No. 173.—MAGNIFICENT SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE STORY!

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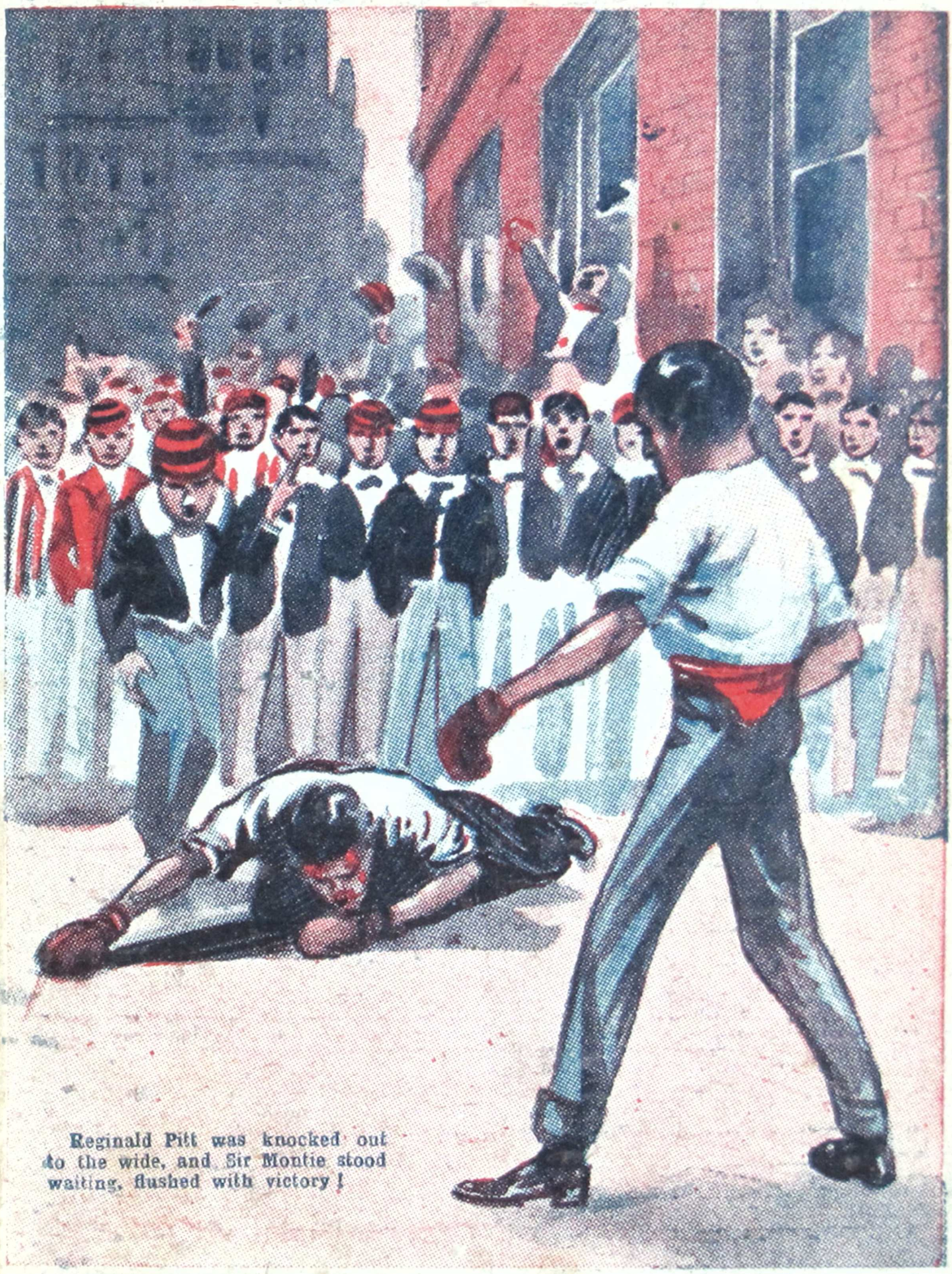

Reginald Pitt was knocked out to the wide, and Sir Montie stood waiting, flushed with victory!

"EXPELLED FROM ST. FRANK'S!"

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing **NELSON LEE** and **NIPPER** and the **BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S.** By the Author of "The Coming of the Serpent," "The Boat-race Mystery," "Nipper in Disgrace," etc. *Sept.* 28, 1918.

No. 173. THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. THREE-HALFPENCE.
(INCORPORATING THE "BOYS' REALM.")

EXPELLED FROM ST FRANK'S

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's.

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(THE STORY RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A MATTER OF DUTY—FULLWOOD AND CO. TAKE A HAND—MONTIE DECIDES.

HANDFORTH was suffering.

He had been suffering, roughly, for about twenty hours, and had become worse and worse as time went on. Opinions differed as to the exact nature of his complaint.

Church and McClure, his faithful study mates, confidentially whispered into various private ears that Handforth was in the throes of a particularly bad attack of swelled head.

This was unkind, but, unfortunately, it was the truth.

Edward Oswald Handforth, to be precise, had been elected captain of the Ancient House section of the Remove at St. Frank's. The tremendous responsibility was rather too much for him all at once, and he went about in a semi-dazed condition.

Personally, I don't think it was the responsibility which dazed him; it was the shock of being elected. Certainly, he was the most surprised fellow in the Remove.

How he had been elected was something of a miracle. Nobody knew exactly how it had come about. There had been an exciting meeting of the Remove the previous evening, and I had been forced to resign the captaincy—owing to the machinations of Fullwood and Co. and their new ally, Reginald Pitt.

Handforth, as ever, was to the fore. Finding that no decent fellow would accept the captaincy, he had put himself up for election, and had won! It was one of those affairs which nobody could understand, and would probably remain a mystery.

The fact remained, however, that Handforth was captain of the Remove. He apparently had the idea that this position gave him the privilege of stalking about, offering everybody advice which they didn't need. Some fellows bluntly stated that Handforth was shoving his nose into affairs which didn't concern him. But, to be just, this was not Handforth's object. He was Remove skipper, and he felt that it was necessary for him to do something to warrant his existence in such a post.

It was generally agreed that Handforth, as captain of the Remove, was a bigger ass than he had ever been before. He wasn't mapped out to be a leader, owing to his drastic ideas. Unless his fellows agreed to every proposition he liked to put forward, he applied force.

He was given a week, at the outside. Even his own chums predicted that he would be toppled over within seven days. And I had an idea that they wouldn't be far wrong. Who his successor would be I had no idea. I was firmly resolved not to stand for captain again until I was expressly asked to do so by the Remove.

Naturally, I was feeling rather sore.

The whole thing had been so preposterous. Reginald Pitt had worked a pretty plot against me, and it had been an obvious "plant." Yet a large number of fellows had been ready to go against me in a moment of crisis. They had been swayed by Pitt's cunning methods, and in their excitement they had voted against me.

Now, after all the excitement had died down, I was pretty certain the Remove was very sorry for itself. Considered calmly, after due thought, it was recognised that there had been no real case against me, and that the whole affair was a put-up job.

But it was too late now. Pitt had gained his object. In his own words I had been chucked out. Only in one detail had the programme gone wrong. Fullwood had hoped to gain the captaincy, but Handforth had defeated him—Handforth, of all fellows!

It was only right that Handforth should have a fair trial as skipper, but it was generally considered that a week of him would be more than enough for anybody.

What had happened was really the commencement of a great campaign against me and against my immediate chums. Fullwood and Co., although rotters of the first water, were not the actual culprits. It was Reginald Pitt, the new fellow in the Remove, who was responsible.

Pitt was something novel in the way of juniors. His sly, cunning manner had earned for him a nickname which was scarcely complimentary. He was known throughout the Junior School as the Serpent. And, undoubtedly, his ways and habits were snaky.

Pitt had approached Fullwood and Co., and had frankly offered his services—for a price. In short, he had agreed to engineer various plots against me and my chums, provided he was kept liberally supplied with pocket-money.

Fullwood and Co., although sceptical at first, were now thoroughly convinced that Pitt was the fellow for their job. He had promised that I should be forced to resign the captaincy within three days. And he had made good his promise! Pitt had relied upon a sudden sensation, when the juniors could be taken off their guard. I had been forced to resign in a moment of great excitement.

The Remove had calmed down by the following evening, and, judging from the sympathetic remarks of nearly everybody, I was certain that the incident was regretted. Personally, I didn't mind much, for I knew very well that it would only be a temporary measure.

And it would certainly be interesting to watch Handforth's progress as captain of the Remove. So far he had done nothing, but, as it happened, Handforth was making plans for a good start.

Tea was in progress in most of the Remove studies; Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were enjoying ourselves. Since I knew that all the decent fellows in the Remove believed in me, I was comfortable. But it mustn't be supposed that I was content to let things rest as they were. Reginald Pitt would find that I was not a very easy customer to tackle. But, as I explained to my chums, there was no necessity for hurry. When I did a job I did it thoroughly.

"Things don't seem to be goin' very smoothly next door, dear fellows," remarked Sir Montie, as he sipped his tea. "I'm afraid our new skipper is havin' some trouble with Church and McClure."

I grinned.

"It's far more likely that Church and McClure are having trouble with Handforth!" I replied. "Just listen to it! Hear those bumps? That's either Church or McClure being knocked down, or Handforth is laying down the law and thumping the table. It's a wonder he doesn't smash all the giddy crocks——"

"Hallo! He's done it!" chuckled Watson.

A terrific crash had certainly sounded from next door—which was Study D, the abode of Handforth and Church and McClure. Some fellows, humorously inclined, referred to Handforth's study as a boxing booth, principally because fights generally occurred there several times a day.

Watson and I had not been far wrong, for Handforth had been thumping on the table so vigorously that McClure's teacup, already near the edge, progressed by little jumps until it finally vanished overboard.

"You—you ass!" howled McClure wildly.

Handforth paused in his banging for a moment.

"What's the matter now?" he demanded testily.

"Look what you've done with your fat-headed thumps!" roared McClure. "That cup of tea——"

"Bother the cup of tea!" snorted Handforth. "I suppose you're not going to make a fuss about a silly cup?"

"It was full, you fathead!"

"Well, there's more tea in the teapot——"

"What about me?" shouted McClure, dancing about. "What about my trousers? I'm soaked to the skin, and scalded, too!"

"Blessed if I've got a minute's peace in this study!" exclaimed Handforth tartly. "You seem to forget that I'm captain——"

"Forget it!" remarked Church wearily. "My hat! I wish we could! We've heard that word about five hundred times to-day! And what about that cup and saucer? I borrowed 'em from De Valerie——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Handforth. "I thought they were ours. You'll have to pay for them, McClure."

"I shall?" shouted McClure, glaring.

"Didn't you break 'em?" said Handforth. "You shouldn't be so jolly careless. How was I to know your cup was near the edge of the table? Oh, don't make a fuss!"

McClure, who wasn't nearly so soaked or scalded as he made out, sat down at the table again and helped himself to Handforth's teacup, generously leaving the slop-basin for his leader. Handforth, in all probability, would never notice the difference—he was that kind of chap. He would see there was tea to be drunk, and he would drink it, without troubling about the size or shape of the vessel.

"That's the worst of these interruptions," said Handforth mumblingly, with his mouth full of bread and butter. "Where was I?"

"Oh, I don't know!" snapped Church. "You can't eat and talk at the same time. You were rambling on about Pitt, weren't you?"

"No, I wasn't!" declared Handforth firmly. "I'm not in the habit of rambling. As captain of the Remove, I insist upon you chaps being respectful."

"We don't mind you insisting, Handy," said Church generously.

"As captain of the Remove," repeated Handforth, thumping the table again, "I consider that Pitt ought to be slaughtered. Boiling oil is too good for him, but we can't go to such lengths as that. My idea is to give him a thundering good hiding."

"He punched your nose once," remarked McClure absently.

Handforth deliberately rose to his feet.

"If you bring that up again, McClure, we shall have a serious quarrel!" he said grimly. "I'm an easy-going chap, but I'm not going to stand any rot. Is that clear?"

"Besides, you oughtn't to thrash Pitt," said McClure, dexterously changing the subject. "If it hadn't been for Pitt you wouldn't be captain. So what do you want to fight him for?"

Handforth gave his chum a withering look.

"That's what I have to put up with!" he exclaimed, with a sigh. "I've got to sit here and listen to fatheaded remarks of that kind. What do I want to fight Pitt for?" he roared. "Isn't Pitt a rotter? Isn't Pitt the chap who forced Nipper's resignation? It's a pity you haven't got more sense!"

McClure fell back fainting in his chair.

"Don't start your rotten puns, for goodness' sake!" he groaned.

"Puns? Who's making puns?" snapped Handforth, who was unconscious of the one he had perpetrated. "Can't you idiots be serious? I'm going to start properly, and by the end of this term I shall be——"

"Chucked out?" suggested Church.

"No, I shan't be chucked out!" snorted Handforth. "I shall remain captain of the Remove until I leave St. Frank's!"

"When you move up to the Fifth, I suppose?" suggested Church sarcastically. "You'll still be Remove skipper when you're in the Sixth?"

"You know what I meant!" roared Handforth. "When I say things perfectly clearly you always misunderstand me! As soon as tea's over I'm going to challenge Pitt to a fight. Is that clear enough for your dull wits to grab hold of?"

Church grabbed his shoulders.

"If you're on the look-out for black eyes and blue bruises, that's your business," he said. "In my opinion, Pitt ain't worth touching. Still, you're captain, so you must decide."

"It's a matter of duty," said Handforth. "It's not exactly what I like or dislike. A Form skipper has got to be above that sort of thing. He's got to think of his duty to the Form, and it's my duty to give Pitt a good hiding."

"I hope you'll do your duty," said McClure politely.

"That's another sneer," said Handforth. "I know what you mean, of course. But if you think I can't whack Pitt, you're mistaken. It's a task which has got to be done, and I'm not a shirker."

