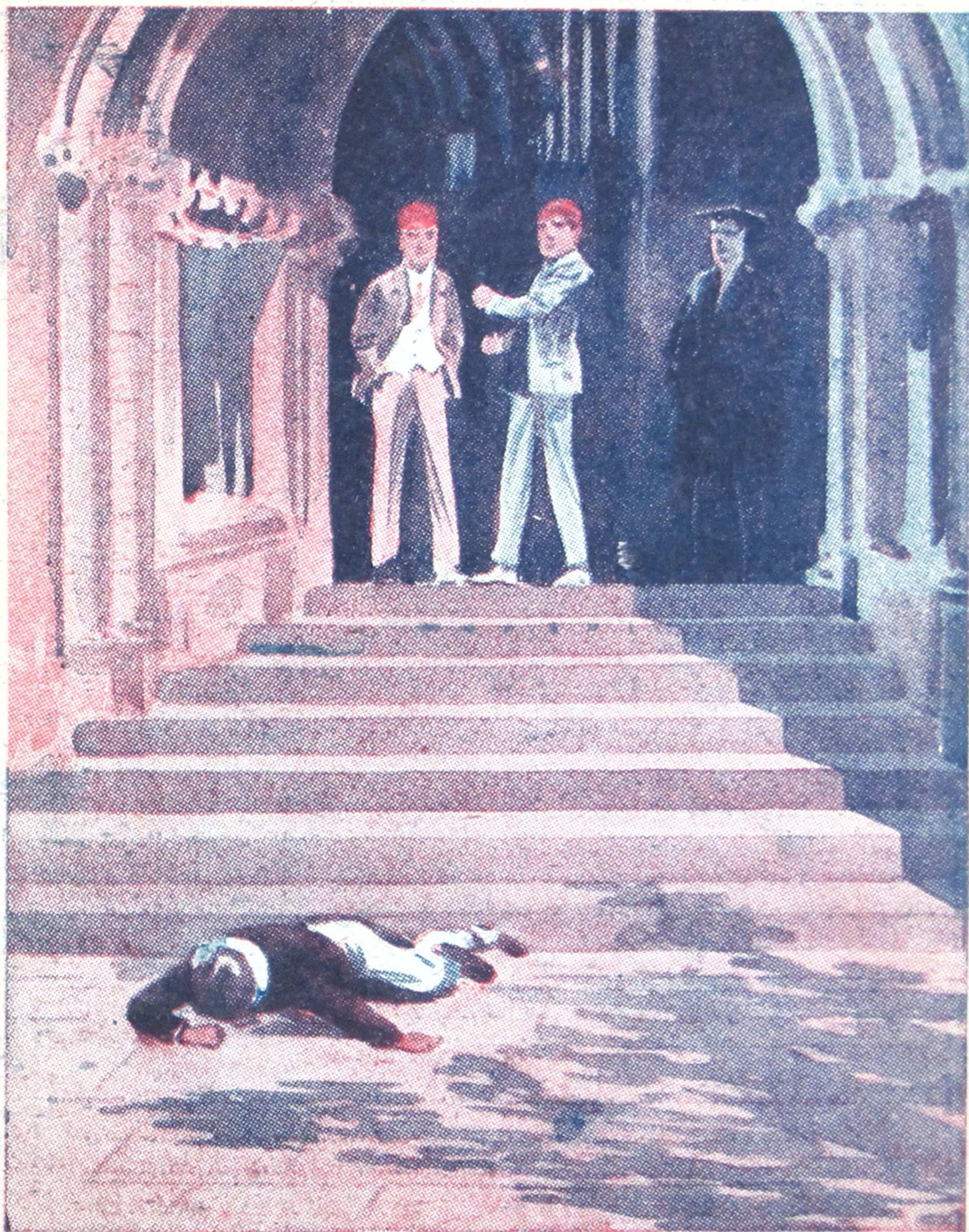


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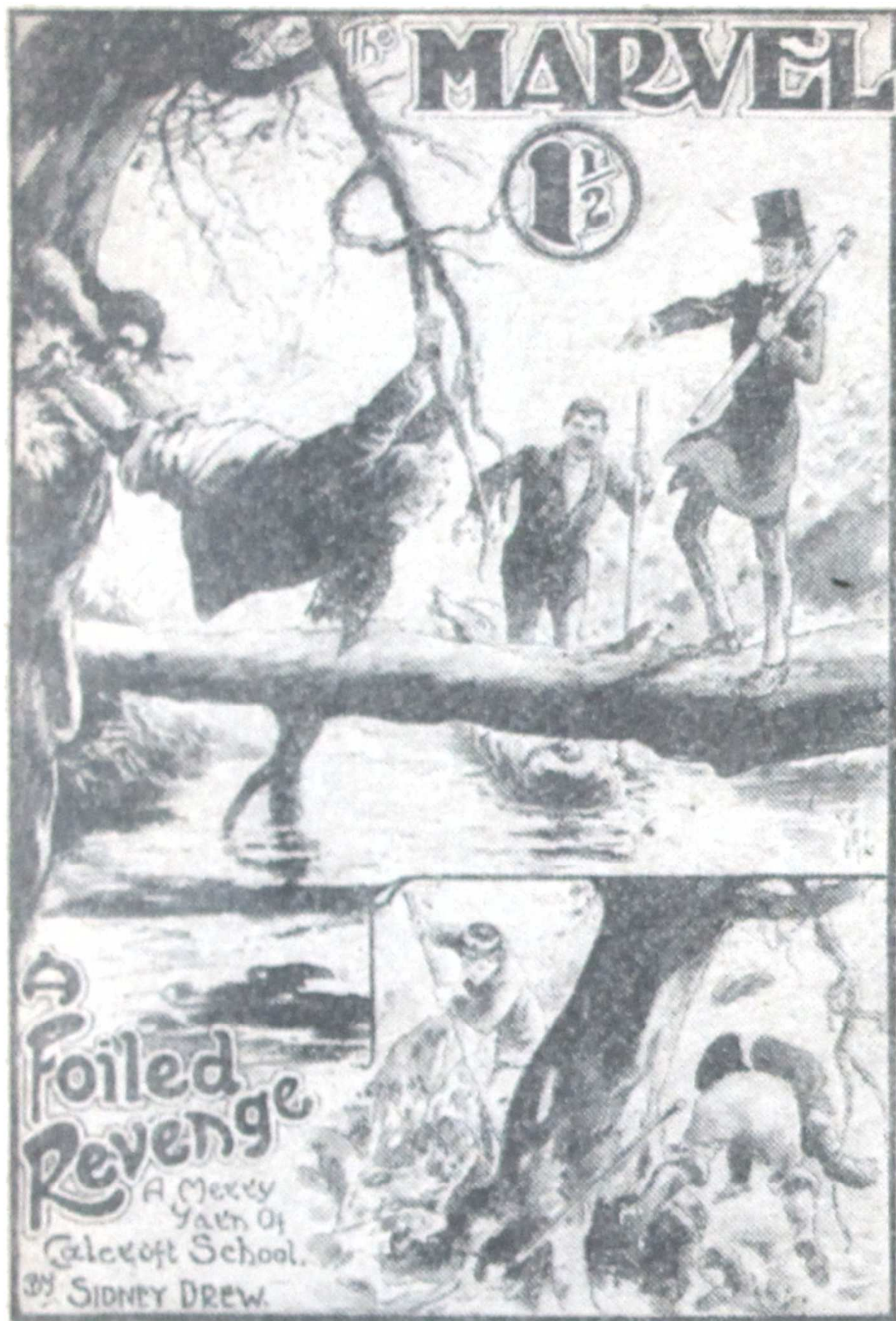


THE REMOVE AGAINST HIM;

Or, THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLD LOCKET!

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 Redemption of the Serpent," "The Boy from Bermondsey," and many other Yarns.

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(THE STORY RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE REMOVE AGAINST HIM.

HANDFORTH shook his head.
"I can't help feeling sorry for the kid," he remarked thoughtfully.
"Dash it all, it ain't his fault that he was dragged up in Bermondsey, and that his pater was a giddy carpenter."

"I don't see that it matters whether his pater was a sweep," remarked McClure.
"There's no snobbery about me, thank goodness, Mason himself is decent enough—and that's all that matters."

