No. 114.—MAGNIFICENT SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE STORY.

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THE BOY FROM CALIFORNIA!

ANOTHER STRANGE ADVENTURE OF "NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S." SET DOWN BY NIPPER, AND PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE YELLOW SHADOW," "THE DUPLICATE DOOR," and Other Fine Stories.

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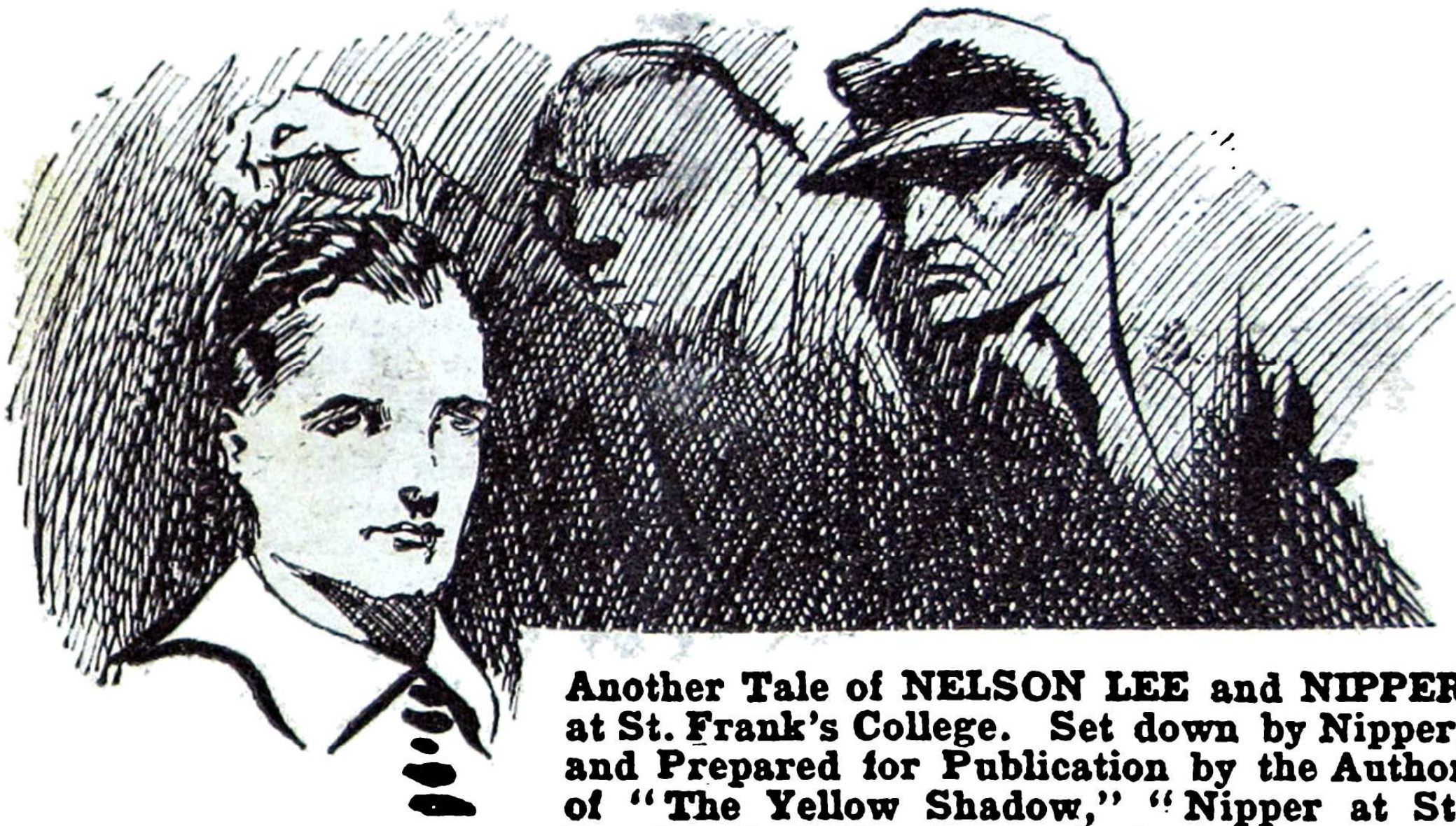
(INCORPORATING THE "BOYS' REALM.")

THE BOY FROM CALIFORNIA



Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER at St. Frank's College. Set down by Nipper, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Yellow Shadow," "Nipper at St. Frank's," "The Ivory Seekers," etc., etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

NELSON LEE and NIPPER are at St. Frank's College for a period of several months. Having incurred the hatred of the FU CHANG TONG, a murderous Chinese secret society, Lee and Nipper have been forced to adopt new identities until the time of peril has passed. Nelson Lee is a Housemaster and Nipper a junior schoolboy. Nipper himself writes of the events which took place during his life as a member of the Remove, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I LEARN THAT JUSTIN B. FARMAN, FROM CALIFORNIA, IS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE AT ST. FRANK'S—I LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING HIM WITH INTEREST.

THE Remove common-room in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was crowded. Quite a number of fellows were there, and they all seemed to be interested. They were listening to a speech. It was a thundering good speech, too.

Handforth and Church and McClure, of Study D, were to the forefront, and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were just near. The fellow who was jawing to the crowd was Dick Bennett, of Study C. Dick Bennett is an alternative way of spelling Nipper—and I'm Nipper.

In short, it was little me who was doing the spouting.

"The Fossils have got to wake up!" I shouted. "Look at the cricket! Look at everything! We're miles behind the College House in sports, and I don't know what else. It's not going to be stood! The Ancient House must assert itself, and show St. Frank's that it's the cock-house of the school—so far as the juniors are concerned, at least!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Bennett!"

"No harm in talking, anyhow!"

"Talking!" I roared. "What's the good of talking? We don't want to talk—we want to act!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at," I went on warmly. "I tell you, we've got to make a big alteration, and we'll start with the cricket. We're going to get up an eleven of our own, and then whack the College House lot!"

"Yes—if we can!" said Handforth sarcastically.

"If!" I retorted. "There's no 'if' about it, you burbling ass!"

Handforth glared.

"Did you call me a burbling ass?" he demanded.

"I did. And I'll call anybody else a burbling ass if he is one!" I said. "Dry up, for goodness sake. This isn't a time to row. We're here for business. This meeting is a serious thing. The Fossils need prodding up!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tregellis-West lazily. "Dear fellow, you're making me realise what fearful slackers we are in this House. You're a whirlwind. You're just full of live wires. I'm left standin' still and gapin'."

"This afternoon is a half-holiday," I went on. "We're not going to watch the Monks play the Fifth. We're going to get busy on our own account. I'm leader of the Fossils, and I'm going to keep you all hard at it. After morning lessons you'll find a notice on the board. There'll be a list of names on it. Every one of the fellows named has got to turn up on Little Side at half-past two. If anybody has made other arrangements, the other arrangements will have to go by the board. That's final. And always remember that we've got to have the honour of the House at heart. The Ancient House has been a back number in the past. In the future it's going to leave the College House miles behind."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, Bennett!"

I stepped down from the form on which I had been standing. Most of the chaps regarded my speech as so much gas; but they were impressed, nevertheless. The Ancient House had been in the background for so long that the fellows had never thought of making any alteration.

At St. Frank's the juniors of the Ancient House were known as Fossils, and the denizens of the College House as Monks. And the Monks were far and away ahead of their rivals. Bob Christine and Co., of the Remove, were the recognised leaders of the Monks, and they were very decent fellows. They resided in Study Q, in the College House.

I had been at St. Frank's for nearly a week, and I had already made the Fossils sit up. In fact, a day or two before, I had been enthusiastically elected leader of the Remove in the Ancient House. This was because I whacked the then leader in a fair fight. Fullwood had ruled the Fossils until I came on the scene, and now he was feeling sore. He was feeling sore physically and mentally.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montgomery Tregellis-West, my study mates, were two fine chaps, and I liked them immensely. Sir Montie was a bit of a novelty, but he was true blue. A dandy to his finger-tips, he was nevertheless one of the cleverest cricketers in the Remove.

It was before morning lessons, and I had jawed to the fellows to prepare them for what was coming later on. They had elected me leader of the Remove in the Ancient House, and I was going to lead.

In addition to Handforth and Co., there were lots of other Removites—Owen major and Canham, Hubbard and Short and Griffith, and others. Merrell and Noys were grinning sneeringly to themselves; they were two of Fullwood's pals, and so they didn't count. Fullwood and Co. were the nuts of the Ancient House, and, since my arrival, they hadn't had their own sweet way so much.

"We've got several decent men to start with," I said. "I'm a good hand with the bat, I believe, and Tregellis-West's a top-holer all round."

"Thanks, old boy," said Sir Montie languidly.

"Watson's good, and so is Hubbard," I went on. "We'll soon scrape a team together, and then we'll practise night and day until we're in terrific form. Now, lemme see." I looked round the common-room. "There's Handforth. He's not much good, I'm afraid. But Church and McClure——"

Handforth turned round wrathfully.

"Who's not much good?" he de-

mandled. "Did you mean me, you cheeky ass?"

"Talking about cricket," I said coolly. "I saw you at practice yesterday, Handforth. You held the bat as though it were a leg of mutton, and when you bowled you did your best to brain the batsman."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly fathead!" roared Handforth. "You don't know what cricket is—nobody does here. It's jealousy. Just because I'm the best cricketer in the Form—better than Christine, even—you're jealous of me. Why, the other day, when I offered Christine my services, he kicked me out of his study! Me, you know! Kicked me right out into the Triangle, and Yorke and Talmadge helped him!"

Edward Oswald Handforth looked round for sympathy. But the Removites were strangely unsympathetic. Anyhow, they were grinning broadly. Handforth snorted. He always snorted, and he always bawled. He couldn't speak without bawling. He had a voice like a megaphone.

"Hard cheese, old man," I said. "But I expect you asked for all you got. That's the worst of going about looking for trouble. You generally find it."

Handforth glared.

"Look here——" he bawled.

"All right. I'm very brave," I said.

"You're brave! What do you mean, you ass?"

"A chap has to be brave to look at you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is what comes of jealousy," said Handforth bitterly. "I'm the best batsman in the Remove—I know that!"

"Lucky somebody knows it," grinned Tommy Watson.

"I don't want any rot from you, Thomas Watson!" shouted Handforth, rolling up his sleeves.

"Oh, dry up!" chuckled Watson. "No need to show us your wrists; they're dirty enough, anyhow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth seemed about to explode, but, fortunately—for himself—the common-door opened, and Long of the Remove thumped in. Long always thumped. He was fat and heavy, and just the opposite to what one would expect from his name. To add to the absurdity, he was generally known as Lanky.

And Lanky Long was a little sneak; a spying, contemptible worm. Everybody in the Remove detested him. Even the nuts couldn't quite stand Long's habits. Yet, curiously enough, although the Remove's opinion of Long could scarcely be put into words, Long himself had an idea that he was a very important person. He believed, in fact, that he was one of the most prominent members of the Remove. There was only one chap who could keep Lanky in order, and that chap was Hubbard. Hubbard digged in Study B with Long and another junior. Personally, I hadn't much to do with Long, but I'd had occasion to pull his nose once or twice.

"Heard the latest, you chaps?" he asked importantly, as he came in.

"Been spyin' again, Long, dear boy?" asked Tregellis-West urbanely. "Spyin' is a fine art with you, I believe? You are a worm, of course, but even worms manage to live, somehow. How is it you've lived so long? By gad! That sounds like a pun!" added Sir Montie, in alarm. "I loathe puns. They make me bad. I am deeply sorry. I feel that an apology is necessary."

"Oh, ring off, Montie!" said Long. "I've heard——"

"You won't be offended, I'm sure," interrupted Sir Montie mildly. "But I find it necessary to remonstrate, Long, dear fellow. My name is Tregellis-West. If you call me Montie again I shall pull your nose. I shall, really!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Montie—I—I mean West!" exclaimed Long, with a grin. "I've heard——"

"Go and tell what you've heard to the doorpost," I said sharply. "We don't want to hear your rotten tales, you young spy!"

"I've heard——" Long paused impressively.

"You've heard what?" bawled Handforth.

"Oh, don't deafen a chap!" protested Long. "I've heard that there's a new fellow coming this afternoon, by the four o'clock train. An American bounder, I believe. We ought to bar Americans at St. Frank's, you know. They ain't any good."

"Begad!" I didn't know you were American?" said Sir Montie, in surprise.

"Who said I was American?" asked Long, staring.

"You said that Americans aren't any good—and you're no good, are you?" asked Tregellis-West mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Long, with a weak grin. "I ain't American. If I was I wouldn't own it."

"Shut up!" I said curtly. "What's wrong with Americans, anyhow? They're first-class in the main. And when it comes to Governments the Americans can show us a thing or two. They don't jaw about doing things—they do 'em. If there's an American fellow coming to St. Frank's, good luck to him."

"His name's Farman," went on Long. "Justin B. Farman, or something. Fat-headed name, ain't it? His people live in California, or—or Patagonia. One of the United States, anyhow."

"Patagonia's not in the States, you thumping idiot!" roared Handforth.

"I—I meant Tasmania!" stammered Long fatuously. "That's in the United States, anyhow! I—I looked it up on the map!"

"Tasmania's off the south of Australia, you ignorant fathead!" grinned Tommy Watson. "Well, what about Farman? He's coming this afternoon, you say? Let him come. I shan't hurt him."

I was thoughtful for a moment.

Justin B. Farman! I knew that name well, for Nelson Lee had told me about the new American fellow a day or two previously.

Nelson Lee was at St. Frank's, of course. He went under the name of Mr. Alvington, and he was the Housemaster of the Ancient House. The Fossils liked him immensely already. The seniors, I knew, had voted the new Housemaster to be the right sort. The guv'nor's predecessor, Mr. Thorne, had been decidedly the wrong sort. Not a wrong 'un in the criminal sense, of course—just a toadying, ill-tempered rotter, who was soft-soapy with the nuts and severe with the decent fellows.

Well, Mr. Thorne had disappeared a week or so before, and Nelson Lee had succeeded in finding him in one of the caves at Caistowe Bay, three miles from the school. The poor chap had been quite unconscious, and he had been kept a prisoner, without food or water, for days. The doctor said that he wouldn't recover until months had passed; his brain was affected.

And the reason for Mr. Thorne's abduction remained a mystery. The only possible clue was something which the unfortunate man muttered in his delirium. He had simply babbled out the name Justin Farman again and again. Later on I had learned that a junior named Justin B. Farman was due to arrive from California within a few days!