Church and McClure said no more about it. They thought it quite likely that Handforth would receive almost as good as he gave, and it would really do him good. Pitt, although an absolute cad, wasn't a coward. And he could fight well.

But once Handforth had made up his mind there was no turning him from his purpose. Practically as soon as tea was done in Study D he led the way out, and went next door.

Pitt was at home, and with him were Gulliver and Bell. All three were smoking, and Handforth gave an expressive snort.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, glaring round. "Put those filthy things out! As captain of the Remove, I don't allow any smoking in junior studies!"

"Who let this in?" asked Pitt languidly. "You shouldn't leave the door open, Gulliver. Or did it get in through the keyhole?"

"And I don't want any rot, either!" roared Handforth. "I'll attend to this smoking business afterwards. Just now I'm keen on something else. I'll trouble you, Pitt, to listen to me."

"Glad you know it's a trouble," said Pitt. "It's a confounded nuisance, in fact. And may I ask if you've swallowed a gramophone born? Or is it your natural voice?"

Church and McClure grinned—fortunately, behind Handforth's back. In spite of Pitt's cynical tone, Church and McClure were somewhat inclined to agree with him. They sometimes thought they would turn deaf after listening to Handforth for long.

"All right?" said Handforth grimly. "You'll only get it hotter for this, my son! I think you're the biggest cad in the Ancient House, Pitt, and I'm going to give you a good hiding!"

"That's beastly interesting!" said the Serpent calmly. "When are you going to perform this miracle?"

"I challenge you to meet me behind the gym. at seven o'clock!" roared Handforth. "Do you accept?"

Pitt shook his head.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I haven't the time for such trifles," he said casually. "Go and challenge somebody else, Handforth—a member of the Second, say. He'd be about your mark."

Handforth could afford to ignore the sneer, for he was one of the best fighters in the Remove. But Pitt's words stung him and he strode forward wrathfully.

Smack!

His open palm—quite a large one—came down on Pitt's cheek with such force that the cigarette was knocked from between the Serpent's teeth, and he nearly toppled out of his chair. His cheek was flaming red.

"Now will you fight?" asked Handforth icily.

Pitt's eyes glittered evilly.

"Yes, hang you!" he snarled. "I'll teach you a lesson, too!"

"Good enough!" said the Remove captain. "At seven sharp!"

He turned and went out of the study, and grinned pleasantly to his chums after he had closed the door.

"That's the way to do it," he remarked. "I'll bet the cad's cheek is burning now. There'll be other parts of him burning before I've done. I shan't be in a hurry to get behind the gym., either."

"What do you mean?" asked Church.

"Seven o'clock, I said," replied Handforth. "I shall let the crowd get there first, and then arrive on the scene with you chaps—my seconds—at the last moment. It'll be more dignified, more becoming for a Form

captain. Let the riff-raff get there beforehand."

Church and McClure grinned, and the trio moved down the passage. But that little conversation had been overheard within Study E, and Pitt's eyes gleamed afresh as he understood Handforth's intention.

The news that Handforth was to fight Pitt spread through the Ancient House rapidly. Within twenty minutes every Removite was aware of the fact. A fight always attracted a large crowd, and tremendous enthusiasm was aroused.

And the prospect of seeing Handforth scrap with Pitt was quite a promising one. The Remove, to a man, decided to be there. Even Christine and Co., of the College House, and all their followers, were determined to be present. They would find much pleasure in seeing Reginald Pitt fought to a standstill.

By half-past six fags in considerable numbers were behind the gym., selecting the most favourable positions. Needless to say, they would get hurled out afterwards, but they always hoped for the best.

At a quarter to seven half the Remove was there, and the other half was on its way. Nobody wished to miss the start. Tregellis-West and Watson and I strolled over, and found that Pitt was already there with his seconds, Marriott and Kemp.

There was no sign of Handforth and Co., but it wasn't yet seven, so nobody could grumble. Light boxing gloves were to be used, and Owen major, who was appointed time keeper, had them all ready for the combatants.

"Where's Handforth?" he asked. "It's five to seven."

"Oh, he'll turn up in a minute," said Pitt easily, "unless he's funked the fight at the last minute!"

As a matter of fact, Handforth was having rather a warm time. His idea of arriving on the scene at the last moment was sound, so far as it went. But Pitt had known of it, and his pals had arranged things accordingly. Pitt, to be exact, was practically certain that he would be defeated. And he was not at all in love with that prospect.

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, assisted by Merrell and Moys and a fellow named Simmonds, had remained behind in the Ancient House. They could distinctly hear Handforth and Co. in Study D. Church and McClure, as a matter of fact, were urging their leader to go; but Handforth insisted upon remaining until three minutes to seven.

"Seven o'clock sharp, I said," he declared. "And we'll get there at seven o'clock sharp."

The junior portion of the Ancient House was singularly quiet. There was scarcely a fellow left within the building, and the Remove passage, at least, was absolutely deserted.

Footsteps sounded outside, and the next moment the door of Study D opened and Fullwood and Co. piled in.

"Collar Church and McClure and hold 'em fast!" rapped out Fullwood sharply. "Now then, don't blunder!"

"What the dickens——" began Handforth.

Before he could get any further Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were upon him. He attempted to resist, but the odds were too heavy. He went down with a thud, roaring.

Church and McClure were simply bowled over and kept down. No attempt was made to harm them.

But Handforth fared differently.

Without a second's loss of time Fullwood got busy. While his companions held their victim down, Fullwood commenced punching his face. He performed this operation with such success that Handforth was hurt very much indeed. After that he was allowed to get up, and then knocked down again. He was simply boiling with fury, and did a considerable amount of damage amongst the Nuts.

But it was hopeless to defeat them or to escape. For ten solid minutes he was fighting a hopeless fight. And, at last, he went down, completely exhausted. He had used up the greater part of his strength and energy, and lay upon the floor, panting heavily.

"Obstinate beast!" exclaimed Fullwood breathlessly. "He caught me a frightful whack on the mouth, hang him! Come on, we'll clear."

Church and McClure were at once released, and the cads hastily took their departure. They went straight to the gym., but did not join the crowd. They had no desire to be asked awkward questions.

Meanwhile, Handforth rapidly recovered under the ministrations of his faithful chums.

"Oh, the cads, the awful rotters!" panted Church furiously. "You're in a frightful state, Handy. Of all the cowardly attacks ——"

"I'll make 'em pay for it!" said Handforth thickly. "But what's the time? We shall be late for the fight."

"You—you ass! You can't tackle Pitt now, after this!" exclaimed McClure. "He'll whack you hands down. You ain't fit, Handy!"

Handforth grinned fiercely.

"We'll see about that!" he exclaimed. "That's why those cads came in here, because they knew I should whack Pitt in a fair fight. All right! They'll find they haven't settled me!"

And Handforth strode somewhat unsteadily out of Study D and hurried to the battle ground, Church and McClure accompanying him. They were extremely furious, but filled with anxiety as well.

They were greeted with a yell from the impatient throng, a yell which instantly changed to a general shout of astonishment. Handforth and Co. were at once surrounded, and Church and McClure poured out their story.

"Do you mean to say that Fullwood and Co. deliberately ragged old Handy like that?" I asked hotly. "By jingo! It's the most cowardly thing I've ever heard."

"Rather!"

"Dear boys, Pitt's in it as well," said Sir Montie, his eyes gleaming behind his pince-nez. "I wondered what he was grinnin' at, an' now I know. It was Pitt's idea all along, I expect. Begad! What a frightful reptile!"

Some of the fellows were anxious to find Fullwood and Co., and annihilate them at once, but Handforth interposed.

"You can attend to them afterwards!" he said quietly. "I'm going to thrash Pitt now. He's responsible for the whole thing——"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" I interrupted. "Postpone the fight till another day. You're looking awfully groggy, and you'll get defeated as sure as anything!"

Handforth shook his head obstinately.

"I'm going to fight Pitt—now!" he exclaimed.

"I sha'n't allow it" said Owen major. "I'm time-keeper, and I'll jolly well——"

"You shut up!" snapped Handforth. "I challenged Pitt, and I'm not going to have him sneering that I backed out. I'm ready for the cad!"

We looked at one another rather hopelessly. It was not a bit of good arguing with Handforth. But I certainly admired his wonderful pluck in insisting upon the fight after what had happened. He was true grit to the backbone.

But it was a pitiful affair.

After the first round Handforth was very unsteady, and practically at the commencement of the second round Pitt delivered a terrific drive which knocked poor Handforth out. There was a deep murmur of sympathy when Owen major completed the counting.

"Well, that's over, thank goodness," said Reginald Pitt calmly. "I knew I should finish him, but I didn't think he'd crumple up quite so soon!"

"You gloating cad!" shouted McClure furiously, looking up from his kneeling position beside Handforth.

There wasn't a fellow present who didn't regard Pitt with the utmost contempt. The fight had been grossly unfair from the very start.

And yet Pitt had the utter audacity to pose as the victor.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West lounged forward.

"Just a minute," he said languidly. "There's somethin' I want to do, dear fellows."

Smack! Smack!

Two blows rang out like pistol shots, and Pitt staggered back with a snarling cry, both his cheeks showing the marks of Sir Montie's fingers.

"You got out of one fight, Pitt, but if you've got any backbone in you, you'll stand up to me now," said Tregellis-West smoothly. "You're a frightful cad, an' I wouldn't soil my fingers by touchin' you if Handforth hadn't been so shamefully treated."

There was a tremendous roar of excitement. It was just like Tregellis-West to act in that impulsive fashion. My noble chum, in fact, was trembling with indignation. The most peaceable fellow, usually, he was now ready to fight until he was exhausted.

Reginald Pitt backed away.

"Hang you! I'm not going to fight," he snarled.

"Ain't you?" shouted Tommy Watson. "We'll make you!"

"Either you fight Tregellis-West or we make you run the gauntlet and then duck you in the fountain!" I said grimly. "Which is it going to be, Pitt?"

Pitt took a deep breath.

"Confound you, I'll fight!" he said huskily.

"That's really splendid," said Sir Montie, peeling off his jacket. "Nothin' will give me greater pleasure than to thrash you!"

CHAPTER II.

NO PITY FOR PITT—THE SERPENT MEANS TO GET EVEN.

THE excitement was now considerable. The crowd was quite delighted to find that there was going to be a real fight, after all. And Handforth, having recovered sufficiently to sit up, took a lively interest in the proceedings. He was as hard as nails, and would certainly show few signs of the severe punishment he had received in the morning.

"Jolly good of you, Tregellis-West, to take this on," he said. "All the same, I'm going to fight Pitt myself later on. Can't leave the affair like this, you know. It'll be something pleasant for him to look forward to."

"Don't you worry, Handy," I said. "You just sit tight and look on. Nobody thinks any the worse of you for being knocked out just now. We expected it. You were too groggy to last."

But Handforth was decidedly upset, and his determination to fight Pitt was now greatly strengthened. Incidentally, he meant to give Fullwood a hiding, too.

"It really had to be done, old boy," said Sir Montie, as he prepared for the battle. "I was so frightfully wild that I couldn't stand still an' do nothin'."

"You'll win," declared Watson. "Just sail in and punish the cad all you can. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be better for Nipper to do it——"

"Please do not be so utterly absurd, Tommy," protested Montie. "I have challenged Pitt to fight, and it's up to me to thrash him or be thrashed myself."

And Sir Montie drew on his gloves determinedly.

"No time to lose," I remarked, glancing up at the sky. "The light's failing now, and you can't scrap in the dark. It won't take you long to settle the worm, Montie."

"He's frightfully wiry, you know."

Tregellis-West was quite right in that remark. Pitt, although addicted to smoking, was as hard as iron, and knew quite a lot about boxing. He had a punch, too, with any amount of drive behind it. Handforth knew that.

But Pitt was not looking at all happy. He and his cronies had known that a fair fight with Handforth would be fatal—for Pitt. And so they had taken steps to assure Pitt an easy victory. They knew well enough that they would be ragged afterwards, but risked it. They had not bargained, however, for a challenge from Tregellis-West. And Reginald Pitt was exceedingly sorry that he had persuaded his chums to attack Handforth. For that is what it amounted to—persuasion on Pitt's part.

Thinking over the affair afterwards I wondered how on earth Fullwood and Co. had made themselves parties to such a scheme. They must have known well enough that severe punishment would fall upon them from the rest of the Remove. For under no circumstances could they have expected Handforth and Co. to keep quiet.

The only explanation was that the Nuts were entirely under Pitt's influence. And it was an undoubted fact that the Serpent had a strange, uncanny "way" with him. He could almost compel the Nuts to do anything he wished. He influenced them at every turn and made tools of them. It was he who thought of the plots and they who carried them out. But, curiously enough, Fullwood and Co. had no idea that Pitt influenced them in the slightest degree. The Serpent, so far as I could see, had no redeeming features. He was—evil.

"Time!" said Owen major.

The two juniors stepped into the ring, and the crowd pressed round eagerly. Handforth was on his feet now, and he was taking a big interest in the proceedings.

Tregellis-West, stripped of his jacket and waistcoat and collar, revealed the fact that he was possessed of formidable muscles, and there was an expression of quiet determination on his face which did not tend to make Pitt easy in mind. This "mill" promised to be one of unusual interest.

Pitt opened the fight with a savage attack, his idea apparently being to get it over as quickly as possible.

He pressed hard, but Sir Montie gave no ground, and appeared to be in no way embarrassed. In spite of his splendid guard, however, he received several hard blows, and towards the end of the round he gave ground slightly before Pitt's fierce attack.

The Serpent was greatly encouraged and fought like a demon. He certainly intended finishing the fight at once, if possible. He was getting everything his own way at present.

"Time!" said Owen major.

The first round was over, and I looked at Montie rather anxiously as he came over into his "corner." Tommy and I were his seconds, and we didn't quite like the way the fight had opened.

