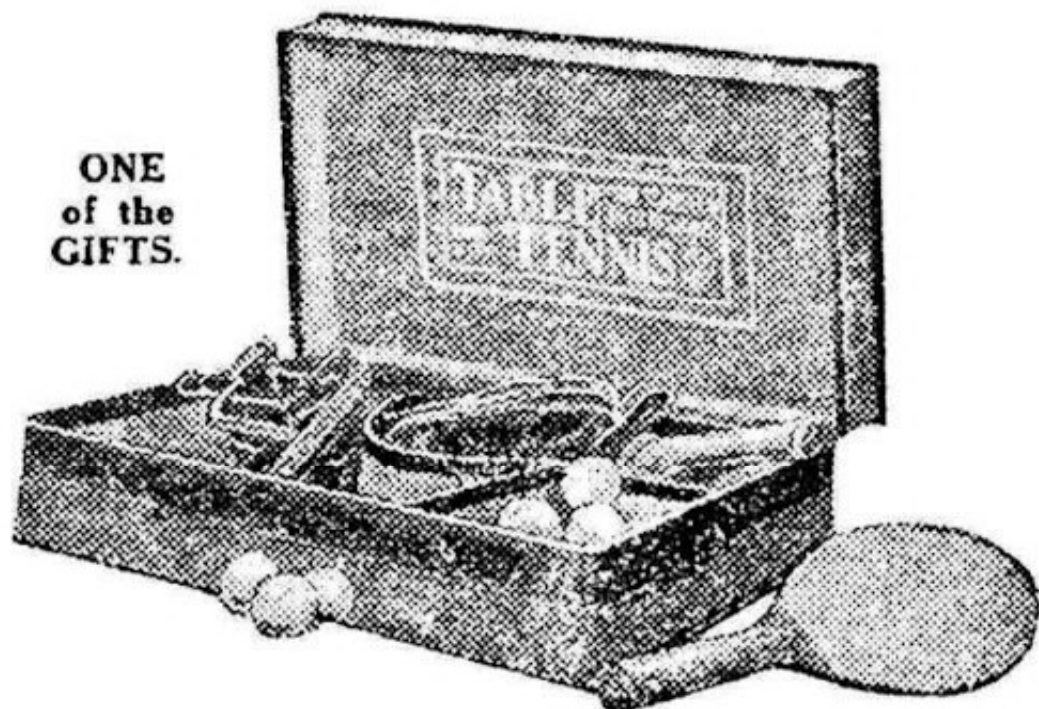
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BETWEEN OURSELVES!

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.



IVY DEAN

MISS IVY DEAN, of 33, St. Thomas Road, Fulham, London, S.W. 6 (whom you see at the top of the page this week), has asked me to print her full name and address, as she would like overseas girl readers to correspond with her.

It seems that you are not only old Scouts, but good old Scouts—Fred Oates (Devonport). Although you and your friends are all over twenty years of age, you are still staunch readers and you are all doing your best to get new ones—not only for the NELSON LEE, but also for the Companion Papers. Three cheers for you! That's the jolly old stuff to give 'em! I shall look forward to hearing from Fred and Harold and Charlie and Reggie and Bert and Edgar. I'd very much like to have their opinions, since they are such old readers. It always gives me a "kick" when I hear of readers such as yourselves who still take in the Old Paper after boyhood's days have gone.

What's a poor author to do—Rex Staples (Walworth)—when he gets letters like yours? (No, all the rest of you, this is not another Staples. It's our same old friend, but he's changed his name to Rex, thinking, no doubt, that this is more princely). Some time ago I asked everybody to tell me whether they liked long series or short series the better, and any amount plumped for the shorter. Now you say: "I expect at least eight in this Australian series, if not more. These are the goods." And you're not the only one, Rex, either. It seems to me that the long series are the more popular, after all. Yet, really, it all depends upon the central wheeze. I don't think you'd like it very much if I got an idea suitable for four stories, and thinned it out to cover eight. The main thing is to get something new as soon as a series shows signs of wear. And even if I can't spot any threadbare patches, the Editor jolly soon points them out! Many congrats., Rex, old man, on the way in which you are keeping up your weekly letters—and not only keeping them up, but making them increasingly interesting. Honestly, I regard this as a very great compliment, and I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. It's one thing to say that

you'll write to me every week, and another thing to do it. You are doing it—and, by Jove, you're doing it thoroughly, too!