Handforth smiled in a superior fashion.

"My dear, innocent chap," he said, "you mustn't judge the rest of the Remove by us. We're different. We're right above the common ruck. We three have got more brains than all the rest of the Remove put together—barring Study C."

"Hear, hear!" said Church and McClure simultaneously.

"Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West, of Study C, are quite sensible," admitted Handforth. "In fact I might almost say that they're as brainy as we are. As for the rest, they're no class. I shouldn't have chosen you two chaps for my chums if you hadn't been sensible."

Quite frequently Church and McClure were of the opinion that they were far from being sensible in having Edward Oswald Handforth for a chum. But they only thought this in moments of exasperation. Handforth, although he was several kinds of an ass, was one of the most decent fellows in the St. Frank's Remove.

"So, of course, while we can see Mason's good points, most of the other fellows simply cut him," went on Handforth. "'Tain't fair, of course, but I expect he'll shake down before the end of term. Just look at him now—as miserable as sin."

Handforth and Co. were seated on the window-ledge of the common-room, and the window was wide open, the day being mild and sunny. Church and McClure looked round, and saw that Jack Mason, of the Re-

move, was strolling beneath the chestnuts in the Triangle, his hands deep in his pockets, his expression grave and troubled.

"Poor chap!" remarked Church. "Let's go and cheer him up."

"Good idea!" said Handforth promptly.
"I don't know that it would be wise, though," he added. "He might not like it—and what could we do, anyhow?"

"Invite him to tea," suggested McClure.
Handforth glared.

"You silly ass!" he snorted. "You've got no brains, McClure!"

"I thought that both Churchy and I were brainy chaps——"

"I didn't think what I was saying when I made that remark," said Handforth calmly.
"Ain't you got a memory, you ass? How much money have you got?"

"Threepence ha'penny!" replied McClure gloomily.

"Church has got sixpence, I've run down to one and twopence, and our cupboard's empty!" said Handforth. "That's a pretty ghastly state of affairs, ain't it? And you talk about inviting people to tea—to cheer 'em up! They'd get a fat lot of cheer in Study D this afternoon!"

"I didn't say 'they'!" retorted McClure.
"You speak as though twenty fellows were coming, and I only meant Mason."

"Well, it's just the same," snorted Handforth. "We shall have to invite ourselves out to tea this afternoon—or else be miserable in the Hall. I don't know what things are coming to nowadays."

Handforth spoke with feeling. As a rule he was blessed with plenty of pocket-money, but an expected remittance had not turned up. It would doubtless do so in the morning, but that wasn't any good for to-day. And Handforth had a horror of borrowing. He would lend money without a thought, and, as often as not, he forgot to ask for it back. But a crisis would need to arise before he would borrow.

And so Jack Mason, instead of being invited to tea in Study D, was allowed to stroll beneath the trees while Handforth and Co.

set about the difficult task of inviting themselves to tea.

McClure safely managed to install himself in Study C, with Watson and Tregellis-West and myself. Church, a blunt youth, marched into Study M, saw that De Valerie and the Duke of Somerton were just about to sit down to a first-class spread, and asked point-blank if there was room for him. There was, and Church stayed.

Handforth, on the other hand, found that a great many juniors were suffering in a like manner to himself. At last he went off to his own study and prepared his own tea—a somewhat frugal meal.

Meanwhile, Jack Mason glanced thoughtfully towards the Ancient House. The new boy in the Remove was not exactly happy.

True enough, he had recently given Fullwood a sound thrashing, and for a day or two the Remove had regarded him with much favour. For Fullwood was a much-detested youth, and a keen fighter, too. Anybody who could thrash him was deserving of praise.

But Mason had come from Bermondsey. His father had been a carpenter. His home was a poor one, and his fees at St. Frank's were being paid out of a legacy. Furthermore, he had attended a low, common, London County Council school. This was the way too many Removites looked at it. So how could such a fellow be accepted?

Of course, the juniors who held that opinion were prigs and snobs. It was rather a pity, but some of the really decent fellows were snobbish where Mason was concerned. They couldn't quite see that Mason had as much right to be there as themselves.