What was the connection between the injured Housemaster and his kidnappers, and the American fellow? Farman was certainly concerned in the affair somehow or other. But how? Nelson Lee and I had had a chat on the subject, but we couldn't arrive at any satisfactory explanation.

And now the boy from California was due to arrive.

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CHAPTER II.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD STATES HIS OPINION FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH—WHICH ISN'T MUCH—AND I GO TO THE STATION AND MEET JUSTIN B. FARMAN.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD swaggered into the common-room, followed by Albert Gulliver and George Bell, his inseparable pals. Fullwood nearly always swaggered. He fancied he was a person of importance. But he wasn't.

It was the entrance of Fullwood and Co. that roused me from my brief reverie. The nuts were very nutty, as usual. Fullwood himself was a thing of glory. He was dressed much more expensively than Tregellis-West, even—but he wasn't half so well dressed. He looked gaudy and vulgar. His fancy waistcoat wasn't merely loud; it shrieked. Gulliver and Bell were in ordinary Etons.

Merrell and Noys strolled over to their dear friends.

"Heard about the new fellow, Fullwood?" asked Noys, with a grin.

Fullwood scowled.

"What foolery has he been up to now?" he asked, directing a venomous glance at me.

"I wasn't talking about Bennett," grinned Noys. "I mean the American chap, Farlum, or Barnum, or Farman, or something. He's coming this afternoon. Hasn't Lanky told you yet. Queer that

he should have overlooked anybody. When Lanky has an item of news to impart, it's generally all over the House within five minutes."

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know, Noys?" said Long smugly.

Fullwood yawned.

"Farman's not a new fellow—yet," he said. "Of course I've heard about him. He's some beastly Wild West bounder from California. A chap like that oughtn't to be allowed at St. Frank's."

"What's wrong with him?" asked Watson.

"Why, he's no class," said Fullwood. "How can you expect him to be when he comes from California? His pater lives in a log hut, I suppose, and he'll come here with the manners of a Hun. He'll talk like a cowboy, and will eat with his fingers. Disgraceful, I call it. St. Frank's seems to be declinin'. They're lettin' any scum in the school now."

And Fullwood looked across at me. His meaning was quite clear. But I could afford to ignore Fullwood's insults. I'd licked him once already, and I didn't want to soil my hands by licking him again.

"They've been lettin' scum into the school for some time, dear fellow," murmured Sir Montie. "They let you in, didn't they?

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An' Gulliver, an' Bell, an' Noys——"

"You silly ass!" roared Gulliver. "Are you calling us scum?"

Fullwood did that, old boy," drawled Tregellis-West. "I was just puttin' him right, you know. No harm in puttin' a fellow right. Fullwood seems to think that it's a new idea to admit scum into St. Frank's. But how can it be a new idea when Fullwood's been here for over a year?"

The Removites chuckled, and Fullwood glared angrily. He jammed an eyeglass into his eye with an air of dignity which made me grin.

"This Farman rotter oughtn't to be allowed in the school," he said. "That's what I say, anyhow. He'll be a disgrace to St. Frank's. A rottenly dressed, poverty-stricken cad, I expect. I sha'n't have anything to do with him!"

"That'll be rather fortunate," I remarked—"for Farman."

Fullwood sneered.

"Oh, you'll stick up for him," he went on. "You'll be birds of a feather."

"I ain't sure that Fullwood's not right," said Handforth, looking round. "He's a cad, of course, but even cads——"

"Are you calling me a cad?" shouted Fullwood.

"Of course. That's only one of your names," said Handforth calmly. "You ain't so high and mighty as you used to be, Fullwood. Bennett's knocked some of the swank out of you, thank goodness. I'll knock some more if you like. Just say the word. I'm always ready to oblige."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood looked like a Hun, and he turned on his heel and went out of the common-room. A general chuckle followed. His fellow nuts snorted and followed him. Fullwood and Co. no longer overawed the Remove. I had already made the fellows realise that Fullwood, as a leader, was impossible.

"All the same," remarked Handforth, "there's something in what Fullwood said."

"Something idiotic!" snapped Hubbard.

"I don't see it," went on Handforth obstinately. "Who's this Wild West fellow, anyhow? He's coming from California, ain't he? That's next door to Arizona and Montana."

"First time I knew California and Montana were near one another," I grinned.

"Well, Nevada, then," said Handforth. "I'm not supposed to remember the names of all the silly States, am I?"

Handforth was red; he remembered how he had corrected Long.

"Supposing the new fellow does come from Nevada and Arizona?" I asked.

"Why, he'll be like the chaps you see in the pictures," said Handforth. "Towsled hair, and all that. He'll chew tobacco, I expect. All Americans chew tobacco. And he'll talk like a coalheaver. There's some sense in what Fullwood said, after all."

"Rats!"

"Did you say 'Rats' to me, Hubbard?" bawled Handforth. "I don't allow anybody to say 'Rats!' to me."

"Don't you?" asked Hubbard. "Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" grinned Tommy Watson.

"Rats!" roared a dozen fellows together.

Handforth snorted, and then the bell rang for morning lessons. Edward Oswald was rather glad of that, and he strode out of the common-room with his nose in the air. The other fellows chuckled and followed him.

Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, was good-tempered that morning. Just as third lesson was beginning the form-room door opened, and Mr. Alvington appeared. He spoke for a moment or two with Mr. Crowell. And I noticed that Nelson's left hand went up to his ear.

I turned to Watson, who sat next to me.

"About the cricket——" I began.

"Shurrup, ass!" muttered Tommy.

The Housemaster turned to the class with a frown.

"Somebody was talking," he said severely. "Who was it?"

I stood up, looking meek.

"Oh, it was you, Bennett," said the guv'nor. "You will write me twenty-five lines. Bring them to me before dinner-time."

"Yes, sir."

I sat down, and Watson glared at me. As soon as Mr. Alvington had gone Watson turned to me again.

"Silly ass!" he murmured, "jawing while old Alvy was here! You've done it before, Bennett. You're always getting lines for jawing while Alvy's in the room."

I didn't explain things to Watson. But Nelson Lee and I had come to a little arrangement. He was the Housemaster and I was a Removite; I couldn't go into his study just when I liked. Nobody at St. Frank's—except the Head himself—knew our real identities, and we were just master and pupil.

Now and again the guv'nor wanted to speak to me privately, and it was necessary for me to have a good reason for going to his study. So, when Lee came into the form-room I was on the look-out for the sign—taking hold of his ear for a moment. At that sign I started talking, and owned up to it.

I had twenty-five lines to do, of course; but that would only take me five minutes. And I was provided with a perfectly adequate reason for going to the Housemaster's study.

After lessons I wrote the lines, and took them to Mr. Alvington. I write down "Mr. Alvington" unconsciously, you know. At St. Frank's the guv'nor was so obviously a staid, middle-aged Housemaster that I almost forgot, sometimes, that he was really Nelson Lee.

When I entered his study he was sitting at his desk, writing.

"I've brought the lines, sir," I said, shutting the door. "I've done 'em hurriedly, but you don't mind, do you?"

Nelson Lee smiled, leaned back, and lit a cigarette.

"I just want a word with you, Nipper," he said quietly. "You'd better not stop for more than a couple of minutes. We can't do as we like at St. Frank's, you know. You're getting on all right, I suppose?"

"Right as rain, guv'nor," I grinned. "Is that all you want to say?"

"No. I want you to run down to the station this afternoon——"

"Can't be did, sir!" I interrupted.

"Can't be did! That's not the way to talk to a Housemaster, you young rascal," said the guv'nor severely. "And why can't it be did—I mean done? To-day is a half-holiday, and you'll have all the afternoon on your hands."

I looked at Nelson Lee pityingly.

"That just shows what you know!" I exclaimed. "We're not at Gray's Inn Road now, guv'nor. When I finish school work I'm busier than ever. I'm going to take a crowd of the chaps down to Little Side this afternoon. Cricket's been going to the dogs in the Ancient House, sir, and I'm going to wake the fellows up. They're getting a bit lively already."

Lee nodded approvingly.

"That's the way, young 'un," he said. "But, seriously, I want you to run down to the station this afternoon—at four o'clock. You can do that, can't you?

I considered.

"Four o'clock," I repeated. "Well, that's not so bad as I first thought. I dare say I can slip away then. Of course, you want me to meet the American fellow with the mile-long name?"

"Master Justin Bartholomew Farman," nodded the guv'nor. "As you know, Nipper, the unfortunate Mr. Thorne murmured Farman's name during his delirium. I am convinced that this new boy is in some way connected with my predecessor's abduction. I don't suppose for a moment that Farman or his people know anything of Mr. Thorne. But there is a connection of some sort. And so I want you to meet

the boy; he may drop a hint or two—quite unconsciously—which will prove enlightening."

"All right, sir, I'll go."

"Good. You'd better not stay any longer, my boy."

"Those lines all right?" I grinned.

"Clear out, you young rascal," chuckled the guv'nor.

"That's not the way for a Housemaster to talk to a junior!" I said severely, as I edged towards the door. Nelson Lee laughed, and picked up a book with the apparent intention of shying it at me. But I escaped from the study and went down the passage grinning.

I found Watson and Sir Montie in Study C.

"Now, about that list?" I said briskly. "My idea is to form a cricket eleven of our own. Bung down these names, Tommy, old son. Mine, yours, Montie's—that's three. Now, lemme see. Who else?"

"Why, Hubbard and Church and McClure—that's three more," said Watson. "That makes six."

"You don't say so, dear fellow?" drawled Tregellis-West in astonishment. "You didn't do it in your head, did you?"

"Oh, shut up, Montie—don't rot now," I protested. "We've got six. Doyle and Griffith and Armstrong, of Study J, are decent fellows. Not much good as cricketers, but we'll soon knock them into shape. Then this new kid may be of some use. Oh, and what about Owen major and Canham? And Lincoln and Skelton? Why, we'll soon have a team capable of whacking the first eleven!"

We made out the list at last, then I carried it downstairs and pinned it on the notice board. Most of the fellows, I know, were eager to see that list. I had succeeded in putting a spark of enthusiasm into the Fossils, and they were all anxious to be in the new eleven. My word was law. I was Remove skipper in the Ancient House, and the chaps were willing to abide by my decision.

"Hallo! I'm down!" said Griffith, a long, lanky youth. "I ain't much good, but I dare say I shall improve with practise. And I'm willing enough to practise my giddy head off. Cricket's been dead in the Ancient House for too long!"

And Griffith's view was shared by most of the other fellows. One or two grumbled, and declared that they wouldn't turn up for practice. But I took them aside and jawed to them like a father. In fact, I promised them trouble unless they toed the line. And they suddenly realised that cricket was quite a splendid game, after all.

"And look here," I went on, turning to the crowd in general. "When I took those lines to old Alvy, he asked me, as skipper of the form, to go down and meet this new American chap."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth at once. "Is he a kid in arms? Can't he look after himself?"

"Well, I couldn't very well refuse, could I?" I asked. "Besides, when you come to think of it, it is up to me to meet the chap and make him welcome. I'm captain of the Remove, and, for all I know, Farman may be a ripping cricketer."

"Yes, and he may be going in the College House!" remarked Watson.

"He ain't!" put in Long. "I heard old Alvy telling Morrow, the prefect, that Farman's going into the Remove in the Ancient House. And I heard——"

"You're always hearing things!" growled Handforth. "That's no reason why we should hear your beastly voice, is it? Dry up, worm!"

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"What!" roared Handforth.

"I—I said you were a sensible chap, Handy!" stammered Long.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But if you go down to meet this new fellow, how are you going to practice?"

"My dear Tommy, you can keep the fellows busy, can't you?" I asked. "I don't need any practice, anyhow—not this afternoon. And I sha'n't start away before half-past three. That gives me a good hour to get things going. And I'll probably bring Farman on the field just to see what he can do."

And so it was arranged.

But it was about a quarter to four before I started out from Little Side. I was in white flannels, wore a blazer and shoes. The afternoon was simply perfect, the hot sun shining down from a cloudless sky. The Sussex countryside looked beautiful, and as I hurried down to the village I couldn't help thinking how far removed this life was from my usual strenuous existence as Nelson Lee's detective assistant.

I should be sorry when this stay at St. Frank's had come to an end. To tell the truth, I was enjoying the life tremendously. And so was the guv'nor. It was a complete change, and it was doing us both a world of good. I almost felt grateful to the Fu Chang Tong for having declared war against us.

When I got to Bellton I heard the train just coming along, and I arrived at the little station in time to see the slow local draw up. I eyed the people who alighted with interest.

There were two farmers, a man who looked a cross between a bookmaker and a grocer, and two women. Then, at the end of the train, I spotted a neat figure in Etons.

"That's my man!" I murmured to myself.

I walked up the platform briskly, and was certainly surprised by the appearance of the boy, who was standing amidst a pile of luggage. He was dressed very neatly, and his bronzed, handsome face was very good-natured and sunny. He certainly did not look like a wild and woolly Westerner.

"Are you for St. Frank's?" I asked abruptly.

"Yes," he replied easily. "Why?"

"You're Justin B. Farman, I suppose?"

He nodded.

"That's my name, I guess," he replied. "This place looks pretty decent, doesn't it? One of the best spots in England, I should say. Are you from St. Frank's? Because, if so, I'm glad to meet you."

He held out his hand, and I took it at once.

"I'm Bennett," I said. "Skipper of the Remove—in the Ancient House, at least. You're coming in the Remove, I believe?"

Farman looked puzzled.

"Remove?" he repeated. "What's that? I understood that I should be placed in the Fourth Form."

"Same thing," I grinned. "It is the Fourth, really, but we call it the Remove at St. Frank's. You're from California, aren't you?"

"Yes, although I spent half my time in Arizona," he replied. "My father's place is just on the border, you see—on the Colorado River."

I couldn't help being surprised. There was a certain twang about his speech which was rather pleasant to listen to, but it was refined to the last degree. He spoke the most correct English.

"The carrier will bring up your boxes later on," I exclaimed. "That's what happened to mine, anyhow. I've only been at St. Frank's a week."

"I thought you said you were the captain of the Fourth?"

"So I am."

"And you've only been here a week?"

I laughed.

"That's right," I replied. "You see, a fellow named Fullwood was captain of the Ancient House Remove before I came. He's a cad, and I whacked him in a fight. I'm skipper now."

"The best man wins sort of thing, eh?" smiled Farman. "Well, Bennett—you said your name was Bennett, didn't you?—I've only known you a minute, but you're the right sort, I guess. I'm glad you've come to meet me. It was decent of you."