"What's up, Montie?" I asked. "You let him make rings round you."

"Dear boy, I was merely lettin' him puff himself," explained Tregellis-West. "I was takin' his measure, you know. I shall be quite energetic in the second round, I shall, really."

"Time!"

The combatants stepped to the line again, and Pitt was looking fresh and confident. He started as before, pressing the fighting for all he was worth.

But Montie stood firm, and Pitt's blows were all futile. He expended his strength for no purpose.

And then the band began to play, as Handforth afterwards described it.

Tregellis-West took up the attack, and he drove in rapidly, his left lashing out with determined drives that Pitt found it impossible to stop. He gave ground, and Sir Montie followed him up, using his right as energetically as his left.

Crash!

Pitt went down, shaken up considerably. But he was on his feet again almost at once, white with savage hatred and fury.

He simply hurled himself at Tregellis-West. But Montie was doing a bit of hurling on his own account.

Bang! Bang! My noble chum's blows fell with grim rapidity upon Pitt's face and chest, and he staggered blindly backwards, hopelessly at a loss. His own thrusts were absurdly weak, now that Sir Montie had found his measure.

"Time!" called Owen major reluctantly.

Pitt was extremely grateful for the interval, for he would have gone down in earnest after another few seconds. He fell into the arms of his seconds, panting heavily, his eyes glittering with hatred.

"I'll finish him yet," he muttered thickly.

Montie walked over to us quite steadily, smiling in the most urbane fashion. In spite of the heavy work of the second round, he was still quite fresh.

"I think the next round will finish it, dear boys," he remarked. "I shall give Pitt all the punishment I can inflict. Begad! He deserves it, the frightful cad!"

When Owen major called time again Pitt was not looking at all ready for the next round. Everybody could see that he was as good as beaten, and he probably knew it himself—although he wouldn't admit it. This round was eagerly watched.

"Go it, Montie!"

"Knock the rotter out!"

"Give him beans!"

All the cries were in Tregellis-West's favour. And it would really be necessary to finish the fight somehow or other, for the evening was now drawing in rapidly and the gloom was quite thick.

A surprise awaited us.

We were nearly all of the opinion that Reginald Pitt was done. But he wasn't. If he had disliked Tregellis-West before, he now felt the most intense hatred. It revealed itself in his dark eyes as he stepped into the ring.

"I'll show you!" he snarled savagely.

And then he let himself go. It was absolutely a whirlwind attack. His fury blazed out in a tremendous burst of energy. Crash!

His fist caught Sir Montie on the chest, and while the latter was staggering back, Pitt followed up his advantage and hammered right and left.

Crash!

Another blow went home, and Tregellis-West went over backwards heavily. But he was upon his feet in a trice, fully prepared now for this unexpected display of savagery. Pitt went for him again, panting heavily and lashing out with determined drives.

But Montie apparently believed in the motto that attack was the best form of defence. He simply let himself go. The result was surprising. Both combatants were now using every ounce of their strength, and the fighting was furious.

The crowd pressed round excitedly.

"Go it, Montie!"

"Good man!"

"That's the style!"

Pitt had failed, and he knew it. His whirlwind tactics had only brought him a momentary advantage. For Tregellis-West was now adopting the same method of fighting, and Pitt couldn't stand it.

Blows rained upon him fiercely, and his guard went to pieces. Sir Montie simply battered his face for all it was worth, delivering the most severe punishment.

Twice Pitt staggered back, but recovered each time. He was certainly game. But then the end came quickly. The Serpent was knocked right and left.

He went back, and still further back, his guard utterly useless now. And one tremendous drive from Montie's left caught him on the chin and sent him crashing down. He stopped down, groaning faintly.

"Oh, good!" came a roar.

"Good old Montie!"

Owen major was counting. By the time he had reached ten Pitt was still lying motionless. He was completely beaten, and hadn't another ounce of fight left in him.

"Begad!" panted Tregellis-West. "That was rather surprisin', eh? Do I look really shockin', old boys?"

"You're hardly touched, my son," I said cheerfully. "Just a bruise over your left eye and a swollen nose, that's all. You'll be as right as ninepence by bedtime."

Handforth grasped Montie's hand heartily.

"Good man!" he exclaimed, with much warmth. "You've done splendidly, Tregellis-West. I'm hanged if I could have done better myself! By George! Just look at Pitt's face!"

It was undoubtedly an ugly sight. His nose had been bleeding profusely, and both his eyes were closing up. His chest, too, was extremely tender, and he would feel sore for days.

Montie stripped off his gloves, and was helped into his coat and waistcoat again. Pitt's seconds were having some little trouble with their champion, for he wasn't capable of walking away yet. In the midst of sponging operations he jerked himself forward and looked at Sir Montie fiercely.

"You've beaten me!" he hissed, "but I'll have my own back, hang you! I'll make you pay for this!"

"Really, Pitt, I have nothin' to say to you," said Sir Montie quietly. "I merely deputised for Handforth, an' it has given me great pleasure to administer a well-deserved thrashin'. As for your threats, I don't care a straw for them. They only prove that you're no sportsman."

"I'll make you wish you never laid a finger on me!" snarled Pitt.

We turned away, rather disgusted, and walked off in the gloom towards the Triangle. Pitt was left with his seconds, to follow as soon as he was capable.

A considerable commotion which was proceeding from beneath the chestnuts attracted our attention. We guessed the meaning of it, and grinned with appreciation.

Fullwood and Co. had been collared.

The Nuts were receiving dire punishment for their caddish attack upon Handforth. The Remove was infuriated, and the Nuts were frog-marched round the Triangle and forced to run the gauntlet. By the time they were allowed to go they looked more like scarecrows than human beings and were absolutely exhausted.

They fled into the Ancient House, and the next half-hour was spent in cleaning operations. When they came down from the dormitory they found the Remove passage fairly quiet, for all the juniors were hard at prep., making up for lost time.

Fullwood and Co., bruised and battered, were feeling very sore against Reginald Pitt, and their first step was to pay a call in Study E. They found the electric-light switched off, but the Serpent was there.

He was lying full length in an easy-chair, looking more dead than alive. He made no sign as Fullwood and Co. crowded in.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" snapped Fullwood savagely. "A fine muck you've made of it! If you'd fought Handforth at the start you wouldn't have received such punishment. Handforth ain't half so good as Tregellis-West."

"And what have you got to say about us?" rapped out Gulliver. "We were frog-marched, and——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Pitt quietly. "Don't growl, you weak-kneed fools! You get on my nerves!"

"Oh, do we?" roared Fullwood.

Pitt looked up steadily.

"Whatever you say won't make any difference," he exclaimed. "What's the good of making a song about it? I've received twenty times more punishment than you have, and I'm not growling."

"Well, you do look a bit smashed up," admitted Fullwood, with great satisfaction. "I hope it's taught you a lesson. Your rotten schemin' doesn't seem to have come to much, does it?"

Pitt closed his eyes.

"Not yet!" he said, his voice vibrating with hatred. "But you won't have to wait long. I'm going to get Tregellis-West kicked out of St. Frank's—do you understand?"

He bent forward, and opened his eyes, to

reveal the fact that they were blazing evilly. Even Fullwood and Co. regarded him with uncomfortable feelings.

"I—I say," muttered Gulliver, "don't look like that!"

"My campaign has only just started!" said the Serpent deliberately. "It's going on—with a vengeance!"

"You'd better ease up——"

"It's going on!" repeated Pitt. "And Tregellis-West will be the first victim to feel the full brunt of my attack. By heaven! I'll make him pay dearly for this evening's work!"

And Reginald Pitt was undoubtedly in earnest!

———.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF FOOLS!

MR. NELSON LEE, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was taking things comfortably. He lolled in the big easy-chair which occupied a prominent position in his study and centred his whole attention upon blowing smoke rings into the air.

At least, that is what he appeared to be doing. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose he knew he was blowing rings at all. It was one of the guv'nor's favourite tricks to puff idly at a cigarette whilst deeply immersed in thought.

A few minutes before the school clock had boomed out the hour of ten, and that meant that all the fellows were in their sleeping quarters—juniors and seniors. The masters, of course, were still taking their ease in their studies or elsewhere, but the midnight oil was seldom burned at St. Frank's, except, perhaps, by Nelson Lee.

But, then, the guv'nor was accustomed to being up at all hours, and he never believed in sleeping more than six hours out of the twenty-four on any occasion. He generally retired at about one-thirty a.m.—a truly shocking hour in the opinion of most of the other masters.

To-night Nelson Lee did not expect to get between the sheets until a much later hour, for there was work to be done. I was rather sore because I couldn't help him. He was going over to Bannington with the object of scouting round the Hermitage, and I had expressly asked him to let me go too.

In a hard-hearted fashion he had refused, severely pointing out that sleep was good for boys, and that midnight was no time for me to be gallivanting about. Of course, he was only pulling my leg, because in an emergency he would cheerfully rout me out at any old hour, whether I wanted to be routed out or not. That was a question in which I had no voice.

"No, my dear Nipper," the guv'nor said, "there is no task for you to-night. Later on, perhaps, I may be able to make use of your undoubted talents. You need have no fears for my safety. My skin is of far more value to me than it is to you, and I shall take care that it remains intact."

And that finished the argument, so far as I was concerned. Nelson Lee was now pondering over certain matters until the clock struck ten-thirty—the hour he had decided upon for departure.

These certain matters were connected with an old house at Bannington, known as the Hermitage. It must be admitted, however, that Lee was more interested in the occupants of the house than in the house itself.

He had grave suspicions, and he was most anxious to verify them. Actually, the guv'nor was working on behalf of Scotland Yard. A large number of cleverly executed currency notes had been flooding the southern counties of late, and the police had narrowed down the search to Bannington. Here, however, all their attempts to discover the culprits had been in vain.

The crooks were too "fly" for the police—even for several astute officers of the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard. In short, no fresh issue of notes had been uttered during the police investigation, and they had been unable to move a step.

A ruse had been adopted in consequence. The police had completely dropped their inquiries, but Nelson Lee had been asked to look into the matter on the quiet. And by a sheer piece of luck he had hit the right scent. He and a stranger, both cycling, had met on the same side of the road, with forcible consequences. And the schoolmaster-detective had seen a bundle of currency notes, suspiciously new. Shadowing the man, he had tracked him to the Hermitage, on the outskirts of Bannington.

But this was not the only thing. Nelson Lee had witnessed the arrival and departure of Pitt, of the Remove.

And Pitt had given a password, and had been admitted wearing a mask. Other people had come, similarly disguised, and the detective was rather puzzled. Pitt was connected with the forgers in some way—but how?

That was the question which Nelson Lee wished to decide. He could only do so by taking certain risks. One of these was to gain admittance into the house himself. This, after all, did not offer many difficulties, for Lee was prepared. He had heard the doorkeeper at the Hermitage giving Pitt the password for this particular night. It was "Something fresh," and Lee meant to take the chance.

He would probably find Pitt there—but Pitt would certainly not find him. Nelson Lee would take care of that.

"There is one point which I have fully decided upon," he murmured, as he rose from his easy-chair. "Pitt must be allowed a good deal of rope. The young rascal deserves a sound horsewhipping, but he must not know that his nocturnal expeditions have been discovered. He would almost certainly give the alarm to his confederates, and they would know that I am engaged upon the case. No, Pitt must be allowed a free hand—until I am in a position to strike."

Lee glanced at the clock, and then gave his attention to a neat leather attaché-case which stood upon a side table. It contained

every necessity in the art of make-up, and the detective lost no time in transforming himself from a clean-shaven, spruce-looking gentleman into an elderly, bearded man who looked like a retired tradesman.

Nelson Lee was always cautious. He might be unmasked during his visit to the Hermitage, and, if so, he wished to have a double chance of escaping detection.

As an added precaution, the detective carried nothing in his pockets which could point to his real identity. On the contrary, he carried letters which pointed to quite another identity. It was just as well to do the job thoroughly while he was about it.

Eleven-thirty was approaching when Nelson Lee boldly entered the gateway of the Hermitage, at Bannington. He had cycled over, but his bicycle was now concealed some little distance away.

Pausing for a moment, he donned a black cloth mask, which effectually concealed his already disguised features. Then, without a trace of unfamiliarity, he marched to the door and gave a series of peculiar raps. This door was situated at the side of the house, quite concealed from the road.

It was opened almost at once, and Lee found himself confronted by a powerfully built man, who was back to the dim light at the end of the passage.

"Something fresh," remarked Lee lightly. "Rather a good password, Field."

The man nodded.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "Anybody with you, sir?"

"No."

The man drew aside, and Lee passed on. It had been absurdly easy. The password was right, at all events, and the assurance of Lee's manner had caused the doorkeeper to feel no suspicions. The ready manner in which he had accepted Lee also hinted that the visitors were very numerous, and that Field could not keep them all in his mind. It was an advantage knowing the man's name. Lee had overheard it a week before.

He passed on, a stranger amid strange surroundings, yet pretending to be fully acquainted with them. It was necessary to remain fully on the alert, for one slip would probably reveal the fact that he was an intruder. But the detective could make no mistake as to his way, for there was only one door at the end of the passage.

He opened it and passed through, noting that the door itself, although apparently of wood, was really a massive steel affair. He could tell that by the heavy swing. It almost resembled that of a strong-room door.

On the other side there was another passage, but this was brilliantly illuminated with a number of electric lights. The murmur of many voices came from beyond some thick curtains further up.

Nelson Lee already had an inkling as to the character of this place, and his suspicions were quickly confirmed.

Passing between the curtains, he found himself in a very large apartment, which contained twenty or thirty people, all masked. Almost the first word which Nelson Lee heard told him the truth.

"Make your game, gentlemen!" exclaimed a droning voice.

"Roulette!" muttered Nelson Lee, with a start.

He was astonished. Roulette—in Bannington! He had suspected that the Hermitage was nothing more nor less than a glorified gambling den, and the playing of banker, or even faro, would not have surprised him. But roulette was certainly unexpected.