My best thanks—Miss Eden Coombes (Taumarunui, New Zealand)—for sending me that Christmas Number of the "Auckland Weekly News." I'm always exceedingly grateful for such acts of courtesy on the part of my readers. I can't be travelling the world all my time, and to receive first-hand information from various parts of the globe is the next best thing.

The Remove and the Fourth Form at St. Frank's—Walter Rose (Bradford)—are about equal. They are practically one Form, but together they would number too many for one class-room, and to be taken by one master, so they are separated in this way.

It's as simple ABC to join the St. Frank's League—Maurice King (Harlesden, N.W.10). The next time the Application Form appears, bag two copies of the Old Paper. Sign one of the forms yourself, and get the form in the extra copy signed by the person to whom you give it. Then send up the two signed forms to the Chief Officer (a ½d. stamp on the unsealed envelope will do if no letter is enclosed), and the thing's done.

No—W. Renouf (Jersey)—I'm not writing for the "Boy's Realm" now, but my earlier St. Frank's yarns are reappearing every week in "The Popular." As to the most daring boy at St. Frank's, I should say it would be a toss up between Willy Handforth and Johnny Onions.

Most decidedly—Alma E. Holloway (West Dulwich)—girls may join the St. Frank's League—and the more the merrier!



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers, send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee School Story Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

This "Jazz" Question!

I HAVE just received a long and interesting letter from a very indignant reader whom I will call "M. E. H." and who resides in Clapton. Let me add here, hastily, that the said reader is not indignant with yours truly. No, he's indignant with certain people who run down dance music! Apparently M. E. H. goes all hot and bothered when he hears N.L. readers or other people calling dance music "horrible, blaring, screeching, unearthly, hideous," and many other lurid adjectives. He wants to know why these same people particularly persist in running down the saxophone, and what justification they have for making all these statements. Further, he wants to know my views on the subject.

Personally, I think there's something to be said for both parties. Some of the present day dance tunes are quite melodious; others—those "hot" numbers, for example—do sound weird, although, no doubt, they are extremely clever in their way.

Saxophone Wisdom!

In my opinion, the whole issue depends upon one thing. These people who decry dance music seem to forget that this particular type of music is written specially for dancing. That underlying rhythm one always hears in a dance tune sounds monotonous and unmusical to a "highbrow" listener, yet it is essential to the dancer.

As regards that much maligned instrument, the saxophone, here again I think there's a lot to be said both for and against. The saxophone, when played properly and "seriously," sounds very beautiful. I have among my gramophone records a saxophone solo in which this instrument sounds almost like a 'cello. On the other hand, I have heard, on occasions, the saxophone sounding shrill and unmusical when playing some of the modern dance numbers.

And there you have my views on the subject. M. E. H.—scanty. I will admit. I gather from your letter that you yourself play in a dance band. I shall be very interested to hear from you again, and let's know how your band's going along, won't you?

"The downfall of Nipper!"

Having taken up so much space in replying to my Clapton chum, I find I have only space enough for a few words about next week's school story.

St. Frank's is in a fine old stew at the moment, isn't it? This Dr. Nicholls may be a really decent sort of chap, but he little realises what an upheaval he is causing. He little realises, too, that his remarkable notions are giving the rotters of the school a chance to score against the decent fellows and get the upper hand.

Next week's story is entitled, "The Downfall of Nipper!" I do not think I need say anything further about it. The title speaks for itself. Needless to say, this yarn is full of dramatic situations and is one that will live long in your memories. You mustn't miss reading it, whatever you do, chums.

Order your next Wednesday's copy of the Old Paper now to save disappointment.

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

G. Burgess, 271, Northstoke, Arundel, Sussex, wants NELSON LEE, old series, 6d. offered for each copy if in good condition.

Alan Smith, 53, Scar Bottom, Halifax, Yorks, wants to hear from egg collectors.

Cecil A. Westrope, 26, Victoria Road, Surbiton, Surrey, wishes to hear from readers who are interested in his magazine, "Youth." Gratis. Amateur authors wanted.