Just then the old porter came along the platform, and I arranged with him for the new fellow's luggage. Farman surprised the porter—and me—by handing him five shillings as a tip. St. Frank's juniors didn't usually throw money about like that. Even the wealthy Fullwood wouldn't give a porter five bob.

Having settled about the luggage, we walked out of the station, and took the towing-path to the school. It was a little shorter, and certainly more pleasant.

Farman was just a little nervous, but that was only natural. And I could see that he was quickly becoming easier in his manner.

"Ever been in England before?" I asked, as we strolled along.

"No. It's bully. Your country is fine," he replied enthusiastically. "We've got splendid scenery out there in California. But this beats it," he added, with an admiring look at the sunny landscape. "And London's just gorgeous. I never thought it was such a fine city."

"You've lived in New York, of course?"

"Never. I passed through on my way to Europe, though."

"Well, hang it all, you talk English as though you had been born here," I said candidly. "The fellows at St. Frank's are expecting you to talk like a—a Western cowboy."

Justin B. Farman sighed with relief.

"Waal, say, that's jest bully!" he

cried., "I'll allow English is a heap fine language. Guess it's sure the best language ever. But if I was to stay around this all-fired school an' trot up refined English I guess I'd choke. Yep, sure. I'm glad, Bennett. You've relieved me some!"

I stared.

"My hat!" I ejaculated. "That's a difference, anyhow!"

"A difference?" he laughed. "Say, have you ever sat around with a pile o' grand folk, an' been afraid to yapp any, lest you make a blame mistake o' speech? Guess you'll understand my feelin's, then. I've been that nervous I ain't slep' a wink. I sure guessed you'd expect me to talk real English at this dogone college. I'm that glad I could dance around."

"But—but you were talking fine just now!" I exclaimed.

"Sure. It wus just misery. I guess I ken talk high-falutin' English when I have to—but it's hard," he replied frankly. "Guess that's sure the truth, stranger. I ain't a feller to put on airs. I'm jest plain. My pop's been real mad with me because of my talk. But he can't hand out piles o' hot air while I'm around this country, can he? I guess I'm feelin' good."

I laughed loudly.

"Well, you're the limit," I grinned. "The chaps will roar when you start jawing in that way. It's easier, I suppose?"

"Easier?" he said. "Waal, I'd smile!"

"You'll get chipped, you know," I added seriously.

"Chipped?"

"The fellows will laugh at you and jeer you."

Farman looked somewhat alarmed.

"I figured the fellers wus expectin' me to talk kind o' rough?" he asked.

"That's right—they are."

"Then it would be a real pity to disappoint 'em," said Farman calmly. "Guess I'll give 'em what they want. English? Say, I've been dreamin' of English! It's the best language under the sun, I guess, but to talk it proper you need practice. Guess I ain't practised much. I'll get that in the class-rooms, sure."

We walked on to St. Frank's, and I wondered how the Removites would receive this novel new fellow. He was interesting, at all events, and he was brimming with good nature.

But I gained no clue whatever to Farman's connection with the mystery of Mr. Thorne. The new American boy struck me as being easy going, sunny tempered, and genial. He would be popular at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER III.

JUSTIN B. FARMAN PROVES THAT HE IS TOO GOOD-NATURED.

THE fellows were strolling in from the playing fields as Farman and I arrived. It was nearly tea-time—and tea, at St. Frank's, was one of the most important meals of the day.

This was because all the boys, except the forms below the Remove, partook of tea in their own studies. It was a free-and-easy meal. The fellows had just what they fancied, or what their pockets would allow. Some juniors, of course, went in to Hall to tea, but that was only when cash was at a low ebb.

Quite a number of Removites were lounging about the Triangle—Fossils and Monks. But the College House fellows usually kept to their own side. They didn't understand yet that the Ancient House was going to forge ahead of them. They chose to regard the Fossils as inferior beings. Bob Christine and Co., however, were really good chaps in every way.

"Hallo! Here's the new chap!"

It was Lanky Long, of the Remove, who uttered that shout. His tubby form—just the opposite to what one would expect from his name—was toddling towards us. Teddy Long could be trusted to spot us first. He was the busybody of St. Frank's. His nose was always where it shouldn't be.

A number of other juniors turned towards us, and we were soon surrounded.

"Farman, eh?" said Handforth. "You look all right, anyhow. You'd better understand at once, you new kid, that I'm Handforth. I never stand any nonsense."

"You only hand forth nonsense—what?" drawled Tregellis-West lazily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red.

"We don't want any rotten puns!" he bawled. "It's pretty beastly, too, to make a pun with a fellow's name. Haven't you got anything to say, you

grinning new kid?" he added, scowling at Farman.

"Waal, I guess I'd say a heap—ef you was worth speakin' to," said Farman. "Say, your throat sounds kind o' husky. Ther' was a foghorn on the ship I came over the Atlantic on; I figger your voice is jest as sweet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky cowboy!" roared Handforth furiously.

"Say, you're lettin' loose a pile o' hot air, anyways!" smiled Farman.

"Wha-a-a-t?" gasped Tommy Watson.

"It's all right," I grinned. "Farman's got to get used to English, you know. He talks the wild and woolly language of Arizona. Hot air means anything that's silly. Hallo! Look out, here's Alvy!"

Mr. Alvington—in other words, Nelson Lee—was approaching the spot from the Ancient House. I expect the guv'nor had seen me arrive with Farman, and had now come out to have a word with the new fellow.

The juniors parted respectfully, and made way for the Housemaster.

"Ah, my boy, you managed to get here all right, then?" smiled Lee kindly, in his schoolmasterly way. "You are Farman, of course?"

"Yes, sir," said Farman, in correct English.

"We are very pleased to have you at this school, my boy," went on the guv'nor. "You will board in the Ancient House, and will share a study with two other juniors—Study H, in the Remove passage."

"Thank you, sir," replied the new boy. "I guess I shall like St. Frank's a heap—I mean, I shall like it immensely. It's a bully school."

"I am glad you think that, Farman," smiled Mr. Alvington. "Come to my study after tea, and we will have a little chat. Any time this evening will do. I will leave you to settle down among your schoolfellows in your own way."

And Nelson Lee walked away, his gown rustling in the breeze.

"You giddy spoofer!" grinned Tommy Watson. "You can talk all right."

"Say, it was surely a trial!" groaned Farman. "I'll allow I ken choke up an all-fired flow of ripe language when I have to, but it's a heap easier to do the free-and-easy stunt. Say, you all seem kinder fazed."

"Did you hear what the rotter said?" asked Teddy Long shrilly, from behind Handforth. "Called St. Frank's a bully school! There ain't many bullies here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fathead!" roared Handforth, turning to Long. "He meant bully—fine—splendid! Don't you understand? That's what you meant, wasn't it, Farman?"

"Sure." Farman nodded, and looked past Handforth. "Say, who's this guy, anyway? Who's this walkin' rainbow factory? Gee! I guess I'm sure dazzled! We don't get galoots like that feller over in California. Say, we bury 'em—real quick. We don't allow 'em to be around five blamed minutes!"

I looked round and grinned delightedly.

Fullwood and Co. were approaching, to see what the excitement was about. And Farman's quaint remarks were evidently directed against Ralph Leslie Fullwood himself. I wasn't surprised. Fullwood's fancy waistcoat was very akin to a rainbow, and his necktie was gorgeous. To add to the effect, Fullwood's eyeglass was jammed into his eye, and he was wearing a topper.

Evidently, Fullwood meant to impress the new fellow with an idea of his great importance—Fullwood's importance, I mean. Nobody else but Fullwood thought that he was important, but that was only a detail.

"Oh, so you've come?" said Gulliver, staring with elaborate interest.

"Yep!"

"What?" gasped Gulliver.

"Say, ain't your ears big enough?" asked Farman pleasantly.

As it happened, Albert Gulliver's ears were rather too big; they stood out on each side of his face like fans. Gulliver was rather sore about his ears. But I don't think Farman meant to be deliberately rude. It was just his way.

"You cheeky beast!" growled Gulliver, pushing forward angrily.

"Gulliver, dear fellow," drawled Sir Montie, intervening, "travel! You do travel, don't you? I've heard something about Gulliver's Travels—I suppose it meant you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You potty idiot!" yelled Gulliver.

"Exactly. You've told me that before—heaps of times," smiled Tregellis-West urbanely. "But don't interfere with

Farman. He's a good man—he is really. I can see it in his eye. He is true blue. Therefore, dear boy, he mustn't become acquainted with such a smoky bounder as you—or Fullwood, or Bell, or Merrell, or Noys——"

"Finished yet?" asked Fullwood politely. "You needn't worry about this cad, West. I can see what sort of a worm Farman is. I wouldn't touch him with gloves on! A dirty cowboy! Ye gods! What's St. Frank's comin' to?"

Justin B. Farman looked at me; then he coughed.

"Guess I'll need to adjust my focus some," he said quietly. "I figgered on meetin' high-born gentlemen at a swell layout like St. Francis's College. I'll allow most of the fellers seem good an' fine, but, say, who's this insultin' boob, anyway?"

"Are you talking about me?" asked Fullwood hotly.

"I guess you called me a dirty cowboy," said Farman. "You need fixin' right, I reckon. I ain't a cowboy; I ain't dirty. Say, it ain't my way to quarrel—I'm a quiet feller, sure. But there'll be a hull pile o' trouble flyin' around this quarter if you don't take back them insults. I'm American, and I'm proud of it."

"Hear, hear!" said Watson.

"Good for you, Farman," put in Handforth. "Stick up for your country. Don't take any notice of Fullwood. He's a worm, anyhow. But I shouldn't advise you to scrap in the Triangle. Too many prefects about."

"I wouldn't fight the poverty stricken cad," said Fullwood contemptuously.

Farman smiled, but his eyes glittered.

"I didn't figger to throw my money around." "But this feller has called me poverty stricken! Say, my pop's a millionaire."

"Your whatter?" asked Hubbard.

"My pop—my father," explained Farman. He's one of the richest men in the States—and, say, to set things right at the beginnin', let me add right hyar that my dad ain't a blame war profiteer, or a Wall Street gambler. I guess he's the president of a big railroad out West, and he's worth millions. He don't guess I'm to go short. Say, does anybody need some cash?"

Farman produced a pocket-book which was simply stuffed with banknotes and currency notes. Most of the fellows stared as though fascinated. I was surprised myself. Even Fullwood, for all his wealth, never possessed a quarter so much money as Farman carried on him.

"I can do with a pound, old chap!" said Long eagerly. "I'll—I'll pay you back when I get a remittance. My hat! Thanks! You're a brick!"

Farman had handed Teddy Long a pound note, and the sneak of the Remove could scarcely believe his eyes. Fullwood was taken aback, and he hardly knew what to say. But I saw the nuts exchanging quick, significant glances.

"I don't reckon to play this stunt," said Farman quietly "Money ain't much, anyway. It's the feller himself that counts. But I was called poverty stricken, and that don't seem right to me."

Fullwood extended his hand with a frank movement.

"I'm sorry, Farman," he said cordially. "I—I spoke to you rottenly. I beg your pardon. I hope you won't mind——"

"Say, that's fine of you," cried Farman gladly. "Will I shake? Gee! I'd just hate myself to death if I refused!"

"How much do you want to borrow, Fullwood, dear fellow?" asked Tregellis-West lazily. "Or steal, perhaps? You're an expert at stealin', I believe? Stealin' is a fine art with you. A quiet game of banker, or nap—everything in order, of course—but when the merry little party breaks up you're generally a few pounds richer. Eh? Is that the little game, my cheerful blade?"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood scowled.

"Shut up, you lunatic!" he exclaimed savagely.

"Rather shockin' for Farman's gentle ears—what?" drawled Sir Montie. "Bennett, dear boy, suppose we think of tea? I am tired—I need refreshment to stir my waning energies. Tea is callin' to us."

I grinned, and nodded.

"Right you are, Montie," I said. "Tea it shall be."

I paused for a moment. I realised, of course, that Fullwood's sudden change of front was due to one cause, and one cause alone. The sight of Farman's well-stuffed pocket-book had excited his innate cupidity. He had set Farman down as a fellow with very little money to bless himself with. And, quite suddenly, he had

discovered that Farman was a millionaire's son, and that he was possessed of tremendous quantities of ready cash.

Thus the sudden change of policy. Fullwood was ready to be friendly with anybody who had plenty of money. Justin B. Farman wasn't to be despised, after all! And Fullwood saw no reason why the American junior's spare cash shouldn't be transferred—via a game or two of cards—to Fullwood's own pocket.

And I didn't leave Farman immediately, because it was more than likely that Fullwood and Co. would invite him to tea in their study, and I knew what that would lead to. Farman was easy-going, and he might be afraid to state his real feelings, for I was sure he was a straight chap. And the expected happened.

"Talkin' about tea," said Fullwood cordially, "suppose you have tea with me, Farman? We'll have a little party——"

"Suppose Farman does nothing of the sort," I put in sharply. "Look here, Farman, it's not my way to preach, but let me give you a word of advice. Don't go to tea with Fullwood. He doesn't care tuppence for you, really. But he cares for the money you showed us."

"You confounded busybody!" roared Fullwood furiously. "Why don't you mind your own business?"

"This is my business," I said. "I'm the leader of the Remove, and it's my business to see that a new chap doesn't get into bad company. Understand that? Bad company, I said!"

"Say, I'm sure uneasy," confessed Farman, with obvious pain. "I don't kinder freeze on to this game. I guess I'm causin' trouble——"

"What's this I hear?" demanded a voice suddenly. "The new fellow's shoved into my study? Cheek, I call it!"

It was Owen major, and he was indignant. Canham was with him, but Canham didn't say anything. He was a quiet, refined junior, with very little to say to anybody. And Owen was a good sort, too.

"Cheek?" I repeated. "Rats! Farman is a study mate to be proud of, Owen major. Take him away to tea with you."

"He's got piles of tin!" shouted Long.

"Oh, has he?" said Owen major. "That's not bad, anyhow. Canham and I haven't got a brass farthing between us! We were wondering how we should get any tea. Farman, old fellow, you're as welcome as the flowers in May!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Owen major's tone was jocular; there was no false cordiality about it. And Farman detected the difference at once—at least, I believe he did. He smiled as he looked round.

"I guess it's up to me," he remarked. "Say, I'm feelin' good. But I can't just go to tea in every study, can I? I reckon I'm surely bound to accept the hospitality of my new study-pards. I don't want to go in any feller's study if I ain't wanted. Guess I'll do without a study."