Looking round, Nelson Lee saw that nobody was taking any particular notice of him. The big apartment was brilliantly lit, and the majority of the visitors were collected round the roulette table in the centre. Faro was in progress in one corner, and there were several card-tables dotted about.

The place, in fact, was a miniature Monte Carlo—very miniature, of course, and rather gaudy. The decorations were cheap, and had evidently been prepared in a hurry. But the visitors gave their sole attention to the gambling-tables.

Nelson Lee easily understood why the majority of the visitors wore masks, for he now observed that one or two had discarded them. They were cautious, and had no wish to be recognised by their fellow-townsmen. This was obviously to safeguard against petty blackmail.

The people who were wearing no masks

bore their true trademark all over them—professional gamblers, billiard sharps, bookmakers, and such like. They didn't care a toss whether they were recognised or not. It was only the "respectable" townsmen who wished to remain unrecognised.

Nelson Lee sauntered to the roulette-table, and saw that the impassive croupier was the man he had encountered on the Bannington road. The fellow was in evening-dress, and carried himself as though he had spent half his life in Continental casinos.

The detective watched with some amount of interest. He had seen the playing at Monte Carlo on more than one occasion, and this tawdry imitation would not bear comparison. At the same time, the principle was the same, and Nelson Lee was somewhat grim.

He could easily understand why this house was patronised. There were always plenty of fools ready to throw away their money on the chance of gaining more. And this place was truly a house of fools! The visitors were all filled with the same desire—to bring what money they had to the tables and to increase it.

In all probability the majority lost during every visit. But others went away with their capital doubled and trebled. And the luck of these men induced the others to come again, when, perhaps, they would have luck, too. And so it went on, winning and losing; but the losers were always in the majority.

It was only the fascination of gambling which kept the place alive. And Lee was fully aware of the fact that the den would flourish until the police broke it up.

So far the secret had been well kept and the authorities knew nothing. But was this house a gambling centre only? Nelson Lee thought very much to the contrary.

The roulette-table, and all the rest of it, was merely a blind. In the event of a police raid it could merely be proved that the promoters had been running a gaming-house.

But what of the forged currency notes?

The detective was not certain—he could not be, having no proof—but he believed that the base currency had its birth at the Hermitage. The gang who were conducting the place had two strings to their bow, and both were prospering greatly.

Lee, of course, could inform the police without delay and have the house raided. This would put a stop to the gambling. But such a course would be hasty and ill-advised.

Before taking such a step Nelson Lee wanted to obtain evidence that the forged treasury-notes were being manufactured at this spot. The forgeries were of far more importance in every respect. Lee even suspected that the winnings of the "punters" were paid with base currency. So the crooks gained in every respect.

There was nothing new in the aspect of this crowd. To all appearances they were enjoying themselves, but on most faces—or that portion of the face which could be seen—there was an unhealthy flush, and in most eyes gleamed a feverish, unnatural light.

Gambling of this nature was not exactly a pleasant pastime; but the fascination was so great that the players actually made themselves believe that they were having keen enjoyment. Once the spirit took possession of a man all sense and reason was lost to him. He generally went on until he was either broken or had obtained sufficient winnings to satisfy his avarice.

The roulette-table attracted far more interest than the "side-shows." There were a good many punters round about, some of them seated, and others standing behind. The game was a sheer gamble, and any sensible man could see that all the luck was with the bank. By chance a player stood to gain immense sums, but on the average the bank was the winner.

It is a well-known fact that roulette bankers, after all, are not in the habit of running the tables for their own pleasure. They run them for the purpose of gaining other people's money.

So far as Nelson Lee's knowledge went, a fair game of roulette had never been discovered. Even if the game is played "straight" the punter stands to lose in the long run.

But even men who have been cheated again and again go on playing, never realising that they have been duped. The fascination of the game is enormous, and there always remains the hope that one may beat the croupier at his own game.

On the face of it, it was easy enough to understand why the players risked their money. By staking a pound one stood to gain thirty-five pounds. But such a chance as this was rare. Nelson Lee, being very level-headed, knew well enough that the whole game was nothing more nor less than a swindle. His eyes were not blind to the fact that it was only the minority who gained anything after an evening's playing

"Make your game, gentlemen," said the croupier monotonously.

As he spoke he picked up the ivory ball and gently turned the roulette wheel. The game was quite simple in itself. The wheel was turned in one direction, and the ivory ball within it spun in the opposite. The wheel was divided into thirty-seven compartments—one compartment zero, and one for each of the thirty-six numbers.

As the wheel spun the ball spun also, and they both slowed down until the ivory ball clicked into one of the divisions. Whichever number that division happened to be was the winner.

If any punter, for example, had staked on that number on the green cloth, he received thirty-five times the amount of his stake. Thus, if the sum of five pounds was placed upon seventeen, and seventeen happened to turn up, he would rake in one hundred and thirty-five pounds, in addition to his original stake.

This looked extremely rosy, but it was a long chance. There were thirty-seven spaces on the wheel, including zero, so the player really had only one chance in thirty-seven. On the other hand, the banker had thirty-six chances to one against the player.

The punters placed their coins upon the

table, on the places they fancied. The majority played cautiously. It was almost a waste of money to place a sum upon a single number, for the chances were that it would be lost.

But there were other methods. A stake could be placed on the line between two numbers, covering both. If either turned up the player received seventeen times the amount of the stake, and this was termed "a cheval." In a similar fashion a coin could be placed on a row of three numbers. Columns of numbers could also be backed. and in this case the winning number paid out twice the amount staked.

Nelson Lee observed that the more cautious players merely backed red or black—an even chance. He also noticed that there were far more losers than winners, and that a considerable amount of money was upon the table—mostly in silver and ten-shilling notes. There were no heavy stakes risked.

The wheel spun, and the croupier tossed in the ball. Lee watched it curiously, but then turned away with a slight feeling of disgust. This sort of thing always made him impatient. It was so senseless, so utterly mad.

He had been aware of the fact that the croupier's pile was of considerable size. It increased with every turn of the wheel, for the bank, as a rule, won all along the line.

The detective looked round at the players, wondering if he could recognise any of them. He did not do so, and was attracted once more to the table by the croupier's droning voice

"Twenty-one, black, impair, and manque."

There was a buzz of excitement as the winners raked in their gains. But the croupier raked in far more than he paid out.

The wheel was turned again, and the ivory ball went clicking round the shallow basin, over the little metal studs.

"I say, this is interesting," said a youthful voice near by. "I vote we risk a quid or two, by gad!"

Nelson Lee did not turn, but he instantly recognised the voice of Ralph Leslie Fullwood. Lee sauntered away, and then turned. He now saw that four boyish figures were among the crowd round the roulette table. In spite of their masks and light overcoats he easily recognised them as Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell and Reginald Pitt.

"The idiots!" muttered Lee grimly. "I should like to expose this place at once, but the time is not yet ripe. Pitt is responsible for this, of course. He has introduced these other boys."

The detective knew that it would be fatal to move prematurely on account of a few foolish boys. They would not be given much rope in any case—a week or so at the outside. And they should be severely punished for this glaring breach of the school rules.

The boys remained round the roulette-table for perhaps half an hour. They were lucky, as Lee soon saw, for Fullwood and Bell, at least, had increased their original stakes twice over. In consequence, Fullwood and Bell could scarcely conceal their delight. In their opinion roulette was a splendid game.

Nelson Lee had no difficulty in guessing the truth. The wheel was not even spun fairly. The croupier was able to stop it at any point he liked—approximately. And, seeing that these boys were newcomers, he had permitted them to win, by way of encouragement. It was exactly what Lee would have expected.

Pitt had already won two or three pounds, and he was level-headed enough to stop at that. To go on would be to lose it all. Fullwood and Co., catching the fever, were inclined to risk their winnings in the most rash manner. But Pitt drew them aside and nodded towards the clock. After that the four young rascals went over to a lounge and chatted with a beery-looking individual who lolled there, smoking contentedly.

This man was known to Lee; he wore no mask. His name was Josh Smale, and he had a bad name in Bannington, being a petty bookmaker of a very shady type. Even Fullwood and Co. did not care for the idea of associating with him, and they left Pitt alone with him.

The Serpent lit a cigarette, and talked very earnestly to Mr. Smale, who listened with great attention. Finally, Pitt handed over one or two currency notes, and Smale pocketed them with a grin and a nod. It was this man, of course, who had come to St. Frank's on a visit to Study C, owing to Pitt's treachery. As Smale had been thrown out with great violence, it was rather astonishing that he would have anything more to do with Reginald Pitt.

The Serpent's tongue was a smooth one, however, and it did not take him long to appease his companion. Nelson Lee was fairly convinced that Pitt was hatching up some fresh plot. He was not merely giving Smale money for the purpose of backing a horse. It was something of a deeper character.

But what?

When Pitt took his departure with Fullwood and Co. he did so with a jaunty step, and his eyes were gleaming with great satisfaction. Nelson Lee resolved to be very much on the alert. He was already convinced that Reginald Pitt was a boy of an unusual type.

What could be the nature of this new move? Nelson Lee left the Hermitage shortly after the boys. He was not entirely satisfied with the result of his first investigation. But he had certainly discovered a good deal, and would have to be content. Were these men the authors of the clever forgeries?

That was the point which was still doubtful and which Nelson Lee meant to settle at the earliest possible moment. For until he established the fact he could not make any decisive move.

In his own mind he was quite certain that the promoters of the gambling house were the forgers—but it was only a suspicion. And until he could obtain concrete proof it would be useless taking his story to the police.

Accordingly, Nelson Lee meant to adopt other methods.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPOOFING OF SIR MONTIE.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST eyed himself in the glass somewhat concernedly. Yet, actually, there was no reason for concern. He beheld a vision of extreme neatness. His fancy vest was a brand new one and his tie a thing of glory. The spotless collar set with just that perfection which Tregellis-West insisted upon.

"Blessed if I can see anything wrong," remarked Watson. "You're not going to say that tie doesn't suit you——"

"I was not thinkin' about the tie, old boy."

"Well, the collar, then."

"The collar is perfect," said Tregellis-West. "In fact, I haven't worn one which fits so splendidly for weeks—I haven't, really. I shall have to order another dozen——"

"Well, if your tie's all right and your collar is perfect, what the dickens have you got to grumble at?" I asked politely.

Sir Montie continued to regard himself critically.

"I was thinkin' of my face, dear fellows," he explained.

Tommy Watson grinned.

"Oh, well, it's no good grumbling at that," he remarked. "You can't change your face, Montie. Of course, I can understand your natural dislike——"

"Really, Watson, I fail to——"

"Didn't you say you were thinking of your face?" asked Tommy. "Don't, old man—forget it! And the less you look in the glass the better. No need to have shocks twenty or thirty times a day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tregellis-West glared at us.

"I understand now that you have been pullin' my leg—the pair of you!" he exclaimed frigidly. "An' it would be as well, perhaps, to study your own faces before criticisin' mine. You know well enough that I was referrin' to the bruises. My left eye is quite black, an' I am sure that my nose is much larger than it ought to be."

"My dear chap, you've only got to go and look at Pitt and you'll bear your wounds with ease," I said genially. "Pitt's as lively as ever, but his face is a study. You're hardly touched, compared with him."

Tregellis-West nodded.

"There is certainly some comfort in that," he agreed, as we left Study C and strolled out towards the lobby. "I am thinkin' of payin' a visit to the chemist after tea, dear boys."

"What for?"

"To obtain some lotion or somethin', to cause the swellin' to go down," said Sir Montie. "Mrs. Poulter has nothin' that will do. I don't mind the pain in the slightest, but I really must consider my appearance. Begad! I feel quite ashamed to go in to dinner!"

"I'll tell you what to do," said Watson.

"Have you an idea, then?"

"Yes—go without your dinner!"

Sir Montie failed to see the point of the joke. His personal appearance would not deter him from partaking of dinner, Tregellis-West being a healthy, hungry junior.

"We might all stroll down to the village after tea," he suggested, as we stood on the Ancient House steps.

"We might, but we sha'n't," I replied. "You'll have to excuse Tommy and me, old son. We're booked for the playing-fields, and haven't time to potter about after fancy lotions."

"Very well; I shall go alone," said Tregellis-West firmly.

His mission was not likely to be successful. The swelling, which largely existed in his own imagination, would go down of its own accord if he only allowed it to. Lotions were not likely to prove of much assistance. Tregellis-West was about the last fellow in the world to take "something" to alleviate pain. But when it came to a matter of appearance, he'd go to any lengths. He had a perfect horror of disfigurement.

As he was strolling out of the gates after tea, en route for the village, Reginald Pitt passed him. The Serpent was cycling, and he rode leisurely down the lane in the dusk. Before reaching the curve he glanced back and noted that Montie was alone.

Round the curve, Pitt dismounted from his bicycle opposite the stile which led into Bellton Wood, and gave a sharp, low whistle. Almost at once a shabby figure appeared, and Pitt talked with him for about a minute.

"You know your instructions!" he said finally. "As it happens there's no need to wait for a chance. Tregellis-West is coming down the road alone, this very minute. Get busy!"

Pitt jumped on his machine and cycled off. He took the Bannington road and went leisurely. By the time he was nearly at the outskirts of the town the late September evening was growing very dusky. He halted in a secluded spot and unhooked a small handbag from the front of his machine.

His next surprising action was to produce a fancy waistcoat of rather startling hue. He donned this and stowed his ordinary vest in the bag. Then he fished out a pair of pince-nez—with plain glasses—and placed them on his nose.

"I reckon I'll do," he murmured softly.

Pitt was in no way disguised. At close quarters he was Pitt, and nobody else. But in the dusk, and at a distance of ten yards, he could easily be mistaken for Tregellis-West—especially by strangers. Members of the Remove would detect the deception easily. But, as it happened, Pitt was not concerned with members of the Remove. His dodge was designed for one purpose, and one purpose only.