"That's all right—only a figure of speech," grinned Owen major. "Come on, old scout. I'll lead the way to the tuck-shop, and you can buy the whole of Mrs. Hake's stock if you like! But we generally go shares in Study H. We'll pay our whack when we get a remittance. Canham and I always whack out alike."

And Farman went off with Canham and Owen, and the crowd dispersed. Fullwood and his fellow nuts were discomforted, but I could see, by the look in Fullwood's eye, that he meant mischief. Farman, with all his wealth, was easy prey, and Fullwood meant to avail himself of the opportunity.

I strolled away with Tregellis-West and Watson, and we were soon busy in Study C, getting our own tea. If Owen and Canham had made any objections, I should have had Farman to tea myself, but it was better for him to feed with his study mates. That was the best way to get pally with them. And Farman, for all his curious way of talking—or, perhaps, because of it—was popular already.

We didn't take so very long over tea. The evening was delightful, and I was anxious to see how Farman would shape on the cricket field. In all probability he wouldn't be any good at all, but it would be wise to find out as soon as possible.

Tea in Study C was generally a somewhat lengthy business. Frying sausages on a spirit stove wants a bit of doing, and it's no easier to boil a kettle of water with some old exercise books when spirit runs short. We mostly had a visitor or two—fellows who had run short of "the ready"—but this evening it was a hasty meal.

Sir Montie and Watson and I—we were usually known as Dick Bennett and Co.—sallied out into the passage, en route for

the playing fields. I had my bat tucked under my arm, and my chums were ready for business.

"Hold on," I said, as we were passing into the entrance lobby. "We'll pop back to Study H, and tell the new fellow to run down to Little Side as soon as he's finished his grubbing."

"Any old thing, dear Benny," murmured Tregellis-West. "I follow your lead in all things, you know. I'm passive. But will Farman be there? I seem to think that he won't."

"What do you mean, ass?"

"Watson, old thing, my ears tell me much," said Sir Montie lazily. "Methinks I heard a voice from Study A; a voice that said something about a galoot."

"Study A—Fullwood's study!" I said sharply. "Great guns!"

I hurried down the passage, tapped at the door of Study H, and entered. One glance told me that Justin B. Farman wasn't there. Owen major and Canham were finishing their tea leisurely, reading at the same time.

Owen major looked up.

"Hallo!" he said. "What the lime-juice do you want?"

"Where's Farman?"

"He went out ten minutes ago."

"By himself?"

"No, Fullwood came for him," said Owen. "What's this? An inquisition? Do I have to answer any more ques——"

"Fullwood came for him!" I said angrily. "You ass! What did you let him go for?"

"My dear Bennett, I'm not the new kid's keeper, I suppose?" asked Owen. "Clear out, for goodness sake! I'm just reading about Sexton Blake——"

"Blow Sexton Blake!" I interjected. "Did Farman go willingly, or was he persuaded?"

"Oh, rats!"

"He didn't want to go, Bennett," said Canham mildly. "Fullwood came here with Bell and Gulliver and Marriott. They said they wanted Farman in their study. Farman was inclined to jib, but they practically carried him off."

I went out to Sir Montie and Tommy Watson. We looked at one another in the passage, and I breathed hard.

"The rotters!" I said hotly. "They've got him after all!"

"What is it, dear man?" yawned Tregellis-West? "Slaughter? Do we invade the den of iniquity known to fame as Study A? Do we gather the clans, an' go on a raidin' expedition? It's a frightful bore, but I'm ready. I only await orders."

"They've collared Farman—to skin him!" I said savagely.

"Rather painful—what?" murmured Sir Montie. "Shockin', in fact. Fancy bein' skinned!"

"Fullwood's got hold of Farman to skin him of his cash," I exclaimed. "But we're going to skin Fullwood—in a different way. We can't let a thing like this go on. And, as we can't sneak, we'll take the law into our own hands. Farman's a weak-willed chap—easy-going and good-natured. "He'll be led into all sorts of blackguardism if he pals with Fullwood and that crowd. I'm going to put my foot down—now!"

"Begad! Be careful, dear fellow!" gasped Sir Montie.

In my anger I had put my foot down literally, and I nearly stamped on to one of the elegant Removite's white shoes. But I meant what I said. I was the chosen leader of the Ancient House Remove, and I was certainly not going to stand by while Ralph Leslie Fullwood deliberately led the new American junior into his own shady habits.

It was a time for action.

CHAPTER IV.

TROUBLE IN THE "NUTS'" CAMP.

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST sighed.

"Life is composed of troubles," he said philosophically. "As soon as one trouble is disposed of, another looms in the distance. This particular trouble's been loomin' a few minutes only, but it's goin' to be a respectable trouble. Quite worth while, I think—I do, really. An' I'm ready for business."

Sir Montie deliberately fixed his gold-rimmed pince-nez on tightly, and then proceeded to lazily roll up his cuffs.

"Let's hope it'll be short," he went on. "It's a fearful fag, punchin' a fellow's nose. But sometime's it's necessary. It's necessary now. And Fullwood's nose is the one I'm anxious to punch."

"Good man," I said. "You're game, Tommy?"

"Game for anything," said Watson promptly.

"Come on, then!"

We marched to Study A. The passage was deserted, but several heads came out of the various doors as I proceeded to kick Fullwood's door with more vigour than was actually necessary. But the door was locked—as I had expected—and an ordinary gentle knock was no good to Fullwood and Co.

"Who's that?" roared the nut leader angrily. "Do you want all the masters here, you silly idiot? You'll have Morrow, or Starke, or one of the other prefects——"

"I don't mind," I retorted. "It's you who'll mind! Open this door!"

"It's Bennett!" I heard Gulliver say. "Tell him to eat coke!"

"Clear off, you interfering prig!" shouted Fullwood.

"You're going to open this door!"

"Your mistake. I'm not!"

"All right," I said grimly. "If you want me to shout through the keyhole what I've got to say, I'll do it. You've got Farman in there, and you're smoking and gambling and——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Fullwood in alarm.

"I warned you. You're smoking——"

The door opened suddenly, and Fullwood glared out at me with a face that was red with fury. I pushed past him, and entered. Sir Montie followed me, and Watson remained at the door, so that it couldn't be closed on us.

Tea had been cleared away, and the table was strewn with cards. The air was rather blue with cigarette smoke, and Justin B. Farman was sitting between Merrell and Bell, looking a trifle uncomfortable.

"Say, I'm real sorry——" he began.

"What did you come here for?" I asked tartly.

"These fellers were surely anxious," said Farman. "They guessed they needed me a heap. I'm showin' 'em how to play draw, I guess."

"Draw poker?" I gasped.

"Yep!"

"And you're teaching Fullwood and Co. how to play it?"

"Sure. It's a good game, although I've never played it for money until now," said Farman, rather uneasily. "Say, Bennett, I couldn't very well refuse, could I? I'm figgerin' that I need to please the hull crowd. I'm a stranger, an' it's up to me to please everybody. Do you get me?"

"You're not pleasing everybody by doing this sort of thing," I said curtly. "You're only pleasing Fullwood and these other rotters. You'll please them still more when you lose some of your money. You're a weak ass, Farman, but I don't blame you. There's going to be trouble here, and you'd better clear out while you're safe!"

"I guess——"

"Don't you go, Farman!" roared Fullwood furiously. "If you do I'll smash you!"

"Gee! That's kinder straight!" said the American junior. "I'll need to adjust my focus a hull heap. Howsum, I guess I'll clear. I ain't hankerin' after causin' trouble."

"Funk!" said Noys contemptuously. "Stay with us!"

"You'd better go, Farman," I said. "You're neutral in this act. Afterwards, perhaps, you'll do a bit of scrapping on your own account. But you can't start fighting on your first day at St. Frank's. It's bad form."

Justin B. Farman hardly knew what to do. I knew very well that he was upset. He was torn between Fullwood and Co. and me. He hadn't got the hang of things yet. And Fullwood had attempted to win him over to the nuts. In that study, surrounded by the nuts, the new fellow had been almost forced to do as they wished. And he was painfully anxious not to quarrel with anybody. That policy was all very well, but Farman would have to quarrel with somebody before long—with Fullwood or with me. He couldn't be friendly with the pair of us.

"I'm real sorry," he said quietly. "I didn't figger on makin' trouble."

And he left the study. His easy-going nature didn't allow him to take up any definite stand. Fullwood watched him go with a glowering brow. Fullwood had made up his mind to make the new fellow one of the select circle of nuts—not because Farman was nuttish, but because of his unlimited supply of cash.

"Why don't you smash this interferin' worm?" demanded Gulliver hotly, glaring at Fullwood, but making no attempt to smash me himself.

Fullwood jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed me coolly.

"I'm not losin' my temper," he said.

"Bennett's come here on his own initiative; he'll have to take the consequences. This is my study, and I don't allow beastly worms to come into it."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "We're beastly worms, Benny, dear boy! Still, we've come in, haven't we? Fullwood says he doesn't allow it, and yet we're in! That's queer—what?"

I pointed to the table.

"You've been gambling—with the new fellow," I said quietly, looking at Fullwood. "You can gamble as much as you like among yourselves. That's not my business. I'm not your guardian."

"Awfully glad of that," said Fullwood calmly.

"And you can go to the dogs in your own way," I went on. "You'll get the sack before long, if this sort of thing continues. Mr. Alvington isn't so lax as old Thorne was, and the chopper will come down sooner than you expect. But, as I said, that's not my business."

"Is that any drawback?" asked Fullwood sarcastically. "I understood that you were attending to our business—and not your own?"

"It's my business to see that a gang of blackguardly, smoky, sneaking rotters don't pollute a new fellow," I said quietly. "It's my business to protect Farman from your rotten influence. And I tell you candidly, Fullwood, that unless you leave Farman strictly alone in future, you'll have to reckon with—me!"

"I'm shiverin' with fear!" sneered Fullwood.

"No, you're not—but you will do, if you don't heed my warning," I retorted. "You can do as you choose—the whole crowd of you. You're past hope. But you're not going to drag a new chap into your sordid blackguardism."

"Finished?" asked Fullwood, yawning.

"Yes. I've said all I mean to say," I replied.

"Then I'll start!" snarled Fullwood furiously.

He was active in a second, and he yanked Tommy Watson forcibly into the study, and slammed the door. There was a click as the key turned in the lock. Fullwood grinned maliciously.

"Now you're going to pay for this!" he said. "You're goin' to hear a few things from me, my interferin' friend! After that you're goin' to be ragged—the three of you. You're outnumbered, so you'd better give in quietly."

"By gad! What a frightful bore!" drawled Sir Montie. "Six of you in here, and three of us. We're not outnumbered, Fullwood, dear boy. We're equal."

"How can we be equal when we're two to one against you?"

"I wish old Crowell asked us questions as simple as that," sighed Tregellis-West. "The answer's easy, dear fellow. We're equal because I'm capable of takin' on any two nuts who ever nutted. Benny's equal to three, if necessary, but that wouldn't be fair to Tommy; he'll want a couple for himself. Personally, I choose Gulliver an' Bell. They're just my mark!"

"You idiot!" roared Gulliver. "I'll smash you with one fist!"

"By Jove! Smash away, dear boy!"

I looked round. The nuts were on their feet, grinning. The door was locked, and they were determined to wipe us up. And I was equally as determined not to be wiped up. And, as Sir Montie had said, we were evenly matched. We were quite capable of taking on two men each.

What was more, we attacked at once. This took Fullwood and Co. quite by surprise; they had imagined themselves to be top-dogs, and for us to attack them deliberately was a bit of a surprise.

In spite of Sir Montie's cheery words, we had a tough task before us; but help could not come to us from outside—at least, not until a considerable row had been made. And we were certainly not going to yell for help.

"Pile in!" I rapped out.

"I'm already pilin', dear fellow," panted Tregellis-West.

The elegant junior had removed his pince-nez, and was attacking Gulliver and Bell with terrific vigour. I took on Fullwood and Noys, and Tommy Watson was left to deal with Merrell and Marriot, of Study G.

"You're mad!" gasped Fullwood, his bluster vanishing. "You can't——"

Just then my fist happened to come in severe contact with his mouth, and he couldn't speak any further. He howled instead. And Noys was living well up to his name; the noise he created awoke the echoes.

He was sitting on the hearthrug doing

his utmost to stain it red. His nose had managed to get into direct line with my fist, with sad consequences to the nose. It was bleeding profusely, and Noys decided that the hearthrug was a fairly comfortable spot; he didn't see any reason why he should get up to assist his redoubtable leader. Matthew Noys was a funk of the first water.

Fullwood, however, had plenty of pluck; he was of a different calibre to his nuttish pals. And he stood up with all the fury he was capable of. We were soon going hammer and tongs.

Behind me Sir Montie was going strong, and Gulliver and Bell were casting anxious glances towards the door. Tregellis-West, for all his languid manners, was one of the best fighting men of the Remove. And, when his spirit was roused, he displayed astounding energy. He displayed it now. Gulliver and Bell were under no delusion on that point.

And Tommy Watson had a fairly easy task with Merrell and Marriott. For about two minutes there was an appalling "mill" in Study A. The table was sent spinning, and the cards were scattered over the floor. Ornaments from the mantelpiece were swept off without ceremony. Pictures were brought down, and chairs were overturned. It was a glorious tussle.

But, from the very first, Fullwood and Co. were on the defensive; we never once gave them a chance to attack. The dust rose in clouds, and thumps on the door told that other fellows were wondering what could be happening.

Fullwood went down at last—and kept down. And his dear pals, seeing that their leader had fallen, slunk back.

"That's enough!" snarled Gulliver. "Chuck it, West!"

"Begad; I haven't finished yet!" panted Sir Montie, in surprise. "I was just gettin' interested. I must punch Bell's nose; I've been trying to reach it for a whole minute——"

"I've had enough!" snapped Bell savagely.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood rose to his feet a trifle unsteadily. He put the key in the lock and turned it.

"Clear out!" he muttered thickly. "By George! You'll pay for this, Bennett! And so will Farman, too! Clear out while you're safe!"

"While we're safe, eh?" I grinned "We're quite ready to stay another half hour if you wish. But I reckon you've had a pretty stiff lesson, Fullwood, and you'll be wise to heed it. Don' forget what I told you about Farman."

I opened the door and passed out, Tregellis-West and Watson following me. We felt that a necessary duty had been performed. Fullwood and Co. hadn't said much, but their thoughts must have been terrific.

And, somehow, I felt sure that Fullwood was more determined than ever to lead Justin B. Farman into paths that were crooked. Well, it was up to me to keep my eyes open.

CHAPTER V.

WHICH DEALS WITH CRICKET PRACTICE—AND OTHER THINGS.

JUSTIN B. FARMAN was waiting in the passage with a crowd of other fellows. Montie and Watson and I were rather untidy, but quite cheerful. The fellows had evidently expected us to be hurled forth in pieces.

Handforth stared at us blankly.

"Ain't—ain't there any more of you?" he asked.

"No. Only the three of us," I replied calmly. "We've just been giving Fullwood some advice. The crocks and ornaments have got smashed a bit in the process, but that was Fullwood's fault."

"I heard Merrell's voice," put in Hubbard. "Those rotters of Study G ain't with Fullwood, are they? You don't mean to say you've whacked the six of them? It couldn't be done!"

"Dear fellow, it has been done!" said Tregellis-West lazily. "It was a bore—a terrific nuisance, in fact. But life is strenuous. These little things will happen, you know. Troubles come, and they are surmounted. Fullwood's a trouble!"

"Great Scott!" said Handforth. "You had the cheek to take on two fellows each! Of all the nerve!"

"My hat!"

"Things are coming to a pass!"

The fellows were almost incredulous. Farman stood looking on without saying anything for the first minute. Then he stepped forward.

"Guess I'm the cause of this all-fired shindy. Say, I'm a hull heap sorry. That's dead true, pard. I didn't want to cause merry blazes around this layout."

"I saw Fullwood & Co. creep to the door and pass out."—(*See page 21.*)

"You didn't want to what?" gasped Handforth.

"He means he didn't want to make any trouble at St. Frank's," I grinned. "But that's all right, Farman, don't you worry. You don't know the ropes yet, and you mustn't think that you've caused trouble—or merry blazes, as you call it. You haven't. Fullwood and Co. are a necessary evil. They're in the Ancient House, and we can't get rid of them. So the only thing is to keep 'em in order."

"Guess I'm just ready to do 'most anything you need," said the American junior seriously. "I'm surely in your hands, Bennett. I'm plumb-crazed to make myself agreeable to the hull darned crowd. Guess there's no offence meant. Mebbe I'll feel my feet after I've been around this ranch for a day or two."

"Ranch!" grinned Hubbard. "That's a new name, anyhow. I've heard the Monks refer to the Ancient House as a barn, or a wash-house, or a lunatic asylum. But a ranch! We're learning things."

"Say, I'm new to this life—guess I'm a tenderfoot," smiled Farman. "I allowed that Fullwood was a real good man. But he don't seem popular. In about a week I'll have shook down into my right place—so, until, then, I guess I'll be real obliged if I ain't interfered with."

"That means you want to pal up with Fullwood!" asked Watson bluntly.

"I guess it don't mean—anything."

"Of course it doesn't," I struck in. "Farman's all right, Tommy. He's hardly been at St. Frank's five minutes, and he doesn't know that playing cards and smoking is absolutely against the rules of the school."

"Say, is that so?" asked the new boy, in surprise.

"Did you think it was allowed, then?" bawled Handforth.

"I guess Fullwood let on that way. Mebbe it was hot air."

"If you were found smoking and gambling, Farman, you'd be flogged before the whole school," I said calmly. "That's the simple truth. Fullwood's a liar of the first water, and he doesn't care a snap of his fingers for you. All he wants is your money. That's just a word of advice."

"I ain't hankerin' after breakin' school rules," said Farman. "Guess I'll have to be plumb careful. Say, I'm just scared to death of doin' things I oughtn't to. But Fullwood fetched me from my shack, and I guess I didn't like to be rude. I just had to go."

"Your shack?" asked Church.

"He means study," I grinned, straightening my tie. "But look here, the daylight's going, and we're wasting time. Do you know anything about cricket, Farman?"

The American junior's eyes gleamed.

"Say, that's just a dandy game," he exclaimed. "We played it at my school out West. Guess cricket's sure fine. But I'll allow we didn't play the game as you play it right here. Y'see, we didn't have swell notions around that school. It was just a game."

"Oh, he doesn't know anything about it," said Handforth, with a sniff. "How can you expect him to? It's not his fault, anyhow. Still, it wouldn't be a bad idea to give him a trial. I'll bowl to him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anything funny in that?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"Not to you perhaps," I grinned. "But it's jolly funny—to us. My dear, innocent old Handforth, you couldn't hit a barn, let alone a wicket. You weren't born that way, you know."

And I walked away before Handforth could reply. But I heard his megaphone-like voice floating down the passage as I strolled across the lobby. As all the juniors had followed me out, it seemed apparent that Handforth was talking to himself. Nobody thought it necessary to stay behind and listen to him. Edward Oswald Handforth was never taken seriously.

We found quite a number of Removites on the junior playing fields. Bob Christine and Co. were there in force. The College House juniors were at present the leaders of junior cricket at St. Frank's. The Ancient House never had a look in—except when one of Christine's men got crocked. On such an occasion Tommy Watson or Tregellis-West would be used. As a rule, however, the Remove Eleven was composed entirely of Monks.

This, of course, was totally wrong. The Ancient House had as much right to share in the school games as the College House. And I had made up my mind that a big alteration should take place. Before the end of the cricket season I meant to

whack the College House Eleven with a team of my own.

Bob Christine, a sunny, genial youth, grinned as we all crowded on to the field.

"Hallo! Come to look on?" he asked.

"No; we've come to show you fellows how cricket should be played," I replied calmly. "We'll use that pitch over there. This is Farman, a new chap in our House. Farman, you're speaking to Bob Christine, the skipper of the College House Remove, and the captain of the St. Frank's Junior Cricket Eleven."

Farman extended his hand instantly.

"Howdy?" he said cordially.

"Pleased to meet you," said Christine, giving Farman a curious look. "Are you a keen cricketer?"

"Waal, I guess I ain't a dandy at the game—yet," replied Farman. "Say, when I get goin', I'll sure raise blazes. Cricket kinder hits me good'n proper—I'll allow I'm a heap keen to finger a ball. I notion I'll surpise you fellers. I'm hot stuff at bowling. Gee! I'll find the wicket of any galoot on this field—an' find it within five minutes, I guess!"

Christine stared still more. And his lip curled a trifle; he didn't like a braggart. But I knew that Farman wasn't bragging. He honestly thought that he was capable of bowling any fellow on the ground. In all probability he would find himself sadly mistaken.

"Perhaps you could bowl me?" asked Christine tartly.

"Sure."

"Right-ho!" said the junior skipper. "Try!"

There was a buzz at once. The College House chaps who were near by were grinning hugely. They were grinning at Farman's extraordinary accent, and they were grinning in anticipation of what was to come.

For Bob Christine was the finest batsman in the junior school. Even Talmadge, the star bowler of the Remove Eleven, had his work cut out to find Christine's wicket.

Harry Oldfield was at the wicket, and he moved aside as Christine strolled down the pitch, swinging his bat. I tossed Farman a ball, and his eyes gleamed as his fingers closed round it. But it left his hands immediately, and soared skywards to a tremendous height. And when it came down Farman caught it with superb neatness.

"He's a dark horse," I declared delightedly.

"Farman is goin' to astonish the natives, dear boy," murmured Sir Montie. "I can see it in his eye. He's hot stuff. In fact, I'm tremblin'—I simply daren't let him bowl me. Thank goodness he's on our side."

"He'll be no good," growled Hubbard.

And, certainly, Farman did not seem to shape very well at first. He walked clumsily, and took hardly any run at all. Everybody was expecting to see a slow, easy ball go down, which Christine would be able to send off to the boundary without the slightest difficulty.

Farman's hand went up, and then his arm gave a curious jerk. Something shot down the pitch. It went so swiftly that it could scarcely be seen. Then there was a crash, and a gasp.

I rubbed my eyes.

Christine's wicket was down!

"Great Scott!" I heard him exclaim dazedly.

"Say, I guess you were dead slow," grinned Farman. "That was one of my easy ones. Mebbe you figgered that I was boasting? Waal, a feller who boasts ain't up to much, I reckon."

There was a roar from the whole field. Christine's wicket was down—the new American junior had clean bowled him with the first ball! Bob Christine grinned good-naturedly.

"I'm sorry I doubted you," he said. "You're certainly hot stuff, Farman. I'd like to see you do some more. I'll be on my guard next time."

Christine was on his guard, but he had all his work cut out to stop the balls which Justin B. Farman sent down. It was one of the finest exhibitions of bowling I had ever witnessed. The new fellow was an absolute demon. In less than five minutes Christine's wicket fell three times, and he never once got a chance of a fair swipe.

And, curiously enough, Farman bowled in the most leisurely fashion. It seemed no effort to him whatever, and every ball he sent down had a different twist on it. Considering that he had been cut of practice for several weeks, his exhibition was little short of extraordinary.

I was simply gloating. Farman was a man to be proud of, and I knew that he'd be a monument of strength for the new Ancient House Eleven.

At batting, however, he made a very

poor show. It was rather too much to expect that he'd be equally as good at both bowling and batting; and, before going to the wicket, he frankly admitted that he would be dismissed within a minute.

As a matter of fact, he stood up to Talmadge's bowling for ten minutes, but confined himself to stone-walling tactics all the time.

"I guess I'm small potatoes at batting," he said smilingly. "I don't just cotton on to it any. But I'll improve, I expect. Guess I'll try, anyway."

It was getting dusk now, but I went to the wicket, and showed the Monks how to bat. Watson declared that I was better than Christine himself, but I won't say anything on the subject myself. I'll only add that I managed to get several fine swipes from Farman's bowling. But he was a terror. His bowling was simply terrific. I didn't feel safe for a second while I was facing him.

The College House fellows, I know, were greatly impressed. Christine, in fact, frankly invited Farman and me to take our places in the next big match, and we both gladly agreed. The feelings of the Fossils must have been rather sore. Both Farman and I were new fellows, and we had been chosen by Christine!

Tregellis-West and Watson were first-class players, but they were out of practice. The other fellows were showing fairly decent form, too—Hubbard and Canham, Church, and McClure and Doyle, and lots of others. In a week or two, I knew, I should have a team which would be quite capable of giving a good show, and then I should challenge Christine & Co. to a House match—the first House match at St. Frank's for ages. I'm talking about junior cricket, of course. The senior elevens were constantly playing inter-House matches.

I went indoors for prep., feeling highly pleased. Before going to Study C with Sir Montie and Watson, we strolled into the common-room. There was a good deal of talk going on—on the subject of cricket, of course.

Fullwood & Co. were in the common-room, talking. They scowled as I entered, but I only grinned cheerfully. The nuts were looking the worse for wear. And they at once went out. I could tell by their expressions that they had been holding a secret discussion.

Something was "on." But what?

Fullwood & Co. couldn't very well be planning a jape against Farman, for the new boy wouldn't sleep in the Remove dormitory that night. It was a custom at St. Frank's for a new fellow to sleep alone, in a little bedroom, on his first night at the school.

All the same, I was a wee bit uneasy.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER LIGHTS OUT!

"HURRY up, fatty! I can't wait all night!"

That remark was cheerfully uttered by Morrow, the head prefect of the Ancient House. It was bedtime, and we were all in our little cots—all except Teddy Long. The sneak of the Remove, being naturally lazy, had taken his time undressing. And Morrow had found him still out of bed.

"Oh, don't hurry a chap, Morrow!" protested Long. "I sha'n't be more than five minutes."

The prefect grinned.

"You won't be one minute!" he said. "I give you ten seconds!"

I chuckled as Long scrambled out of the rest of his clothes, and then tumbled into bed. Long was one of the biggest funks in the school, and he was even afraid of a good-natured cuff.

Morrow put his key into the switch and turned the light off. Then he went out, with a cheery "good-night," which was answered by most of the fellows. Fullwood & Co. occupied six beds, all together, near the door. This wasn't just by chance. They had occupied those beds by arrangement since the beginning of the term.

There was electric light all over St. Frank's. It was made on the premises, and in the dormitories there were special switches provided. The "beaks" didn't think it necessary to have the ordinary switches, which could be turned on in a second; so they were of a patent variety, which required a key. Some of the fellows had used an old pocket-knife with success when occasion demanded, but it wasn't safe to switch the dormitory lights on after the prefect had gone his rounds.

There was a certain amount of talk for about ten minutes, and then the chaps fell off one by one. Nine-thirty was the time for lights out, and by ten the whole dor-

mitory was asleep. All except myself. I lay awake.

Ten o'clock was a ridiculously early hour for me. I had been accustomed to getting into bed at all times of the night. Often enough, when engaged on urgent detective work, I hadn't gone to bed at all.

And to-night I lay awake, thinking.

I had a lot to think about.

My life at St. Frank's was novel and interesting. I was certainly enjoying myself. And the guv'nor was glad of the long rest, too.

Nelson Lee was looking healthy and happy. In fact, the enforced idlenesss—or change of work—was just exactly what he had required. Previous to this episode the great criminologist had been working altogether too hard, and had gone a bit stale.

Now, however, he was as fit as a fiddle again. When the danger from the Fu-Chang-Tong had passed, we should start real work again with terrific gusto. Indeed, I should be thundering sorry to leave St. Frank's. But there was no question of that yet. We hadn't been at the school much longer than a week, and there were months ahead of us.

I had seen the guv'nor for a minute or two just before coming up to bed, and I had reported to him that I had discovered nothing regarding Farman's connection with the mystery of Mr. Thorne. Was there a connection? We didn't know; we only suspected.

I heard the school clock chime the quarter-past ten. I was a bit drowsy then, but I didn't sleep. The dormitory was very still. When the half-hour sounded, I heard it as though from afar, and I snuggled down into the pillow, intending to doze off in earnest.

Then suddenly I heard a whisper. It came from the end of the long dormitory. I was alert in an instant. Nelson Lee had trained me to awaken with my full wits about me.

"You fellows awake?" came a soft murmur.

It was Fullwood's voice, and I compressed my lips. Faintly, in the dimness, I could see him out of bed. He was dressing himself.

"Hallo!" mumbled a sleepy voice. "Wasser matter? 'Tain't time——"

"Half-past ten, ass!" murmured Fullwood. "Rouse up!"

Gulliver and Bell left their beds and started dressing, too. I saw one of them go to another bed and shake the occupant.

"You comin' with us, Merrell?" I heard Fullwood ask.

"Eh? Oh, it's you!" said Merrell. "No; rats to you! We aint comin' to-night, Fully. Marriott an' Noys won't go without me. and I ain't goin'. You fellows go alone this time."

"Just as you like," said Fullwood. "Ready, you chaps?"