It was necessary for the glasses to be plain, for Pitt's sight was perfect, and with lenses his vision would be blurred; and that would not be suitable for cycling, especially in the dusk.

He rode through Bannington quickly, and finally pulled up in front of a squalid-looking

It was altogether a shocking scene, and there, actually sitting at the table, was Sir Montie Tregellis-West !—(*See page 20.*)

little house in a particularly mean street. One or two tiny shops were near by, and several people saw Pitt arrive—although they were given no opportunity of regarding him closely. Pitt's destination, to be exact, was the residence of Mr. Josh Smale.

Meanwhile, Sir Montie was having a somewhat unusual adventure. There wasn't a keener fellow in the Remove than Tregellis-West, but there was one certain way in which his keenness could be overcome, and that was to appeal to his kindliness. Montie was the owner of a very soft heart, and it was always possible to spoof him, provided his tender susceptibilities were appealed to. In all other respects he was as astute as the best of the other fellows.

He strolled down the lane, with the intention of obtaining some marvellous elixir which would reduce the size of his swollen eye. Personally, I hadn't been able to see much wrong with it, but Montie was very particular.

He never reached the chemist's, and forgot all about his eye. The cause of this was an incident which occurred in the lane. Montie was quite by himself, and as he picked out the most dustless path in the roadway—being very thoughtful for his trousers and boots—he heard the unmistakable sound of sobbing.

Tregellis-West paused, rather startled.

"Begad! Who's doin' that?" he asked, looking round concernedly.

Montie hated to see anybody crying. If he ever came across a fag blubbing he would console him; other juniors politely informed the unfortunate not to be a fatheaded baby. Montie's method was different, and was certainly the better. It was always possible to obtain sympathy from the elegant junior.

He looked round again, failing to discover the author of the heart-rendering sobs. But, walking on a few paces, he located the trouble. Sprawling on a grassy bank, half hidden by bushes, was the shabby figure of a youth. His face was hidden in the crook of his arm, and his shoulders were heaving convulsively as he gave vent to long, heart-rending sobs.

Sir Montie stood in the roadway, irresolute. He was in great distress. He did not like to intrude upon this unknown boy's grief; yet, at the same time, he simply could not walk on and ignore the thing. He wanted to sympathise and to offer words of consolation.

He coughed, but there was no response.

"Begad!" he said, walking nearer. "Is anythin' the matter, dear boy?"

This question seemed rather unnecessary, for there was obviously something very much the matter. But Sir Montie's remark had opened the way for further conversation.

"Go 'way!" muttered the other, looking up sullenly. "I—I don't want you sneerin' at my troubles——"

"Dear boy, I shouldn't dream of doin' such a thing!" exclaimed Montie, taking a seat on the bank. "Why, I've seen you before, haven't I? Ain't you the fellow who came to St. Frank's some weeks ago, pretendin' to be Pitt?"

"Yes—that's me," muttered the boy miserably.

"That was when Pitt first came," went on Tregellis-West reminiscently. "It was those cads from the River House who did it, wasn't it? Wellborne an' his beastly lot? I must be allowed to remark, dear boy, that you behaved in rather a shockin' manner——"

"Why don't you go away?" growled the other. "I knew you'd only sneer at me. Can't I cry now without somebody interferin'? Alf Summers don't want no sympathy from a dood like you."

"That's all right," said Montie soothingly. "A fellow doesn't like to be found cryin', I know. But if you're in trouble, I'd—I'd—— Begad! I hope you won't think I'm pryin', Summers, but what's the trouble? Perhaps I can help you."

"You can't—nobody can't 'elp me," said Summers wretchedly.

"That's ridiculous. Possibly it's money?" suggested Montie. "Rent overdue, or somethin'? Just say the word——"

"No, I don't want no money," muttered Summers. "It ain't that. Thanks all the same for offerin' it. It's awful good of you, sir, but it ain't money."

If Montie had had a suspicion that this was a ruse, Summer's words would have dispelled it. He had refused money, proving, quite plainly, that no trick was intended.

"Then what's the matter?" asked Tregellis-West. "Begad! Don't start cryin' again. Where's your handkerchief?"

"Ain't got one!" muttered Summers.

He looked the very picture of misery, and his face was wet with tears. At least, that is what Montie supposed. He was unfortunately not aware of the fact that Summers's grimy handkerchief was just beyond the hedge in a soaked condition. Montie was also unaware of the fact that Summers's tears were composed of river water. His eyes, having been very thoroughly rubbed, it looked as though much heart-rending weeping had been indulged in.

After a momentary struggle with himself, Montie produced his own handkerchief and passed it over.

"There you are, dear fellow. You can keep it," he said generously. "Now, if you'll just tell me why you're so frightfully worried, I'll see what I can do. Don't think I'm rottin'. I hate to see any fellow in in trouble, you know."

"I s'pose you'll laugh at me," said Summers huskily. "It's because I can't git no proper eddication. It's a rotten school at Bannin'ton, an' I can't learn nothin' there. I want to learn French, but they won't let me."

Sir Montie stared, as well he might.

"You want to learn French?" he repeated wonderingly.

"Yes, sir," muttered Summers. "Oh, an' I want to learn all sorts of other things, too. But I can't, they don't teach them sort o' things. I don't git no opportunity!"

"An' is that why you're miserable?"

"Yes!" said the Bannington boy wretchedly.

"Begad!" said Montie, almost at a loss. "You'll excuse me bein' surprised, Summers, old boy, but it is rather astonishin', you know—it is, really! An' I don't exactly see what I can do. The fees at St. Frank's are rather high, an' I don't think your pater could manage to keep you there."

Summers nodded.

"That ain't no good, Master Tregellis-West—that's your name, ain't it?" he said. "My dad can't afford no fees. He can't 'ardly afford to keep us in grub these times. An' I don't want to come to a big swell school like this 'ere. It wouldn't be right, neither."

"Then what do you suggest, dear fellow? I'm willin' to give you a hand——"

Summers looked eager.

"Will you, reely?" he asked quickly.

"Willin'ly. But I don't see what I can do——"

"Oh, you're a kind-'earted young gent, that's wot you are!" said Summers, gazing at Tregellis-West with gratitude in his eyes. "Could you—could you manage to 'elp me for just a hour every evenin'. You've got books an' things—books I don't never git a chance of seein'. If you could only give me a 'and for a hour every evenin' I'd—I'd do anythink in the world for you!"

"My dear Summers, I shall be only too pleased to extend a helping hand," said Sir Montie generously. "Begad! I should be a frightful rotter if I refused. An' as for doin' anythin' in return, I wouldn't think of it. It's simply rippin' of you to display such toppin' qualities. You deserve every encouragement, begad!"

"You're too good to me, Master Tregellis-West," said Summers huskily. "Oh, an' I'll work as hard as I can. I'll show you that you ain't wastin' your time. I don't know 'ow I can thank you!"

Sir Montie, for all his keenness, had no reason to suspect a trick here. This uneducated boy was anxious to improve himself. If he had appealed for money, Tregellis-West would not have been caught napping; it is what he would have expected. He had, indeed, offered money as a test, and it had been refused. So where was the suspicion to come in? The whole thing was so openly honest.

In the end, Montie agreed to meet Summers at a certain gate on the Bannington Road every evening at seven. He would then coach his pupil for one hour. Just near this spot there was a small barn, and Summers's studies were to be undertaken there.

Montie was asked not to spread the story broadcast through the school, but as soon as he got back he told Tommy Watson and me all about his arrangement. He knew that we shouldn't let the yarn go any further. And, naturally, we grinned hugely.

"You ass!" said Watson bluntly. "You fathead!"

"I fail to see, Watson, why you refer to me in such scathing terms," exclaimed Montie frigidly.

"You've been spoofed, you giddy innocent!" I grinned. "If you turn up at that barn to-morrow evening, you'll be ragged by a crowd of Bannington kids, or something. Take my advice and don't take any more notice of the business."

Tregellis-West gazed at me coldly through his pince-nez.

"I think I am above bein' spoofed, Nipper," he said, with strong disapproval. "An' as for your advice, I must politely decline to accept it. Begad! I think it is rather rotten of you to suggest leavin' Summers in the lurch after makin' a definite promise!"

And Montie sat down to his prep. sternly, as though the matter was finally disposed of.

"All right," I said. "Don't blame me if you come back with your face blacked, or something of that sort. If Summers hasn't been spoofing you, I shall be surprised. That's all I can say!"

I was surprised. For the following evening Montie returned in perfect condition, so to speak, intensely satisfied with the result of his first evening's coaching. Summers had turned up, and had eagerly followed all Montie's instructions.

Watson and I were astonished. And we were still further astonished when the evenings went by and Montie continued his visits to the barn. Summers was an ideal pupil, working his hardest. There was certainly not the slightest reason for Tregellis-West to suspect that all this was part and parcel of a deliberate plot.

And Reginald Pitt during that week continued his visits to Smale's house in Bannington. His scheme of vengeance against Sir Montie was evidently one of a very elaborate nature.

And it was infernally cunning, too.

CHAPTER V.

AN URGENT MESSAGE—AND A SURPRISE.

"LETTER for you, Tregellis-West."

It was Handforth who made that statement. Sir Montie had just lounged down into the lobby, looking neat and tidy, as usual. The morning was fine and sunny, and very warm for September.

"Thanks, dear boy," said Montie, taking the letter from Handforth. "By the way, how are you feelin', Handy?"

Handforth lifted his eyebrows.

"I'm all right," he replied. "Why?"

"That fight——"

"My dear chap, I've forgotten it," said Handforth. "It was over a week ago, anyhow, and I'm as right as rain again. But you needn't think I'm going to let Pitt off," he added darkly. "Pitt won't know himself by the time I've finished!"

"He'll be dead," remarked McClure thoughtfully. "If you're going to do every-

thing to Pitt you've been threatening to do, it's a poor lookout for him. You've already suggested about five hundred methods of slaughtering him, so one of 'em ought to be all right."

"I don't want any sarcasm!" said Handforth darkly. "Who's captain of the Remove?"

"There isn't one, is there?" asked Church blandly.

"Isn't——" Handforth paused for breath. "What do you mean, you fathead? Ain't I the Remove skipper?"

"Well, the chaps say you are, and you claim to be," replied Church. "But ain't it rather a farce, Handy? You weren't cut out to be Form captain, you know——Yaroooh!"

Church sat down very abruptly, Handforth's fist having alighted upon his nose.

"That's for cheeking your Form-skipper!" said Handforth calmly. "I'll show you whether I was cut out to be a captain or not! Don't sit there yelling, you ass! I didn't hurt!"

"Just a gentle tap!" grinned McClure.

"And if you ain't careful you'll get one, too!" roared Handforth.

Tregellis-West backed away somewhat hastily.

"Begad! Is this a distribution?" he asked mildly. "I think I'd better be movin' on, dear fellows. You're a good chap, Handy, but you're so frightfully energetic. You take a chap's breath away, you do, really."

To be on the safe side Montie not only took his breath away, but took himself away, too. He sauntered along to Study C and examined the letter which Handforth had given to him out of the rack. Tregellis-West, in fact, was rather puzzled, and he had nobody to talk to, seeing that Tommy Watson and I had not yet come down.

The letter was rather a novelty to Sir Montie. He was in the habit of receiving letters of the most "swagger" class. This could not be included in that category, for the envelope was of the cheapest kind and the handwriting was bad and smudged.

"Begad! It's from Summers," murmured Montie, recognising the fist of his pupil. "Now, what the dickens can Summers want to write to me for? I'm goin' to see him to-night!"

The best way out of the difficulty was to open the letter and read the contents. He took a paper-knife from the table and slipped it beneath the flap. Then he withdrew the single sheet of notepaper. Montie handled it very gingerly, for he was particular, and this sheet was in a decidedly grubby condition.

There were only a few words, scrawled in pencil, and it was evident that Alf Summers had been in a hurry.

Montie commenced reading, and there was a very thoughtful expression on his face when he had done. He was concerned, too, and not a little worried.

For the note ran as follows:

"24, Paradise Lane,
"Bannington,
"September 23rd.

"Dere Sir Tregeliswest,—i have met with a aksident and I hope you won't mind. i am very sory indeed, but i slipped over an badly twisted my foot. i can't walk more than a yard whih hurts awfu'l. what about meaing me as usual for the leson? i can't come to-morow, so will you please come hear at harf-past sevven. i shall be wateing anxiously. will you please burn this leter as i don't want you to get into trouble for having deelings with the likes of me. your teechers might not like it, or the boys neither. i again say I am sory an i hope you will come. i shall be wateing anxiously at harf-past sevven.—yours truely,

"ALF SUMMERS."

p.s.—i hope you won't mind the trubble.

"I hope Summers is not really hurt," murmured Sir Montie. "Of course I shall go this evenin'. It would be shockin'ly bad form to ignore this—this letter. Poor chap! It's hard lines—it is, really."

Bearing Summers's request in mind, Montie struck a match and set light to the precious epistle. He was very thoughtful, and watched the letter burn absently.

"Begad!" he murmured, with a start. "I ought to have shown Tommy an' Nipper——No, it's better not," he added. "They would only laugh an' make fun. But, really, I shall feel compelled to drop a hint to Summers that his spellin' is frightful, an' that his grammar is too awful for words."

A minute later Tommy Watson and I entered the study. Our tempers were not of the best.

"I'll give Pitt a piece of my mind for this!" Watson was saying, as we entered. "The cheeky ass! It's all your fault, Montie!"

Tregellis-West raised his noble eyebrows.

"What have I been doin', Tommy boy?" he asked mildly.

"Did you tell young Lemon, of the Third, that you wanted us in the old tower?" demanded Watson.

"Of course he didn't," I put in. "Didn't Lemon explain that Pitt had passed it on to him? It was a silly trick."

"I am quite puzzled, dear fellows——"

"You needn't be," I interrupted. "Just as we were leaving the dormitory young Lemon came up and said that you wanted us up in the tower. We went there, and found it empty. When we collared Lemon again he said that Pitt had asked him to speak to us. Now, the question is this: Why the merry dickens did Pitt want to send us off on a fool's errand like that?"

"His idea of humour, I suppose," grunted Watson. "And what's up with you, Montie? Why are you looking like a boiled owl?"

"I wasn't aware, dear fellow, that I was lookin' like that," said Tregellis-West mildly. "As a matter of fact, I've been thinkin'——"

"Oh, that explains it," I grinned.

"I was about to tell you somethin'," said Montie stiffly. "But as you are pleased to be facetious, I shall keep my own counsel."

And Tregellis-West brushed past me and went out. I grinned as the door closed.

"Now we've missed something special," I said lightly. "Well, come on, my son. Let's go and sun ourselves before brekker."

We passed out into the Triangle. Knowing nothing about that letter—at the time—I had no suspicions regarding Pitt's object in delaying Tommy and I upstairs. The object, however, was clear to anybody in the know.

We had been kept up there so that Montie should have a chance to get his letter, read it, and destroy it. This, as I have already described, actually happened. But it had been really our fault that Montie had not told us. It only proves how chance steps in to help evil-doers, for, if I had heard of that letter, I should certainly have scented trickery.

Montie remained rather thoughtful throughout the day, but he did not make any remark to us with regard to his preoccupation. We assumed—correctly enough—that he was thinking about his somewhat incongruous pupil.

And when he went off just before seven, as usual, we believed that he was going to the barn. But Montie rode straight on and arrived at Bannington. He had taken careful note of the address—24, Paradise Lane—and he reflected, as he entered Bannington, that Summers lived in rather a splendid street.

In the centre of the town he dismounted from his machine and made inquiries of a policeman. It was now almost dark, and Montie had got his bicycle lamps alight.

"Paradise Lane?" repeated the constable, looking surprised.

"Yes, can you tell me the way to go, dear old boy?"

The dear old boy could, and did. But he was somewhat at a loss to understand what a swell like Sir Montie could want in the "toughest" district of Bannington.

Tregellis-West's instructions were concise, and he followed certain streets until he found himself in the lower town. His opinions regarding Summers's residence underwent a change.

"Surely there is somethin' wrong?" he murmured, frowning. "How could anybody name one of these frightful roads Paradise Lane? I'm afraid that policeman has been havin' a game—— Begad!"

He had caught sight of the name he was seeking plainly written on the wall of a dingy house, and he turned up the narrow street in a state of wonderment. Poor as Summers was, he had hardly expected him to reside in such a disgraceful - looking thoroughfare as this. Ragged urchins were playing all over the road like so many insects, and Montie could scarcely ride without knocking a few of them down.

But he safely arrived at No. 24. This was situated between two small, squalid-looking shops, the owners of which were standing at their doors, engaged in a necessarily loud conversation, considering that the doors were separated by some little distance.

They paused as Sir Montie dismounted from his machine and wheeled it into the open doorway of No. 24. There was a narrow passage, illuminated by a single gas-jet, which was turned very low. A man came forward as Montie hesitated.

"I say, have I come to the right place?" asked Tregellis-West.

"Who d'yer want?"

"A boy named Summers——"

"That's right," said the man. "The poor kid 'as 'urt 'is foot bad, an' I believe 'e's been expectin' you. Leave your bike there an' foller me."

Montie did not like the aspect of things at all, and he was becoming somewhat uneasy. He mentally decided that Summers was an unholy prevaricator, for this house did not tally in the least with Alf's description of his own home.

However, Tregellis-West could not very well back out now, even if he had wanted to. He had to see the thing through, and he followed the man down the passage, carelessly extracting his handkerchief as he did so. The odour of the place was not exactly delightful. The most predominant features of it appeared to be stale tobacco, beer, and recently fried herrings—and the whole did not combine nicely at all.

A door opened, and Montie's guide stood back, allowing him to walk in. Even as he did so his uneasiness gave place to positive suspicion. There was something decidedly wrong, but it was now too late for him to withdraw.

"Awful good of you to come, sir," grinned Alf Summers.

The boy was standing on the other side of the room, and both his feet were apparently in the best of health. And he was grinning all over his dirty face.

"Really, Summers, you do not appear to be very badly hurt," said Tregellis-West. "However, I have answered your——"

Slam!

Montie turned quickly as he heard the door close. He saw the man who had escorted him standing with his back to the door. And there was now another man present—Josh Smale, the bookmaker. He nodded pleasantly to Sir Montie.

"Glad to see you, young shaver," he said genially. "You've just come in time to join us in a nice little game o' banker. No need to look scared, the stakes 'll be just your weight!"

Tregellis-West's eyes blazed.

"You frightful rotter!" he shouted. "Do you think I shall play any gamblin' game with you? An' what does this mean? Begad! I can see that I've been tricked!"

"Rather late to see that, ain't it?" said Summers jeeringly. "You stuck-up idiot! Must have took me for a fool, stuffin' all that bloomin' rot into me! By gosh! I

reckon I've earned my money over this 'ere job."

Poor Tregellis-West had nothing to say. The realisation that Summers had deliberately spoofed him caused such a fury to rise up that he was incapable of speech.

And, meanwhile, other events were taking place.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNFOLDING OF THE PLOT.

DR. STAFFORD frowned heavily.

"Really, it is most extraordinary," he murmured, pacing up and down his study. "And I must confess I do not like it at all. The very idea is preposterous, and I shall be wise if I ignore it completely."

Even while the words passed through his mind he knew very well that he would not ignore it. The "it" happened to be a letter which had come to hand by the evening post.

The Head glanced at the letter again and reread it. It was short, but to the point. The one feature he intensely disliked was that it was anonymous. And Dr. Stafford had no sympathy with anonymous-letter writers.

This particular specimen, however, was of such a nature that he felt compelled to give it attention.

"To Dr. Stafford, M.A.—I feel that it is my duty to inform you that one of your boys has been frequenting a low hovel, occupied by one, Josh Smale, a man of very questionable habits, during the past week or so. This boy has been gambling and drinking nightly, and I feel that he will go to the bad unless checked at once. For this reason I have ventured to address this letter to you.

"In order that you may obtain positive evidence, I should like you to enter Smale's house, No. 21, Paradise Lane, Bannington, at 7.30 in the evening, or slightly later. You will then catch the young rascal red-handed.

"A RESPECTABLE TOWNSMAN."

Dr. Stafford had read the communication with a certain amount of indignation. He could not believe that a St. Frank's boy could be guilty of such conduct as that suggested, and his first idea was to throw the letter into the waste-paper basket and dismiss it from his mind.

But the faint chance that the "townsman" was right caused the Head to alter his mind. At all events, he decided he would seek the advice of Nelson Lee. The time was even now six o'clock, and there was none to be wasted.

The Head touched his bell, and Tubbs, the page-boy, presently appeared. He was ordered to fetch Nelson Lee at once. After five minutes' absence he returned alone.

"Mr. Lee's out, sir," he announced.

"How annoying!" exclaimed the Head frowning. "Very well, Tubbs, bring Mr. Lee to me as soon as he comes in——"

"Warren says that Mr. Lee will be out all the evenin', sir," put in Tubbs. "Leastways, Mr. Lee went out on 'is bicycle, an' 'inted that 'e wouldn't be back before lockin'-up."

The Head drummed upon the desk with his fingers.

"Then you had better request Mr. Crowell to attend my study, Tubbs," he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir!"

Tubbs departed for a second time, but this mission was more successful, for Mr. Crowell, the Master of the Remove, very shortly put in an appearance.

"Ah, Mr. Crowell, I should like to hear your opinion on this letter," said the Head, getting to the point straight away. "It came by the evening post, and I am somewhat concerned. I feel, however, that it really deserves no serious consideration."

Mr. Crowell seated himself and took the letter. He commenced reading with some display of surprise, but his expression underwent a change. The Head, watching him, noticed it at once.

"Well, Mr. Crowell?"

The Form-master looked up.

"I should hardly think this information is reliable, sir," he replied. "Personally, I abominate anonymous letters. If a man has not the courage to sign his own statements, he can scarcely expect to receive attention. This letter is a positive accusation, and I can hardly believe——"

Mr. Crowell broke off, with a start.

"No, quite impossible!" he said, as though to himself.

"What is impossible, Mr. Crowell?" asked the Head quietly.

"I regret having spoken, sir," said the Form-master quickly. "It just crossed my mind that I had seen Tregellis-West in Bannington the other evening. He was cycling rather quickly, and I do not think he observed me."

"Do you know which direction he was taking?"

"Well, I must confess that he was apparently heading for the lower town," replied Mr. Crowell reluctantly.

"And is Paradise Lane situated in that quarter?"

"I think so, sir," replied the other. "But, really, I must hasten to say that Tregellis-West is entirely above suspicion. Of all my boys, I think he is the least likely to practise such despicable——"

"But you saw him there, Mr. Crowell," interrupted the Head. "I, too, have a very high opinion of Tregellis-West. He is one of Nipper's closest chums, and that, in itself, is a guarantee. But are you quite positive that the boy actually was Tregellis-West?"

Mr. Crowell considered.

"Well, perhaps, I should not like to swear to it," he confessed. "It was nearly dark at the time, and I only drew my conclusions from the fact that the junior was wearing glasses, and, I believe, a fancy vest. Tregellis-West is the only boy who wears both—although, of course, several boys favour light waistcoats, and others wear glasses."

The Head smiled.

"Upon the whole, then, it would be hardly fair to accept it as certain that you saw Tregellis-West himself," he remarked. "This letter states that the boy has been to Smale's house regularly. Is there any way of discovering, Mr. Crowell, whether Tregellis-West has been absent each evening?"

"We could ask Nipper, or Watson," replied Mr. Crowell.

"Then we will do so without delay," said the Head, ringing the bell. "It is positively hateful to make inquiries of this nature, but I really feel compelled to take some action—if only to convince ourselves that Tregellis-West is innocent, as we believe."

Tubbs soon arrived, and he was instructed to fetch Tregellis-West—or, if Montie was unavailable, to bring Tommy Watson or me. As it happened, I was busy on Little Side, and didn't know anything about it. Watson had elected to remain in Study C in order to finish his prep. early. Montie had just started off for his nightly course of instruction with Summers in the barn—as we thought.

Watson was surprised to receive the summons from the Head, and he went with Tubbs in a wondering condition.

"Anything the matter, sir?" he asked when he entered the Head's sacred apartment, and trying to rake up any past sins of his own which had escaped his memory. It was rather significant that his own Form-master should be in consultation with the Head.

"Where is Tregellis-West, Watson?" asked the Head.

"He's just gone out, sir."

"Where to?"

"Oh, over to——" Watson hesitated. "He's gone to meet somebody, sir," he added. "Montie's been playing the giddy ox—I—I mean—he's been going out every evening, sir, doing somebody a good turn."

"My dear lad, you must be more explicit," said the Head, giving Mr. Crowell a sharp glance. "Did I understand you to say that Tregellis-West had been going out every evening?"

"That's right, sir," said Watson, rather bewildered.

"At what time?"

"Why, just about this time, sir."

"And when does he return?"

"Oh, generally at about half-past eight, sir."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head. "This is most remarkable—most distressing. Tell me, Watson, has Tregellis-West been paying visits to Bannington?"

"No—not exactly, sir," replied Watson uncomfortably, wondering what on earth all this could mean. "He's been meeting some chap from Bannington—a poor kid named Summers. He wanted Montie to coach him, and Montie good-naturedly complied. That's all, sir. They've been meeting on the Bannington Road regularly."

"Have you ever been with Tregellis-West on one of these expeditions?" asked Mr. Cromwell sharply.

"No, sir."

"Has Nipper?"

"I don't think so, sir," replied poor Watson. "But—but is anything the matter? Has the ass—— Has Tregellis-West been getting into trouble, sir? He was only doing the chap a good turn," added Watson eagerly. "No harm in that, was there, sir? I can jolly well speak up for Montie ——"

"Quite so, Watson," interrupted the Head gently. "I fully appreciate your concern. For the moment I can say no more. You may go, my boy."

Watson went, more bewildered than ever, and he came tearing out to me on Little Side. He told me what had occurred, and I grinned cheerfully.

"Nothing to get alarmed about, you ass!" I said. "The Head's got wind of it, and doesn't like it. I don't suppose he would, come to think of it. But he can't punish Montie for doing a good turn. I suppose he'll forbid Montie to go any more, that's all."

"But the Head said something about distressing——"

"That's what the Head would say," I grinned. "I daresay he's awfully shocked to think of Montie mixing with a common bounder like Summers. For, after all, Summers isn't exactly an ideal youth."

And we dismissed the matter as of no importance—knowing nothing at the time of the cunning plot of Reginald Pitt's. But the Head and Mr. Crowell were vastly concerned. It seemed to them as though their grave suspicions were more than justified.

"We must really look into this matter more deeply, Mr. Crowell," said the Head gravely. "Watson's statements completely corroborate the remarks contained in this letter; and you must not forget that you saw Tregellis-West in Bannington on one of the very evenings when his own chums supposed him to be elsewhere. We must visit—er—Paradise Lane this very evening, Mr. Crowell. Tregellis-West, as you know, has already left the school."

Mr. Crowell could do nothing but assent. But the bare thought that Tregellis-West was guilty of such conduct was altogether startling. It was really more than Mr. Crowell could credit.

He agreed, however, that it was highly necessary to set all doubts at rest without delay. At present the Form-master was staunch to Sir Montie, believing that some absurd blunder had taken place—and this even in face of the already overwhelming evidence.

The Head ordered his car to be brought round at once, and this was done. The two masters then set out for Bannington in the dusk, and were whirled there rapidly.

They did not speak much during the journey, except to express regret that Nelson

Lee was not with them. However, this was a matter that would brook of no delay.