I smiled grimly to myself. I knew the explanation of that whispered conference in the common-room now. Fullwood and his two particular pals—his study-mates—were going out "on the tiles." In other words, they were going to break bounds. Their destination, probably, was the White Harp, the shady inn on the outskirts of Bellton village.

"Come with us, Merry," urged Gulliver. "Old Bradmore's goin' to be at the Harp to-night, an' we'll skin him at billiards——"

"He'll skin you, you mean!" said Merrell. "No, we're not goin' with you. Study G ain't on in this act!"

"Oh, all right!"

I saw Fullwood & Co. creep to the door and pass out. And Merrell & Co. went to sleep again. Sometimes I include Merrell and Marriott and Noys in "Fullwood & Co.," but they were really a separate "Co." on their own. But they were all members of the noble order of nuts.

It didn't worry me—this night "blagging" of Fullwood's. It wasn't any business of mine. If they chose to risk expulsion for the sake of a little forbidden pleasure, that was their concern. I very much doubted whether they derived any pleasure out of their night jaunts. But it was "doggish," and Fullwood & Co. considered themselves to be "goers" of the first order.

Jonas Porlock, the innkeeper, was always pleased to see Fullwood & Co. They spent much of their cash at the White Harp. There were other St. Frank's fellows who were suspected of visiting the inn, too. Starke and Kenmore, of the Sixth, both of them Ancient House prefects, were generally credited with playing billiards and cards at the White Harp.

I could have told the guv'nor all about these goings on, of course; but I didn't. As a Housemaster, he would have been bound to take action, and I loathed an informer. The guv'nor would have to find out things for himself. I shouldn't

even give him a hint. It wouldn't have been playing the game.

But I grinned a little to myself as I lay in bed. Nelson Lee had told me that he was going for a walk after ten o'clock that night. He had said that it would have been O.K. if I could have gone with him. "Mr. Alvington," therefore, was out and about. It would be all up with Fullwood and Bell and Gulliver if they happened to run into the guv'nor!

Still, it was their funeral if they were bowled out. They deserved the sack, anyhow. St. Frank's would be better without them. During Mr. Thorne's reign the nuts had done pretty much as they liked. Mr. Thorne had winked at a lot of shady actions on Fullwood's part.

Fullwood didn't quite realise yet that the new Housemaster was a man of different calibre.

"Oh, rats to them!" I told myself sleepily. "Let the cads rip! They haven't got Farman with 'em, anyhow! He's a decent chap, I believe, but he's thundering weak. Too good-natured altogether. Doesn't know how to say 'no' to a fellow——"

Quite suddenly I sat up.

An alarming thought had entered my brain-box.

Had Fullwood routed Farman out of bed? The new junior was sleeping in the little bedroom, just along the dormitory passage. By this time Farman could have been smuggled out of the school! What an ass I'd been not to think of it before!

But I was wrong, of course. Fullwood wasn't such an idiot as to take a new fellow down to the White Harp on his very first night at St. Frank's! All the same, I meant to make sure.

I slipped out of bed, padded softly to the door in my bare feet, and went out into the passage. The school was quiet. The masters were still up, of course, but there were no masters' studies or bedrooms in this quarter of the House.

I reached Farman's bedroom and softly opened the door. The little apartment was silent and dark. I crept across to the bed and bent down. At such close quarters I could see distinctly.

The bed was empty!

The sheets and blankets were thrown back, and it was obvious that Justin B. Farman had left it only a short time before. He'd gone! Fullwood & Co. had taken him off with them!

The idiot—the fat-headed ass!

I simply glared at the empty bed. I didn't blame Farman so much. He was new to school life—in England, at all events. Fullwood had probably told him that it was the usual thing for juniors to get up after lights out and visit shady public-houses. And Farman, being weak-willed and easy-going, had accompanied the nuts on their disreputable errand.

For about twenty seconds I stood still, thinking. In emergencies I had been taught by the guv'nor to act with decision. Fullwood & Co. hadn't been gone more than five minutes—perhaps less, for they had had to wait for Farman to dress.

And I came to a swift decision.

If possible, I meant to defeat the nuts and rescue Farman before the White Harp was reached. Then I'd give the American junior a thorough jawing. He might resent it, and I might be called a preacher. But I should risk that. Farman needed a jawing, anyhow—breaking bounds on his first night at St. Frank's!

In less than five seconds I was back in the Remove dormitory. I shook Tregellis-West and Watson, and then roused Handforth. I decided that Handforth, for all his bluster and talk, was a handy fellow. He possessed the strength of a bull, and at heart Handforth was true blue.

"Hallo! Who's that?" mumbled Handforth sleepily. "What the dickens ——"

"Get up, old scout!" I whispered. "You're wanted!"

"I'm wanted?" said Handforth, sitting up. "What for? That's you, Bennett, ain't it? What's the matter? House on fire, or what? My hat, you ain't going to break bounds, are you? Do you expect me to come, you cad?"

"Oh, don't be a bigger ass than you can help, Handforth!" I protested. "You awake, Watson?"

"Yes. What's up?"

"I was dreamin'," murmured Sir Montie. "I was dreamin' of a demon cowboy who played cricket on horseback, by gad! He was just about to score a goal——"

"About time you were awakened, I reckon!" I interjected. "Scoring goals in cricket is something new! Now, look here, you chaps! We've got to get up and go out. Fullwood & Co. have broken bounds, and we're going after 'em!"

"Did you wake me up for that, you fathead?" demanded Handforth wrath-

fully. "Fullwood's broken bounds scores of times."

"I know. But he's taken Farman with him this time," I said. "We're going to rescue the ass. Can't allow him to go to the dogs with Fullwood, can we?"

"Hang Fullwood, and hang Farman, too!" grunted Handforth. "If he's fool enough to go out with the nuts, let him! I don't see why we should look after him! He's old enough to know his own mind, I suppose?"

"That's just it!" I said. "He's new to St. Frank's. He's new to England altogether. Fullwood's persuaded him to break bounds. Perhaps he doesn't know it's an offence that'll get him the sack if he's found out. He doesn't know the ropes, and it's up to us to look after him until he shakes down. After that, if he's fool enough to go out blagging, we'll let him go his own way. He's a good chap in the main."

Martin looked at me doubtfully.

"Something in what you say," he admitted. "Farman's a fathead, all the same! What the dickens did he want to take any notice of Fullwood for? Are you sure he's gone out with the nuts?"

"Positive. Slip your things on, and don't jaw so much."

"That's all very well," said Watson. "Suppose we're spotted?"

"Oh, rats! We'll chance that!" I said impatiently.

"I'm ready for anything you like, Benny boy," murmured Sir Montie. "Count on me. You're leader, an' it's not our place to question you. Breakin' bounds isn't in my line, but it's all for the good cause. I'm resigned."

And Tregellis-West commenced dressing quickly. The other two, after a second's hesitation, followed his example.

"Not a second to lose," I said. "Fullwood's been gone nearly ten minutes. But he and his chums will take the road, I expect. It's a bit longer, but it offers more cover in the case of a surprise. The towing-path is as bare as a plain. We'll go that way, and run all the way."

"And chance being spotted?" growled Handforth.

"Yes."

"Just to save an idiot like Farman?"

"You needn't come unless you want to," I said tartly. "If you're funky——"

"Funky!" bawled Handforth. "Why, you——"

"Don't wake the whole dormitory, you ass!" I hissed. "We sha'n't be spotted—I'll take care of that. Fullwood & Co. will walk and they'll walk cautiously, too. We can arrive at the White Harp before them if we're sharp."

My idea was to surprise the nuts before they entered the inn. Then we would rush them, and carry Farman away by force. Once back at the school, I'd tell him a few home truths.

But the whole scheme was useless if we didn't start off immediately.

Tregellis-West and Watson and Handforth would never have dreamed of breaking bounds on their own hook. But I seemed to influence them easily, and they didn't offer any more objections. Sir Montie, in fact, seemed rather amused.

"This is rather novel, dear boys," he murmured. "Going to the rescue of youth in distress. Savin' him from himself, you know. But Bennett knows what he's doin'. I'd follow Benny anywhere. I trust myself in his gentle care."

Under my leadership the other two forgot their qualms, and we were soon out of the dormitory. Breaking bounds was a serious business. If we were collared we couldn't explain our errand, and we should catch it hot—a public flogging, at least. My own peculiar position at St. Frank's wouldn't save me. For the time being I was a junior scholar, and there was no exception made in my case.

But I was really concerned about Farman. He had been persuaded into accompanying Fullwood & Co.—I felt sure of that. He hadn't gone because he wanted to. But, once in the rut, he would find some difficulty in getting himself out of it. It was my plan to rescue him before any real harm was done.

I led the way downstairs. The big hall was dark and deserted. We reached Study C without difficulty, and closed the door. Then we breathed freely. It was easy enough to get out of the window into the Triangle from the playing-fields. Once through this hedge we should be on the towing-path within a minute.

Happily, the night was dark.

We scudded across the open space of the Triangle, and reached the playing-fields. There were several lights in the lower windows of both Houses, but everything was quiet outside.

We didn't speak as we ran along the

path, with the river on one side of us, and bare meadows on the other. We were running hard, for it was absolutely necessary to reach the Harp before Fullwood & Co. arrived.

At last, the inn loomed in sight. It stood by itself, and the road was quite near. The road passed in front of the inn, and the towing-path, the back. When we were nearly there I led the way across the strip of grass to the hedge.

A gap was negotiated, and then we stood on the dusty lane. It stretched away towards the school in a winding line. Only about a hundred yards of it was visible; and even then the gloom was deep

"We've done it," I panted. "They haven't come yet!"

"What's the programme," asked Watson. "I suppose we'll spring out——"

"Hallo! What's that?" said Handforth sharply.

Clearly on the night air a definite sound had come to us; it came from just round the first bend of the lane. It was a cry for help! And the voice, I knew, was that of Ralph Leslie Fullwood!

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH NELSON LEE TAKES A HAND.

WHAT had happened?

Even as we held our breath, we heard the cry repeated.

"Help!" came Fullwood's shout, and the voices of Gulliver and Bell were added to his. Evidently something bad had taken place.

"Great corks!" gasped Handforth. "What's wrong? Some tramp or other——"

"Come on!" I said between my teeth.

I led the way up the lane, running for all I was worth. The others, good runners as they were, were left behind. I turned the corner, and saw three dim figures. They turned towards me as I approached.

"You're too late!" exclaimed Fullwood huskily.

I came to a stop, and looked at the nuts. Justin B. Farman was not with them! Fullwood & Co. saw, at the same moment, who I was.

"Bennett!" gasped Fullwood. "And some other chaps, too! What the dickens are you doin'—— But we want the police——"

"Where's Farman?" I asked sharply.

"He's gone!"

"Gone!" yelled Handforth, coming up.

"Some rotters attacked us, and carried Farman off!" blurted out Bell, shivering with fear. "Oh, it was awful! We were taken by surprise! They've collared Farman, and he's gone!"

"By gad!" said Sir Montie mildly. "By gad!"

"Look here, Fullwood, tell me what happened a minute ago!" I said. "We were waiting for you down the lane. I found out that you'd taken Farman with you, and these fellows and I came out to muck up your rotten game. It seems that something else has happened."

"Oh! So you were interferin'——"

"Don't rot now!" I snapped. "What's happened to the new kid?"

"You heard what Bell said, didn't you?" growled Fullwood, recovering himself somewhat. "It wasn't our fault, I suppose?"

"What wasn't your fault?" roared Handforth.

"Farman's been kidnapped!" gasped Gulliver shakily.

"Kidnapped!"

"Oh, stars!" muttered Tommy Watson.

"We were coming down the lane, talking——" began Fullwood.

"Who was talking?" I asked abruptly.

"We all were, of course."

"Did Farman speak fairly loudly?"

"That's funny," put in Gulliver. "Farman was talking rather loudly, as it happened. How the dickens did you know? We had to warn the ass not to raise his voice so much. He was talking when we were attacked."

"Well, go on," I said impatiently.

"Two men sprang out of the hedge," said Fullwood. "They were on us before we could do a thing. I yelled for help, but Gulliver was bowled over, and Bell was too jolly frightened to do anything."

"Didn't you do anything, dear fellow?" asked Montie.

"How could I?" growled Fullwood. "The beasts were collaring Farman. They got him down an' tied his feet an' hands. Then they carried him through the hedge and into the wood. I tried to stop them, but one of the rotters was carrying a great cudgel. I didn't fancy getting my head cracked!"

"Funks!" said Handforth contemptu-

ously. "Three of you—and the two men had their hands full up with Farman! Funks! Couldn't you have driven 'em off?"

"Oh, hang you!" snarled Fullwood.

He could see that he and his chums had cut very poor figures in the affair. Their companion had been taken from them, and they hadn't even put up a fight. It was not surprising, though. The nuts were not renowned for their pluck and stamina.

But I was startled.

What did this mean? What could it mean—except one thing?

Mr. Thorne had been kidnapped, and he had been taken to a cave on the coast, three miles away. On being rescued he had muttered Farman's name. That's all we knew. And now, on Farman's first night at St. Frank's, he had been kidnapped, too! It was too obvious to be missed.

The men who had attacked Mr. Thorne were the men who had attacked Farman. But what had they done with the American fellow? They thought, of course, that Fullwood & Co. would rush off in terror; and, before assistance could come, they would have their victim safely away—or killed! For it struck me that the object of all this plotting was murder!

And Farman had been taken away right in front of the nuts' eyes!

"You say the strangers went through the hedge?" I asked keenly, forgetting, for the moment, that I was a schoolboy, and not a detective. But, of course, at heart, I was a detective, and now that something mysterious—something criminal—had happened, I was in my element.

"Yes, through that gap," replied Gulliver.

He pointed, and I saw a low gap through the bottom of the hedge. Beyond it was the dark bulk of Bellton Wood. This stretch of woodland went right back, I knew, to Bannington Moor, a couple of miles distant.

By night the wood was black and grim; it would have been possible for a hundred men to hide in it. I almost felt in a panic as I gazed at the dark trees. For I knew that it would be impossible to track the ruffians. With a light—— But I hadn't got a light.

"We shall have to make a search," I began, but Fullwood interrupted.

"Somebody coming!" he ejaculated, in alarm.

We listened.

Quite clearly the sound of leisurely footsteps came to us. Somebody was walking along the lane, and he was coming form the village. I recognised the tread in an instant. The newcomer was Nelson Lee!

And I went hot with excitement and pleasure.

The guv'nor! He was the very man for the job! Of course, he had been for his long walk, and he was now on his way back to St. Frank's. It was early yet—for him. Eleven o'clock hadn't struck.

"Cave!" muttered Bell, with chattering teeth. "It's the master!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Handforth.

He and Sir Montie and Tommy Watson gazed at one another in dire consternation. And Fullwood & Co. made a dive on to the grass. Then they pelted away towards the school at full speed.

"Come on!" whispered Handforth hurriedly. "We'd better run for it, too!"

But it was too late!

"Who's that?" demanded the guv'nor's voice sharply.

"We're in for it, Benny," murmured Tregellis-West. "It's Alvy! It's our respected Housemaster. Better not budge, Handforth. Face the music like a man, you know. It's the fate of Good Samaritans to be misunderstood. We came out on an errand of mercy—and we shall get the sack!"

"Rats!" I said. "We're safe enough!"

Nelson Lee came up to us, and flight was impossible. I, of course, had never thought of flight. But the others had naturally been alarmed, and their instincts had told them to make themselves scarce.

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed the guv'nor, in surprise. "You are St. Frank's boys—juniors! What does this mean, you young rascals? What are you doing out of your dormitory at this hour of the night?"

"It's all right, sir," I said coolly.

"Nip—Bennett!" said Mr. Alvington, correcting himself before the others heard anything. "So you are breaking bounds—and you have brought other boys out with you. Tell me your names at once!"

"Tregellis-West, sir," said Montie calmly.

The others gave theirs in awe-struck voices, and there was a momentary

silence. The guv'nor, I knew, was wondering what this night expedition meant. Under the circumstances he couldn't ask me point blank. He guessed, of course, that I had a good reason for being out; but he was compelled to be stern.

"You will come with me to the school ——" he began.

"Hold on, sir," I said quickly.

"I refuse to hold any conversation with you here, Bennett!" said the Housemaster curtly, piling it on beautifully. "Unless you can give a very satisfactory explanation for this gross breach of the school rules——"

"Farman, the new junior, has been kidnapped, sir," I said quickly.

The guv'nor caught me by the shoulder in the darkness, unseen by the others.

"Farman has been kidnapped?" he asked. "Dear me! That makes a big alteration, my boy! Let me hear your story. Be brief—and lose no time."

I coughed.

"We didn't mean to say a word about it to anybody, sir," I began. "But, as you've come along, we shall have to speak. And now that Farman's been carried off it makes a big difference. We should have had to get help in any case."

"Well? Go on—go on, young 'un!"

Lee was keen, and he pressed my shoulder reassuringly.

"Farman's a new chap, as you know, sir," I said. "He—he doesn't know the ropes. You see, I don't want to get him into a row—if he's found."

"Farman will not be punished, whatever you say, Bennett."

"That's all right, then," I exclaimed. "I couldn't sneak about him, sir. But he was breaking bounds, and I found it out. Farman doesn't know the ropes yet, and he may have thought that getting out at night wasn't such a serious offence as it is. Anyhow, he left his bedroom, and we—Tregellis-West and Handforth and Watson and I—came after him, to lug him back."

"I quite understand," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Under the circumstances, you will not be punished severely—lines will meet the case, I can see. You came out from a good motive, and that alters the affair. It is possible that I shall overlook the offence altogether."

I heard my companions sigh with relief.

"What a brick!" I heard Handforth whisper. "What a stunner!"

"Alvy's a gentleman—he is, really!" murmured Sir Montie languidly.

I had purposely refrained from mentioning Fullwood and Co. They had escaped, and although they were absolutely to blame for the whole incident, I couldn't inform against them.

"When we were nearly up with Farman," I went on, "we heard a cry for help. Two men had got hold of him, sir, and they carried him through a gap in the hedge, bound hand and foot. At least, I believe so. But it's possible that his feet were free. He couldn't walk with bound feet, could he? And I expect he is being forced through the wood at this very minute. There is probably a motor-car waiting on the other side, against the moor."

"How do you know that, dear Bennett?" asked Montie.

"I don't know—it's what I think!" I replied. "We couldn't follow the rotters, sir," I went on, turning to the guv'nor again. "We hadn't a light of any sort—and then you came along!"

Nelson Lee clicked his teeth sharply.

"I quite understand, my boy," he said. "Well, we must follow these men, and do our utmost to rescue the unfortunate boy. This affair is obviously connected with——" He paused. "But come; we have no time to waste!"

"All of us, sir?" asked Watson incredulously.

"Yes, all of you!" said the detective. "You may be wanted!"

"By Jove! He's the kind of Housemaster!" murmured Tregellis-West admiringly. "Now, old Stockdale, of the College House, would have had ten fits in a situation like this. Alvy's rippin'. He's great. He ought to have been a detective!"

Montie was right on the mark there—but he didn't know it!

Nelson Lee had taken in the situation at once; and, what was more, he meant to get on the track without a second's delay. The fact that Tregellis-West and Watson and Handforth were with us was really splendid. Our party would just be a schoolmaster and a crowd of boys. If the guv'nor and I had been alone it would have been somewhat risky. The Fu Changs were as sharp as needles; and, in reading of this affair—or hearing of it—they might have connected things. As

it was, there was no danger of any sort. Mr. Alvington—to use the guv'nor's school name—brought out his electric torch, and walked quickly to the gap in the hedge. For some moments he examined the ground in silence. Then he looked at us.

"I think the task of tracking the ruffians will be easy," he said. "The trail is very clearly marked, and our quarry must have, of necessity, progressed slowly. We shall make better speed."

"You're going into the wood, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Yes, and I am going to rescue Farman!" replied Nelson Lee grimly.

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CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE EDGE OF BANNINGTON MOOR—THE RESCUE—CONCLUSION.

NELSON LEE was in his element now—as I was. This was a real detective adventure. We hadn't expected to get detective adventures at St. Frank's. And so we were both rather eager.

We knew, however, that the case was really serious. And we were puzzled as to the cause of the whole business. Why had Justin B. Farman been kidnapped? Who were these men who had captured him so dramatically?

They couldn't have been lying in wait for him—that was certain. Farman had come out that night unexpectedly. So it was clear that the men had been in the wood by chance, and, hearing Farman's unmistakable voice, had acted on the spur of the moment.

It was clear that the attack had been hastily decided. No kidnappers, however daring, would have taken their victim by force when he was accompanied by others. But Fullwood & Co. were only juniors, and the men had assumed that the boys would be too frightened to offer resistance. That assumption had been correct, for the nuts had been frightened out of their wits almost.

And now Nelson Lee was tracking the unknown scoundrels with great skill. To Tregellis-West and Handforth and Watson it seemed almost miraculous. Unerringly the guv'nor led the way through the dense wood, picking his way deliberately, and with never a mistake.

He followed the trail of the strangers without a pause. Yet, to anybody not versed in wood-craft, the task would have been impossible. The tracks were clear enough to Lee, and I could follow them fairly easily. For we were both trained in wood-craft in all its branches. The guv'nor, especially, was a wonder. He could follow a trail as keenly as any bloodhound.

Only once did the detective go wrong, and then it was I who pointed out the mistake. And we were soon on the right track again. The wood was dense, and the falling leaves had formed a soft carpet upon the ground. We made no noise as we progressed.

I knew that we stood a good chance of rescuing Farman.

For there had been no waste of time. If Nelson Lee had not come up when he did there would have been a very great waste of time, and the kidnappers would have smuggled their victim away. Events had happened very luckily.

At last the trees thinned somewhat, and progress was faster.

"Gettin' near the moor now," murmured Tregellis-West in my ear. "Dear boy, isn't Alvy a peach? Isn't he a marvel? How does he do these things? He rescued Mr. Thorne from the cave at Caistowe Bay, didn't he? He seems to be a Sexton Blake and a Sherlock Holmes all rolled into one, by gad! I'm staggered, you know—I am, really!"

"This is a ripping adventure," grinned Handforth. "And no punishment, either! My only topper! Won't the fellows yell to-morrow when we tell 'em?"

"They will—if we rescue Farman," I said grimly. "If we don't——"

"Hush, boys!" murmured the guv'nor, from ahead.

And we hushed.

It was lucky we did, as it happened. For the trees suddenly came to an end, and we saw before us a wide, undulating stretch of moorland. The gloom of the night seemed almost bright after the blackness of the wood.

Quite near us, on a little rise, stood an old ruined building.

"By Jove! The old ruined mill!" whispered Sir Montie.

I could see it was a mill, now. But my attention was attracted by something else. A narrow road ran close to the mill, and there, against the building, stood—a closed motor-car!

There were no lights on it, and I only

recognised it because I had been looking for something of the sort. The men, it was clear, had left the car there while they went through the wood. I suspected that they had intended raiding the school itself, but had been saved the trouble. Or they may only have been scouting. Anyhow, by a stroke of chance, they had captured their man.

Then I saw three dim figures against the mill—the two men and Farman! He was being forced towards the car! Truly, we had only arrived in the nick of time! Another five minutes and the scoundrels would have completely vanished!

"This is lucky!" murmured Nelson Lee—"very lucky!"

"What's to be done, guv'—sir?" I asked excitedly, nearly making a bloomer in my eagerness. The others were too excited to notice my slip. They would have been astonished if they had heard me address Mr. Alvington as "guv'nor"!

I saw Lee fetch out his automatic—even now, at St. Frank's, the guv'nor always carried his revolver.

"We must deliver a surprise attack," he said softly. "You boys had better remain in the rear—leave the work to me——"

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Handforth, "We want to have a hand in it!"

"Begad! I should think so!" said Tregellis-West. "We're dyin' for a scrap, sir. We ain't afraid. We'll do our bit."

"Very well—but be careful!" muttered Lee. "Now—come on!"

As he spoke he pelted across the intervening space. A surprise attack was the only course open to us. I and the other juniors followed hard on Nelson Lee's heels. We simply flew over the grass.

We got to within twenty yards before our presence was discovered.

Then came a sudden, furious cry.

"Quick, Ling—somebody is coming!" came a husky voice. "Quick, man! I guess we'll need to hustle!".

But hustling was no good—then. We were upon the blighters.

Nelson Lee made straight for the taller of the two men. Justin B. Farman, with bound hands, was released, and he fell to the ground. Something flashed in the bigger man's hand. It was a revolver!

But, in a second, the guv'nor's fist went up, and the weapon went flying harmlessly away. The next second Lee and the stranger were fighting furiously.

The smaller man found himself facing me. Then I caught a terrific shock; so great a shock, indeed, that I was incapable of action for a second.

The second was—a Chinaman!

Instantly there flashed into my head the remembrance of the dreaded Fu Chang Tong—the fearful, murderous Chinese secret society which had sworn to kill Nelson Lee and I.

Was this man, this Chinee, a member of the Tong?

Had our secret been discovered?

I had no time to think further; my wits had returned, and I attacked with great energy. But the Chinaman was like a bunch of live wires. He wriggled and squirmed amazingly. Tregellis-West and Handforth piled on to him, but he escaped. Then we all attacked together.

Misfortune overtook us.

Handforth—quite accidentally—slipped, and went down. Sir Montie tripped over him, and Watson tripped over Sir Montie. Confusion reigned. I was down, too, for I had been rushing forward.

When I scrambled up, bellowing, the Chinaman was running like the wind towards the motor-car. He had already reached the road. The three Removites were on the ground, in a struggling heap.

I looked across at Nelson Lee.

He was still fighting furiously with the big stranger. And, as I looked, the man abruptly fled. He flew down towards the car: he had apparently seen his Chinese companion's sudden move. The engine of the automobile was running, and it now raced. The Chinee was at the wheel.

Nelson Lee was rushing after his man, and I started running, too. Tregellis-West and the others hadn't sorted themselves out. The whole affair was over in less than a minute.

The guv'nor would undoubtedly have spoilt the game but for an unforeseen circumstance. The racing man suddenly twisted round, picked something up, and threw it. Then Nelson Lee went down in a heap.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

I swerved aside, and pelted to the guv'nor. When I got to him he was sitting up. The man had thrown a large stone, and it had struck the detective clean on the right knee-cap, sending him flying.

"Are you hurt, sir?" I asked anxiously.

"A bruise, Nipper!" murmured Lee, under his breath. "'Pon my soul! Look

there! The hounds have got away—we can't stop them now!"

The motor-car was moving, and gathering speed rapidly. In less than twenty seconds it had almost disappeared into the gloom.

"But we've got Farman, sir," I said triumphantly.

"Yes—we have rescued the poor boy," replied Lee. "And that is the main thing. How infernally unfortunate!"

Handforth and the others rushed up.

"Hurt, sir?" asked Tregellis-West concernedly.

"Not much, my boy," smiled Mr. Alvington painfully. "The rascal threw a stone at me. It struck my knee-cap, and bowled me over."

"They've escaped!" bawled Handforth furiously.

"You're wonderful, sir!" said Sir Montie. "Begad! I can't say what I think! I'm gropin' for words! Farman's here, sir! He's not touched! And you rescued him! Just think of it, dear fellows!"

Justin B. Farman was standing by our side. He had been bound previously, and had been unable to take any hand in the fight. But Tregellis-West and Watson had freed him. He seemed to be strangely subdued.

Nelson Lee got to his feet. The motor-car had vanished now, and nothing could be heard of it, either. The kidnappers had escaped, and I doubted if they would ever be traced. But their dastardly attempt had failed. And they had only escaped by a mere fluke.

Upon the whole, though, we had every reason to congratulate ourselves.

"I guess I'm real obliged to you, pards!" said Farman, in a low voice. "Say, that was a dandy fight——" He paused, realising that Mr. Alvington was present. "Thank you, sir," he added. "You just came in time, you know."

"Tell me, Farman," said Lee. "Do you know who those men were?"

"I—I——" The new junior paused. "I guess I'd prefer not to speak, sir."

"Come, come, that won't do!" said Lee sharply.

"I'm real sorry, sir—but I can't just say a thing," said Farman quietly.

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth, in his impulsive way. "We want to have those rotters arrested! Do you mean to say you know who they are—and you won't tell Mr. Alvington?"

"Say, I'm fixed kind of queerly—that's all," was Farman's reply.

"Mr. Alvington rescued you——" began Watson hotly.

"I know that, and I thank Mr. Alvington with all my heart, I guess," said the American junior quietly. "But I just can't say a thing. That's all there is to it. I surely thought I was done for—until I heard you getting around."

Farman was curiously affected by the incident. He seemed grave, and his face was very pale. It was as though he had received a great shock. And he was disinclined to say any more.