It was already seven-thirty when Bannington was reached, and the car was taken to the corner of Paradise Street. Here the Head and Mr. Crowell alighted and walked rapidly towards No. 24, many eyes following their progress from numerous doorways. Visitors of this type were few and far between.

A man was lounging in the opening of No. 24, and he gave a perceptible start as the two masters appeared before him—a start which Dr. Stafford at once noticed.

"Does—ahem!—Mr. Smale reside here?" inquired the Head.

"Yes, when 'e ain't up in 'is town 'ouse," replied the man facetiously. "Mr. Smale is residin' in the back room at present, but 'is car will probably take 'im round to the club later on!"

"I want no impertinence!" said the Head coldly. "You will please inform Mr. Smale that I wish to speak to him at once."

"Step in, gentlemen. Mr. Smale will be most pleased to hentertain you," said the man. "If you will take the trouble to foller me, I'll lead you right into 'is parlour!"

The Head and Mr. Crowell followed the fellow down the passage, and waited while he gave three sharp raps upon the door at the end. It was opened at once, and a waft of foul tobacco smoke and spirit fumes came out.

"Good gracious!" gasped the Head. "What—what an appalling—— Ahem! Come, Mr. Crowell, we will enter."

The Head spoke as though they were about to brave the dangers of a burning house, and they both charged within boldly. At a glance they noticed that the apartment was illuminated by two flaring gas-jets, and that the central table was littered with greasy-looking cards, piles of money, and glasses half filled with whiskey. It was altogether a shocking scene.

And there, actually sitting at the table, was Sir Montie Tregellis-West. Mr. Smale was on one side of him and another man on the other, which accounted for Montie being seated in such a compromising position.

"Tregellis-West!" thundered the Head.

But Montie was already on his feet.

"Begad! I'm frightfully glad you've come, sir!" he exclaimed joyfully. "These awful rotters have been keepin' me here. I've tried to get away three or four times, but——"

"'Ow can you?" said Mr. Smale reproachfully. "'Ow can you sit there an' tell them lies? You're found out—red-'anded—so wot's the good of blubbin'? Why can't you own up like a little man, an' done with it? You've skinned me of three quid, any'how—to say nothin' of——"

"Be silent, sir!" rapped out the Head. "Tregellis-West may be guilty of wrongful conduct, but you are a dastardly scoundrel to induce him to come to your house!"

"'E didn't want no inducin'!" shouted Smale violently. "'E come of 'is own accord——"

"Really, I am gettin' shockin'ly bewildered!" protested Montie. "You don't believe these men, sir? It's all a tale—it is, really! They're tryin' to make you think that I've been gamblin'——"

"The least you can say, Tregellis-West, the better," interjected the Head, his voice vibrating with anger. "Come with me at once, and return any money you may have won——"

"But I've won nothin', sir!" protested Tregellis-West frantically. "I wouldn't touch any of these cards for anythin' in the world! Begad! You can't think that I've been gamblin', sir?"

Montie was quite stunned by the very thought. But, after all, Dr. Stafford had every justification for being convinced that the elegant Removite was deeply involved in disgraceful conduct. The evidence, right from the very start, pointed absolutely in that direction.

Tregellis-West realised, too late, that his kindly nature had been imposed upon, and that he had been made the victim of a plot. He knew this the instant he had entered Smale's house, but had not realised the true purport of it until the Head's arrival.

And now, all at once, Montie's brain cleared and a great anger surged up within. Yet he remained calm, and faced round towards Summers with a grim light in his eyes.

"Why have you done this, Summers?" he asked steadily. "I think I have been doin' everythin' I can for you, an' I utterly fail to see any reason why you should uphold Smale's string of lies. Will you kindly inform Mr. Stafford that I have been with you every evenin', teaching you, and that I was tricked into comin' to this house!"

Alf Summers jeered.

"I don't know what you're torkin' about!" he exclaimed roughly. "You've bin 'ere every night—gamblin' an' smokin' an' drinkin', like the rest of us."

"You—you frightful liar!" shouted Montie, blazing with wrath.

"That will do, Tregellis-West!" said the Head.

"But it's all a tale, sir—a shockin' string of lies!" protested Montie huskily. "I only came here because I thought that Summers had hurt his foot. I've never seen the place before to-night——"

"'Oo's tellin' lies now?" sneered Josh Smale.

Sir Montie took his breath in sharply. He suddenly realised that it was his bare word against the evidence of these rascals. Moreover, he had been caught red-handed sitting at the table. What chance had he of proving his innocence?

The plot was so cunningly clever that poor Montie hadn't an atom of chance. He was involved hopelessly, and could not produce the slightest shred of proof in his own

favour. And, although the Head and Mr. Crowell had previously held him in high esteem, they could not ignore this accumulation of evidence.

"Everythin' looks frightfully against me, sir," said Montie quietly. "But I am absolutely innocent, an' I think——"

"I have already told you, Tregellis-West, to say nothing," interrupted Dr. Stafford angrily. "You will leave this foul place with me at once. I only regret that I am unable to prosecute these dastardly rascals who enticed you into such criminal habits."

"Go on—go on!" sneered Mr. Smale. "Blame me, do! Wot about the kid hisself? 'E come 'ere beggin' me to let 'im play cards. I don't expect you to take my word for it. Ask other people. The kid's been comin' 'ere for a week past, an' 'e's the tork of Paradise Lane!"

The Head ignored Smale's remarks. But Mr. Crowell thought it advisable to make a few inquiries. He entered the two shops, one after the other. Their owners were not exactly high-class, but perfectly respectable and honest. And they, in addition to quite a number of interested customers, gave evidence to the effect that Montie had been visiting Smale's house regularly every evening.

The true cunning of Reginald Pitt's amazing scheme was now apparent—but not to the Head or Mr. Crowell. Pitt had not come upon his expeditions until deep dusk had set in, and these people were not to be blamed for thinking that Pitt was Tregellis-West.

Within five minutes Dr. Stafford's car was gliding away from Paradise Lane. Sir Montie sat between the two masters. He said nothing at all. To tell the truth, the unfortunate junior was completely thunderstruck.

The blow had fallen.

And what was to be the result?

Sir Montie, pondering over the position in a somewhat dazed condition, realised that his life at St. Frank's was at an end. For this disaster could only have one ending:

Expulsion!

CHAPTER VII.

EXPELLED FROM ST. FRANK'S.

TOMMY WATSON laid down his pen.

"I should think so, too!" he exclaimed tartly. "Where the dickens have you been all this time? My hat! What's up, Montie? You're looking rather white about the gills!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West had just entered Study C. It was nearly supper-time, and Watson was writing a letter home. I lounged in the easy-chair, reading. But I put my book aside now and looked at Montie curiously.

His urbane, genial expression had completely vanished. His face was pale, and there was a look of absolute misery in his eyes. Something bad had happened.

"What's the matter, old man?" I asked quickly.

Montie sat down and smiled—a very weak smile.

"I'm goin' away," he said huskily. "Don't be upset, dear fellows. I'm the fellow to be upset, begad! I'm going away by the last train this evenin'."

"Is this a joke?" asked Watson gruffly.

"Begad! Don't I wish it was!" said Tregellis-West, with a deep sigh. "No, Tommy boy, it ain't a joke. I'm goin' away——"

"But what the dickens for?" I demanded. "Is your uncle ill, or something of that sort?"

"I can quite believe that my uncle will be ill when I turn up in the morning, an' when he hears all about it," replied Montie. "The fact is, dear old boys, a shockin' catastrophe has happened. An' I'm frightfully upset because the Head thinks the worst of me! It ain't fair—oh, it ain't fair!"

And Montie, although he had done his utmost to bear up bravely, allowed his head to fall on to his arm, and he lay over the table, silently sobbing.

Tommy Watson and I exchanged startled glances. This was about the last thing in the world which I should have expected from our serene chum. The blow must have been terribly heavy.

"I—I say!" I muttered, laying a hand on his shoulder. "Buck up, old man! It's not so serious as you think, perhaps——"

"Dear old Nipper, you're wrong," interrupted Montie, looking up miserably. "I'm sacked—expelled from St. Frank's!"

"Sacked!" roared Tommy Watson, jumping up wildly.

"Expelled!" I gasped.

Tregellis-West nodded.

"An' I've done nothin'!" he said quietly. "Some awful rotter has been plottin' against me. Dear fellows, please don't make a fuss. I don't think I can stand it. If you'll sit tight, I'll tell you all about it."

We did sit tight, and Montie related the whole affair. Tommy Watson became somewhat frantic towards the end, but I remained perfectly calm. And I was grim, too.

"But it's rot—sheer rot!" panted Watson furiously. "The Head must be mad! How the dickens can he suspect you of being mixed up with a beast like Smale? Oh, it's absolutely insane——"

"Shut up, Tommy!" I cut in. "We can't blame the Head. The evidence against Montie is overwhelming, and, on the face of it, he seems to be guilty——"

"You don't think he's guilty, do you?" roared Watson, glaring.

"My dear chap, I'd stand by Montie if the evidence were ten times as strong," I replied quietly.

"Thanks, dear boy—thanks awfully!" murmured Tregellis-West. "It's splendid to know that you haven't turned against me. All the other fellows will, of course——"

"Rats to the other fellows!" I broke in. "We've got to look this thing in the face, Montie. Has the Head positively declared that you must go?"

"Yes."

"Ain't you going to be sacked publicly?" asked Watson.

"No, old fellow. I'm goin' in about half an hour—as soon as my things can be packed," replied Montie. "An' then the Head's goin' to make a speech, tellin' the school that I've been—been sacked!"

Watson sat in his chair dully.

"But—but who did it?" he asked. "Why did Smale——"

"Smale be dashed!" I interjected. "Pitt is responsible for this—it's Pitt's vengeance!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie, with a start.

"Didn't Pitt threaten to get his own back on you for that fight?" I went on. "And just try and think, my sons. Pitt's been out every evening for a week past. Isn't that significant? Why has he been out?"

"Oh, don't ask conundrums!" snapped Watson.

"It isn't a conundrum," I retorted. "Pitt has been going to Bannington every evening. He's been making people think that he was you, Montie. And you can bet your boots that Summers was paid by Pitt to take you away from school every evening."

"But why?"

"My dear chap, so that you couldn't prove an alibi," I replied. "Pitt had to do that. All the rest of his plot wouldn't have been any good without it, because you could have brought plenty of witnesses to prove that you were in other places when you were supposed to be at Bannington. But as matters now stand your only witness is Summers, and he swears that you have been gambling. It's all a plant—and a clever one, too!"

"But what's to be done?" demanded Watson wildly. "What's the good of us jawing here? We'll go to the Head——"

"No good!" I interrupted.

"I'm afraid you're right, old boy," agreed Montie brokenly. "The Head is dead against me—an' I can't blame him. It's no good; I shall have to go. Begad! Ain't it frightfully rotten!"

"And all the chaps will gloat over it!" muttered Watson. "At least, Fullwood and Co. will! I—I feel like—— Oh, I don't know what the dickens to say!"

I jumped up.

"There's only one thing to be done," I said crisply. "I'm going straight to my guv'nor. If he can't prove your innocence, Montie, I shall lose my faith in him. Don't worry old son; it'll all come right!"

Tregellis-West looked at me in alarm.

"Don't go to Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "What's the good, old man? Mr. Lee can't do anythin' after the Head's given me the sack. An' I expect he's as much against me as Dr. Stafford is. Ain't the evidence overwhelming?"

"You wait, my son," I said grimly.

I left the study, and walked rapidly towards Nelson Lee's sanctum. As I neared it the guv'nor's door opened and a gentleman emerged. He was Mr. Ridgeway, the owner of an old house called the Mount, situated near St. Frank's. Mr. Ridgeway was a big friend of Nelson Lee's, and he was a novelist of some repute.

"Hallo, Nipper!" he exclaimed cheerily, as he passed me. "Upon my soul! You are not looking very bright this evening."

"I don't feel very bright, sir," I replied.

And I passed on without any further comment. Nelson Lee was standing in his doorway, and he regarded me thoughtfully as he tapped a cigarette upon his thumb-nail.

"Have you heard the news, guv'nor?" I asked huskily.

"About your friend, Tregellis-West?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have heard that the Head has decided to expel the lad," replied the guv'nor. "Come in and close the door, Nipper. Tregellis-West appears to have been getting into serious trouble——"

I flared up.

"You don't believe it, do you?" I shouted.

"Now, Nipper, please remain calm," interrupted Lee smoothly. "If you will remember, I said that Tregellis-West appears to have been getting into trouble. I think I know Montie well enough to be quite certain of his innocence."

"You—you mean——" I paused breathlessly. "Are you going to speak to the Head, sir?" I added, grabbing his arm.

"I have already done so, Nipper."

"And Montie is to stay?" I asked eagerly.

The guv'nor shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he replied. "The Headmaster is a very clever gentleman, but he is somewhat inclined to be obstinate. I have expressed my firm belief that Montie is innocent, but have been unable to produce any proof. And Dr. Stafford declares that it is his positive duty to expel Tregellis-West without a moment's delay. In one way the Head is quite right."

"Right!" I exclaimed hotly.

"Undoubtedly. Were Tregellis-West to remain at the school he would be jeered at and subjected to the most bitter sneers from other boys. You must remember, Nipper, that there are always plenty of people ready to believe that a person is guilty upon the slightest evidence, and the evidence in this case is astonishingly sound."

"Then—then Montie's going?" I asked huskily.

"Yes, young 'un," replied Nelson Lee. "But you need feel no alarm. I am well aware that the ingenious Master Pitt is mainly responsible—indeed, entirely responsible—for this disaster."

"You—you know?" I gasped.

"You may remember, Nipper, that I possess a pair of eyes," the guv'nor reminded me. "My brain, also, is not quite stagnant, and it is still capable of reasoning. Pitt has been plotting against Montie. We now see the result."