But we were all jubilant, nevertheless. Our little expedition had panned out very well indeed! For, if I hadn't conceived the idea of going out to rescue Farman from Fullwood and Co., he would have been spirited clean away!

. . . . . .

The next day there was considerable excitement at St. Frank's.

Excitement amongst the juniors, that is—especially the Fossils. Once again I was in the limelight. Edward Oswald Handforth was in high feather; he was surrounded with glory, and that suited him to a tee.

Tregellis-West and Watson and Handforth and I didn't receive any punishment whatever. We were highly praised instead. But the truth of the strange affair didn't come out.

Farman, for some unaccountable reason, remained silent. And he had learned his lesson!

And so the episode ended. Taking everything altogether, it had ended satisfactorily. But why had Farman been kidnapped? Why had he refused to speak? He knew something—that was certain. But he kept it to himself.

And what was his connection with Mr. Thorne? The mystery, in a way, was still deep. And then, both Nelson Lee and I were somewhat worried about the Chinaman. Was he a member of the Fu Chang-Tong, and had we been discovered in our obscurity at St. Frank's?

Days passed, and nothing further happened. And, at the end of a week, everything was as usual. But the guv'nor and I were still a little bit uneasy. Had the Fu Changs discovered us?

Only time would show.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(*See p. iv.*)

GRAND NEW SERIAL—JUST STARTING!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Read this first!

TOM CRAWLEY, *light-weight boxer and stoker aboard H.M.S. Flyer, makes his first public appearance in a contest with Jimmy Fowl, lightning feather-weight. He wins the fight, and with the prize-money is able to replace his father's torpedoed fishing smack. Tom is jealous of*

BOB RANDLE—*who, the lad considers, is a "slacker"—on the grounds that Bob seems to find favour in the eyes of*

MARY THWAITES, *the pretty daughter of Fisherman Thwaites, of whom Tom is very fond.*

FISHERMAN CRAWLEY'S *smack is chartered as a mine-sweeper, and one day is torpedoed by a German submarine in sight of land. The crew, with the exception of old Thomas Crawley, are cast adrift on a raft.*

(Now read this week's thrilling instalment.)

A PILGRIM ABOARD A GERMAN SUBMARINE.

DOWN, down into the depths of the sea, tossed and turned and hurled about as helpless as any cork.

Fisherman Thomas Crawley, of the Dora Grey, believed that this was death, for though he tried to move his arms and hands, he found the pressure too great.

His last conscious act before sinking had been to fill his lungs with air. And he held his breath now until he felt the blood rushing to his brain, and his veins swell to bursting.

Only sub-consciously did he become aware, after what seemed an eternity of time, that he could use his arms at last; and at length when he opened his mouth, unable to withstand the strain any longer, it was to breathe in pure, life-restoring air, and to float on the bosom of the heaving sea.

Thomas Crawley had been flung to the surface by the upheaval of the waters, and floated idly there amid the bubbles for a moment, too exhausted and benumbed to think or move.

He could feel his heart thumping against his ribs with tremendous rapidity, and the agony of the coming to was almost too overpowering to bear. It was only as his body sank again, and his mouth sucked in a rush of brine, that he realised that another effort was needed, and began to swim.

He righted himself, and blinked his eyes around.

Being only a moderate swimmer, he knew that he was still in danger.

Where was the raft? His eyes searched vainly for it; but ahead of him he saw the German submarine. It was being urged slowly towards him.

He turned, and there floated the raft some distance from him.

Thank Heaven, Mary and the others were safe aboard it.

He judged the distance, and knew that he would never be able to swim so far, handicapped as he was by his soaked clothes and heavy fishing-boots; nor was he skilful swimmer enough to discard these things while in the sea.

The U-boat was nearer at hand, and drifting closer still. Yes, he felt that he might struggle so far, and the instinct of self-preservation impelled him to the effort.

He could see the grinning seamen aboard the under-water boat staring down at him, and he heard the coarse taunts and threats they hurled at him.

In his time he had sailed to German ports, and he knew sufficient of the language to understand.

"Dog of an Englishman!" shouted one of the brutes. "how long will you take to drown?"

"Germany, not Britannia, rules the seas," said a second.

"Stand away there!" roared a third; "for if you attempt to come aboard, I'll cut you down."

So saying, he half drew a cutlass which he wore at his side, and his devilish smile told the rest.

But Fisherman Thomas Crawley swam on, because this was his only hope.

Already he felt his strength failing him, and his heavy clothing dragging him down.

Nearer and nearer the U-boat drifted, until it was but a few strokes away, and the desperate skipper of the luckless Dora Grey, with a last effort, reached her, and scraped her iron sides with his finger-nails as he vainly endeavoured to secure a hold.

The taunts and threats swelled in volume now. Menacing faces leered down upon him. He raised his fine, old head and looked at his enemies.

Were they men or devils? Was it such sport to them to see a harmless mariner drown?

As he felt the end draw nearer, he redoubled his efforts, and somehow managed as the water lifted him to grasp hold of the rail which ran along each side of the submarine.

Firmly his fingers grasped it, and he hung there as the sea sunk down again, thankful for the momentary respite.

One of the German officers issued a command.

What did he say? What did he mean?

Murder, surely, for one of the seamen sprang forward, and raising his nailed boot, stamped cruelly upon the clinging hands.

A low cry burst from Thomas Crawley's lips, as the skin was torn and the blood started forth.

"You inhuman dog!" he cried; and, in spite of his agony, he held on.

Fierce imprecations burst from the lips of those aboard the raft, mingled with a girl's despairing cry, as they saw what happened.

Riley, in his blind, impotent rage, hurled himself into the sea, as if he would swim to the rescue. Poor fellow! The action merely showed the splendid stuff he was made of. It was useless, however even ill-advised.

"Drown, drown, you British sea-dog!" snarled the Hun who stamped. "This is a German's vengeance——"

The words were still upon his lips, and his cruel foot was raised to strike again, when the officer in command of the submarine sprang towards him with flashing eyes, and, swinging his right arm, delivered a punch upon the angle of the monster's jaw which dropped him headlong to the iron deck.

The words in German which accompanied the blow were lost to Thomas Crawley, but even in that terrible moment, when he believed that his life must end, he thanked God that there were some Huns who could behave like decent men.

And then, to his astonishment, the commander, bending over him, seized his hands, and, with a reassuring smile, hauled him up on to the safe deck, and held him there.

"Surrender yourself my prisoner," he cried, "and I will take you back to Germany with me——".

To become a prisoner of war was almost as bad as death, and Thomas Crawley hesitated.

He turned his anxious eyes upon the raft, and as he did so he saw Bill Riley, Jerry Morgan, Sam the boy, and Mary, who stood with her hands clasped, watching with bated breath. The moment they realised that Thomas Crawley had been saved a ringing cheer came echoing towards the submarine.

The U-boat commander's humane act received an almost instant reward.

Thomas Crawley waved his hands to them.

"Good-bye, my lass," he shouted. "Good-bye, my lads. We may never see each other again; but if the sea keeps calm, you ought to be picked up soon."

The U-boat commander now sternly ordered the seamen below. He swung round haughtily on the gallant fisherman.

"You must go down into the ship," he said, with a meaning and explanatory gesture. "You are my prisoner. I count upon you offering no resistance, or——"

At that moment a loud, strident cry in German caused the commander of the submarine to start and turn his face towards the north.

As he did so a string of angry oaths issued from his lips, intersected with commands.

Down the iron ladder tumbled the U-boat's crew, and Thomas Crawley, sweeping the seas with his eager eyes for the source of the unrest, observed a long, rakish, grey-painted war-craft speeding towards them like the wind.

Her smoke stacks were so low as to be almost invisible. The state of the atmosphere had prevented the look out on the U-boat from picking her up before. Only when the noise of her engines and the fountains of water turned from her prow could be heard and seen had they taken alarm.

There she was, a new type of British chaser and destroyer beyond a doubt, and to Thomas Crawley's lips there leapt a cry of pride and triumph.

"Britannia for ever!" he called, his voice ringing like a trumpet. "Britannia for ever! Britannia rules the waves!"

As he spoke a flame leapt from the hull of the chasing vessel, and a puff of smoke made itself visible even as the boom of her gun and the fall of the shell she hurled into the water told all aboard the U 99 that she was in dire peril.

Thomas Crawley leapt to the side of the vessel, intending to dive into the sea and take his chance, but the strong hand of the Hun commander gripped him.

"You are my prisoner," he cried sternly. "It would mean certain death if you leapt overboard. Down into the hold! We are going to submerge."

Another shot, and yet another, rang from the hull of the British warship, and Thomas Crawley, laughing like a happy child, remembering his tact submission to the will of the enemy, slipped in to the iron ladder, and dropped down into the hold of the submarine.

After him leapt the Hun officer, issuing commands as he came.

The iron manhole or hatchway was clanged to and the screw-bolts tightened, and the levers wrenched into place.

With throbbing engines and the reek of oil, and a peculiarly unpleasant smell, the U-boat dived below the surface, even as a porpoise dives.

Down she plunged swiftly, but none too soon, for shells beat upon the water, and drove into it.

She was not one second too soon.

Trembling in every plate and bolt, rivet and stanchion, she plunged deep down into the sea—deeper yet.

Through her plates the water percolated silently, ever and ever so slowly, to hang in glistening beads upon the partially rusted iron and drop upon the crew as they worked in the stifling hold.

Silence gripped the men, the silence of fear. A minute passed, two, five, ten—fifteen minutes, and then, with a laugh of relief, the U-boat officer cried:

"It's all right, comrades. We have given her the slip. We are safe!"

Yes, they had escaped the deadly menace of the British ship of justice, for which Thomas Crawley was profoundly sorry, for he would willingly have given his life to have had the U-boat sunk. And as she ploughed her way through the silent middle of the deep to Germany she bore the resigned and ill-fated fisherman of Weathersea with her to captivity.

PICKED UP!

FROM the moment of the submarine attack until after the sinking of the Dora Grey, events had happened so swiftly, and there had been such peril of death, that none of those aboard the raft had time to think of anything but themselves.

Nor did any one of them know that the skipper, Thomas Crawley, was not with them until they grew calmer and looked around with cleared vision.

It was then that Mary Thwaites realised that her uncle had not joined them, then that she saw him swimming helplessly some distance away, with the grim hull of the low-lying submarine drifting near.

She called out to him, screamed when he caught hold of the rail as the surge of the wave threw him upwards. She screamed again, with her hand pressed to still the beating of her heart as the brutal Hun seaman tried to stamp his hands away.

And then—then she saw him drawn clear of the water and safe upon her narrow deck.

How thankful she was, though still she feared that the brave fisherman would be slain by his brutal enemies.

Then she heard the mate Riley utter a loud cheer, and saw him pointing with shaking finger into the northern sea.

"Look! Look!" he shouted. "It's a destroyer—one of ours! He's saved! We're all saved, and the cursed submarine will be driven to the bottom! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The others cheered, too, and looked on with wild eyes.

Then the first shell was fired, and burst in the sea perilously close to the sub-

marine. "They've got her!" shouted Riley. "They've got her!"

Another shell came hurtling across the waves, and a third.

Mary saw Thomas Crawley hustled into the hold of the U-boat, saw the men and their officer scramble after, and the iron hatchway slam down.

Then came the porpoise-dive; and a second or so later there was only the swirling of the waters to show that the U-boat had been.

Still the shells burst, and then the destroyer passed right over the place where the submarine had vanished.

Had she been sunk?

"I can see bubbles there! Look at 'em! Look at 'em! Bubbles—and oil, too!" cried Riley, pointing. "See there! See there!"

There was froth and foam, and oil, it seemed, and certainly bubbles. But did it mean that the U-boat had been sunk?

Mary, with clasped hands, prayed that it might not be.

"Why not?" howled the boy Sam, almost fiercely, staring at her with savage eyes. "Did she 'ave any mercy on us?"

"No," answered Mary gently. "No, Sam; but Thomas Crawley would have gone to his death with her, and I am hoping that he's alive."

The boy hadn't looked at it in that light. His face changed colour, and he trembled.

"Poor old skipper!" he blubbed, drawing his sleeve across his moist eyes. "Poor old Thomas Crawley!"

Riley groaned.

"It's cruel luck!" he moaned. "But the devils will have to pay for it! Germany's got to be beaten to her knees. I'm no landsman, but I'll join the Army to avenge him, if they'll have me in the fighting units."

He stood with fists clenched whilst the raft rocked, staring wide-eyed in front of him.

The destroyer had by this time swung round, and was steaming slowly towards them.

Lucky for them, perhaps, it was she was so near, for the sea was rising and the wind freshening. The raft rocked heavily, and water broke over her frail planks. All trace of other craft near had vanished.

The frail float could not have kept them up much longer. Already the cross pieces of timber were breaking apart.

The destroyer came alongside, and eager hands were stretched out to them and ropes thrown.

The raft scraped her iron hull. Mary Thwaites was drawn aboard her. The boy Sam followed, then the others in turn. The dripping survivors of the Dora Grey were conducted to where the skipper of the destroyer stood.

A typical naval officer he was, clean-shaved, copper-bronzed, with clear blue eyes that stared out piercingly from under beetle eyebrows.

He asked for particulars of the sinking of the fishing-boat. He had not witnessed the tragedy of the sea, though he'd heard the explosion of the torpedo, and had guessed the rest.

Riley told the story of the sinking in graphic sentences and simple words.

"What port do you belong to?" asked the commander of the destroyer.

"Weathersea, sir."

"Weathersea. Can't put you ashore there. But I'll land you at Borrowmouth. It's not a long journey. Are you all here?"

"No, sir. The skipper was taken aboard the submarine."

"What? Went down with the U-boat?"

"Yes, sir."

The officer directed his eyes at the heaving sea, and shook his head.

Mary leant forward, eyeing him timidly.

"Do you think he is drowned? Did you sink the U-boat, sir?" she faltered.

"I'm sorry to say I didn't," he replied. "But it takes a bit of the sting off my failure to think that the life of a brave fisherman may have been saved."

"Then they won't kill him, sir?"

"No. They'll not kill him. If the submarine is lucky, it will get safely back to port, and your skipper will be imprisoned there."

Instantly the drawn and haggard expression of Mary's face gave place to a calmer look. Thomas Crawley would be made a prisoner of war. He would be out of the strain and horror of the deadly U-boat warfare, and at peace for a while. And when the war was over, he would come back home to Weathersea.

Mary, in spite of her courage and her strength, was but a woman, and somehow she found comfort in the thought.

A minute later the destroyer was speeding onward at half-speed, with her wireless cracking as messages were given and received.

(To be continued.)

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