"And do you mean to tell me that you're going to let Montie be driven out of the school?" I demanded hotly. "Are you going to stand by while he's sent home in disgrace, sir? Oh, I can't believe it!"

"As it happens, Nipper, is isn't necessary for you to believe it," said the guv'nor smoothly. "I know—positively know—that Montie is entirely innocent, and I have expressed that opinion to Dr. Stafford. Unfortunately, my words have been idle. But it may interest you to know that I am writing to Tregellis-West's uncle to-night, explaining the whole affair, and asking him to rely upon me. I am promising, in fact, that Montie's innocence shall be established before the end of the month."

"Oh, good!" I exclaimed heartily.

"Further, you may remember that Mr. Ridgeway was with me a short time ago?" went on the guv'nor smilingly. "He has very kindly consented to a proposal I made. Montie will be Mr. Ridgeway's guest for the next week or two——"

I jumped up, excited.

"So Montie's not going away?" I gasped. "Oh, guv'nor! You're a brick. This is simply splendid! Montie will go off his head with delight!"

"But, remember, the thing must be kept secret," warned Nelson Lee. "Tregellis-West's innocence will be proved as soon as my plans are fully developed—and there is no need for you to worry!"

I didn't worry. I was simply dotty with delight. Tommy Watson nearly burst a blood-vessel when he heard the news; and Sir Montie was so grateful that he really had very little to say. His eyes gleamed with joy behind his pince-nez—and he didn't worry.

The fact that Nelson Lee was on his side was quite good enough; and when he left St. Frank's an hour later he didn't travel far.

The Head made his speech, and the school was thunderstruck. It came as a great shock to the fellows to learn that Tregellis-West had been sent off in disgrace—expelled from St. Frank's.

Reginald Pitt and Fullwood and Co. gloated openly. They had achieved another triumph. But they took care to conceal their delight after the first outburst, for the Remove was seething with indignation.

And Edward Oswald Handforth, in the privacy of Study D, darkly hinted to Church and McClure that he, for one, wasn't going to stand it! Handforth, to be exact, had got a stunning idea.

That stunning idea is quite worthy of being fully described in a yarn to itself.

THE END.

GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL!

The Chums of Littleminster School.

A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

The First Chapters.

BASIL HOOD *is a new boy at Littleminster School. On his arrival he makes a friend of*

JOHN CHALLIS, *a Senior in the Fifth Form.*

MYERS *and* COGGIN *are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Challis takes Hood fishing in a punt, and saves his life. A day or two after he runs away from school to obtain money from his father to pay for the damaged punt. Basil and two other fags, named Fawcett and Raymond, offer to do his lines for him. He refuses. Grainger, the Captain of the School, sees Challis practising at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven.*

(Now read on.)

FAWCETT EXPLAINS.

THE boys of Littleminster had enough to think about one way or the other these times, and the thing that staggered them most was the extraordinarily good luck that seemed to attend the doings of John Challis.

They had sent the cad to Coventry, they had openly insulted him, he had got into what had looked like being serious trouble with the Head, he had been forced to fork out fifteen pounds for the damaged punt, he had wilfully and deliberately run away from the school, and yet, in spite of all, there he was, a member of the school still.

Nor did he show any outward sign of contrition or regret, which disgusted the meanest of his enemies. Not that Challis was liked by any of the other boys. It had become a habit to decry and condemn him.

And now had come the last straw. Grainger had asked him to play for the next sixteen against the school eleven, the school eleven being the side that had represented Littleminster in all its big matches last year, and the sixteen being composed of selected individuals from the different houses, mostly boys of the Fifth and Sixth forms.

What was Grainger about? How dare he select a boy who had been confined to the school for a month and had each day to tackle a punishment task?

Ponsonby, Ryder, Myers (chief agitator), Chalfont and Digby, decided to tackle Grainger on the point. This they did, but the school captain held resolutely to his point.

"I intend that Challis shall play," he replied, after having listened to all their arguments. "He has grit. I am beginning to believe that he isn't a bad sort. He's been thrown too much on himself. I believe he will do well. At any rate, he shall have his chance."

"In spite of the way he treated us in the House match?" stormed Chalfont, reddening hotly. "Look here, Grainger, the whole school will be up in arms. You'll lose your popularity as sure as——"

Grainger smiled.

"I'll take the risk," he remarked. "Challis showed great pluck and judgment when he saved young Hood when that punt broke away on the Awle. And you yourselves say that he did remarkably well at the nets. He's out of practice, too."

"It was a fluke," stormed Ryder.

Grainger smilingly shook his head.

"It's no use," said he, "I mean to have my way. I am captain of the school, and I don't intend to resign. If need be, I shall appeal to the Head."

The deputation saw that it was hopeless to try and coerce Grainger, and retired much ruffled and almost rebellious from the room.

"Well, at any rate, Myers," growled Chalfont, "Challis will make an awful show if he does play. He'll turn up in his dirty old rags and be bowled for a duck. We'll have the laugh of Grainger then, and we'll make him sit up afterwards."

Ponsonby, scowling, and inwardly uneasy, left them with a curt nod of the head and strolled back to the cricket ground. There he found several groups of boys discussing the sensation of the afternoon.

The fags were particularly voluble. Ponsonby had witnessed merely the end of Challis's practice. He collared Fawcett, who, with Raymond, was talking to Basil, by the ear.

"How! Wow! Let go!" cried the fag, writhing.

"I heard you jawing about Challis," said Ponsonby darkly. "What about him? Did you see him playing at the nets?"

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

"Yes. Let go! Ow-ow!"

Ponsonby let the boy's ear go.

"Tell me all about it," said he. "Or you'll get the biggest tanning you ever had in your life. Now, fire away."

Fawcett fired. What he had to say was very much to the point.

"Some of the Fifth were batting at the nets and were making us field like billyho," he declared, "when who should come along but old Challis. He had got a dirty old bat with him, though deuce knows where he got it from. No flannels, of course. He was wearing that heavy tweed suit."

"I know. Believe he sleeps in it," growled Ponsonby. "I never knew such a poverty-stricken cad."

"But he got that money to pay for the broken punt though," said Raymond, ducking under a heavy backhander.

"Dry up. Go ahead, young 'un."

"Well, Challis stood looking on like a duffer. He seemed scared to death. Hadn't got the pluck to ask for a turn at the nets. Chalfont, Digby, and the other chaps crowded him out. Then suddenly Digby asked Challis to bowl."

"He refused, of course?"

"No. He hesitated, that's all. Then said he would. And my hat, when he did start, he sent in some ripping balls. He fairly stuck old Digs up, and all of a sudden got his middle stump. After that he beat him almost every time, and Digby couldn't play his bowling, though he swiped like mad."

Ponsonby, reaching out again, got the fag by the ear and cuffed him.

"None of your lies," he growled.

"It's the truth. Oh, you brute!"

Ponsonby, twisting his ear, let him go.

"Finish up," said he. "And if you stuff me up with a lot of rot, I'll make you sorry you ever were born. Mind, I can get at the truth, you know."

Fawcett, grinning ruefully, stood at a safer distance.

"I have told you the truth," said he. "Digby got ratty, said he was out of form, and couldn't play a lot of flukes. He then told Challis he could bat. Challis went to the wicket, and didn't put any pads on. Digby started the bowling. Chalfont and Ryder had a go. They sent the balls flying all round Challis's legs, but they couldn't hit him. Crums, you ought to have seen the way he batted, Ponsonby! He blocked and swiped, hit and drove, until they all looked silly. Then they got us all to come up and have a go at him, but it was no use. I don't know how he did it, but Challis hit the bowling all over the place."

"Bah!" burst out Ponsonby angrily. "Any fool can do that sort of thing when there are nets to stop the ball. If he had been at an open wicket he would have been stumped or caught in a jiffy. I can't see much in it."

"But Grainger did," ventured the fag, darting out of reach. "And he has chosen him for the next sixteen. That's one in the eye for Myers."

Ponsonby made a rush at the junior, but missed him. He tried a second time, a third, but Fawcett was wonderfully active on his feet and didn't mean to be caught.

As he ran he saw Myers stalking along with a savage frown on his ill-tempered face. Ponsonby was right upon him, and so the fag, catching Myers round the middle, swung him right into Ponsonby's way.

Myers met Ponsonby with a crash that nearly floored him.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this?" he snarled as he regained his balance.

"It's that Fawcett kid," explained Ponsonby hastily.

Myers turned and made a dash after Fawcett, but the fag was footing it merrily, and there was obviously no chance of his being overtaken before the school house was reached.

Myers put his hand to his mouth.

"You wait till I catch you," he shouted.

"Don't you wish you could. Yah! Beast!" answered Fawcett, turning to grin back from the shelter of the doorway.

Then he vanished.

THE SPY.

ALL this time Basil had been much concerned over the finding of that silver coin on the bank beside the river.

Dark misgivings were rising in his mind. Innocent, generous boy though he was, he knew, vaguely, that there were evil things in life, and his coming to Littleminster had been a rude awakening.

Having left the shelter of his home, he saw for the first time that boys could be cruel, unjust, revengeful, greedy, and brutal as well as generous and kind. He had always been taught that it was a part of one's duty to think of others; at Littleminster, alas, it was the creed of many of the boys to think only of themselves.

Bullying was a part of the school life. It spread like a disease.

Only fags who had experienced a few terms of it didn't seem to mind.

Later on they would exercise the same power and authority over small and inexperienced fags that was being extended to themselves.

And Grainger laughingly told Basil one day, seeing that the kid was homesick and heartsick, that no boy was ever the worse for it.

"It makes a man of him in the end, young 'un," said he. "For, after all, nothing is worse than conceit. A man has got to learn how to obey orders before he is fit to give them. Stick it, and you'll not be sorry."

After that Basil felt happier about things. But this finding of the coin seriously disturbed his mind.

Above all things at Littleminster, in common with other big schools, sneaking was abhorred. There was no hope for a talo-

(Continued overleaf.)

bearing boy. Quite right, too. The code of honour which puts blabbing beyond the pale at a public school helps to shape the future man.

At nearly all German schools blabbing is encouraged, nay, deemed praiseworthy. Its effect on German mentality in after-life has been all too plainly shown in the Great War. Littleminster had no use for a sneak. And so Basil was puzzled to know what to say or do about that coin.

After the talk between Ponsonby and Fawcett he made his way slowly, and thoughtfully towards Evans's, and, passing up the stairs, was suddenly hailed by the grinning kid before mentioned.

"I've got old Raymond here," said Fawcett, as he poked his nose out of a half-open door. "He is cleaning up that rotter Byfleet's dug-out. Come in!"

Basil hesitated, and then entered. As he passed the door Myers, who was prowling about, hoping that he might happen upon Fawcett alone, so that he could give him a jolly good hiding, caught sight of him. He waited a moment, then crept towards the door and listened, his ear to the seam.

"I say, you chaps," he heard Basil say. "I want to ask you something——"

"If it's for a loan," advised Raymond, "it's no go, old sport. We spent our last bean in the tuck shop yesterday."

"Oh, I don't want to borrow anything," returned Basil, taking him seriously, and looking mild-eyed at them both. "But—it's something else. I say, have you ever seen this before——"

"What is it? Oh, a coin! Crums, it's a stunner, too. Where did you cadge it, Hood?"

Myers's heart was beating heavily now. He seized the door-handle, and taking advantage of the storm of ejaculations, turned it and opened the door a little.

Scowling, he saw that Hood held the coin in the palm of his hand.

The other two were bending to examine it closely.

"I was wondering if you could recognise it," the spy heard Basil Hood say.

"Can't say that I do," remarked Fawcett, but Raymond omitted a whistle of surprise.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "It's like the one that Myers wore on his watch-chain. And I noticed that he hadn't got it the other day. I thought he had taken it off. What's it mean, Basil?"

"Oh, nothing much! I found the coin, and I thought that it might belong to Myers. That's all."

Fawcett seized him by the shoulders. "Look here," he said solemnly. "There's something more behind it than that. What's the trouble, Basil. Better let us into the secret. It's no good having anything on your mind."

The boy shook himself free.

"I want to make quite sure," he said.

Just at that moment Raymond heard the door creak.

"Hallo!" said he. "Somebody's spying on us. Who's there."

Quickly Myers pulled the door to, turned and ran, speeding on his toes, stealthily, quickly, hardly making any sound.

As Raymond reached the door, pulled it open, and glanced after him, he saw a figure vanish round the angle of the wall at the end of the corridor. Uttering a loud view hallo, he started after, Fawcett joining him, and Basil bringing up the rear.

It was no use. When they gained the landing the spy had gone.

CHALLIS'S ADVICE.

BASIL having received confirmation of his suspicion that the coin belonged to Myers, became more troubled than ever over its possession.

What ought he to do about it? Dare he speak to Challis on the matter or confide in Mr. Evans?

After all, suspicion was not proof. If he forced matters, what was there to prevent Myers declaring that the coin did not belong to him?

Grainger had been a witness of their quarrel on the river bank, of course, but the timid boy did not want to drag the captain of Littleminster into the sordid business.

He was very moody and silent while he sat over his lessons with Raymond and Fawcett, and Giles and Robinson, two other boys in the lower Fourth, and before the supper bell rang he slipped up to the dormitory, entered his curtained cubicle, and hid the coin in a corner of a drawer, under the neatly-folded piece of white paper that served as a lining.

It would be all right there, and there it should remain until he had made up his mind exactly what to do.

Feeling more at ease, he left the dormitory, and hurried downstairs. As he passed to the head of the stairs leading below, his heart leapt, and he looked around in the gathering darkness as if he expected to see somebody there. His nerves were all on edge. He felt jumpy, almost afraid. In every shadow he fancied he saw a figure lurking, and did a thing he used to do when quite a little chap at home, fled, fled down to the lighted landing below as if some monster were at his heels.

Once there he felt better, and slowing down, walked panting to the dining-hall.

(To be continued.)

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