And Jack was sensitive on the point. It worried him. He was sorely-troubled over the attitude which the majority of the fellows adopted towards him. And, in just the same way, he was very grateful for the friendly spirit which I and my chums extended to him. We just treated him as any other decent fellow; he wasn't a pal of ours, but he was true blue, and we liked him.

Handforth, too, was proving that he had no snobbishness in his nature. And fellows like De Valerie and Burton were all of the same opinion as ourselves. But, of course, we only represented a minority. The fact was simple—the Remove was against Mason.

And not only the Remove, but a great many seniors. Fifth-Formers and Sixth-Formers were too dignified to say anything, but they would smile contemptuously when Mason passed them, and to a sensitive boy this was well-nigh unbearable.

Starke and Kenmore, both prefects, were recognised as frightful rotters and bullies. They had a special "down" upon Mason. There was no real reason for this, for he was one of the best-behaved boys in the Remove. But he was an outsider. And Starke and Kenmore, having the power, visited their viciousness upon Mason.

They had been amusing themselves in this manner almost since the day of his

arrival. And another instance was about to occur now. As Mason ascended the steps of the Ancient House, Starke and Kenmore emerged from the lobby.

Jack was deep in thought, and he walked up the steps with his eyes to the ground. Starke grinned, and deliberately bumped into the junior, sending him reeling.

"You cheeky young sweep!" exclaimed Starke harshly. "Why don't you look where you're going?"

Mason came out of his reverie.

"I'm sorry," he said simply. "I was thinking."

"About your slums in Rotherhithe or Billingsgate, I suppose?" asked Starke. "Go down the steps and walk up again. Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Well, get on with it, confound you."

"I don't see why I should," said Mason quietly. "You've no right to make me do that, Starke—"

"Clip his beastly ear," advised Kenmore.

"I'll knock his head off altogether if he doesn't mind!" said Starke. "You'll write me two hundred lines for cheek, Mason."

The bully of the Sixth was doing this for the mere pleasure of being harsh to the new boy. Bullying was one of Starke's favourite pastimes. And here was a splendid opportunity.

Mason was sensible. He was a junior, and Starke had the authority to give him lines. There was no appeal against this form of injustice, unless he sneaked to the Housemaster—and Jack was not that sort of fellow. The best way was to say as little as possible. But, if necessary, Mason was ready to stand up for himself.

He commenced walking up the steps without a word, meaning to enter the House. If Starke had been sensible he would have allowed the junior to go. But the Triangle was quite deserted and the dusk was gathering. Starke needed some more amusement.

"Come here, you little beast!" he exclaimed, grasping Mason's shoulder. "Didn't I tell you to get down the steps again? If you don't obey my orders I'll report you to the Housemaster."

"I don't think you will," replied Mason steadily. "You don't report this kind of affair, Starke. And I'm not going to walk down the steps just to please you."

"We'll see about that!" snarled Starke, losing his temper. "I don't suppose you know much better, after having been dragged up amongst a lot of hooligans. But you can't do as you like as St. Frank's. Get down those steps, or I'll kick you down!"

"You have no right to—"

"Are you going down?"

"No!"

Starke took hold of Mason's shoulders, whirled him round, and sent him spinning down the steps to the gravel below. It was a violent action, and Jack was lucky in only sprawling over and grazing his wrist. The result might have been far more serious.

"Now you can obey my orders!" snapped

Starke. "Come up here and beg my pardon for being cheeky!"

Mason picked himself up, ran up the steps, and faced the prefect with blazing eyes.

"I'm not going to beg your pardon!" he shouted hotly. "I'm going to tell you that you're a cowardly cad and a beastly bully! And if you dare to lay hands on me again, I'll——"

"Chuck him down again!" growled Kenmore savagely.

"By thunder, I will!" panted Starke, grasping Mason fiercely.

This time matters looked really serious, for Starke was in a violent temper. But an interruption occurred.

"Release that boy at once!" exclaimed a sharp voice.

Starke let go Jack as though he had been red-hot. Nelson Lee had emerged from the gloom of the lobby, and Starke stared at him for a moment in alarm. Then he laughed easily.

"I was just correcting this insolent junior, sir," he said.

"So I observed, Starke," said Nelson Lee calmly. "I have found it necessary once or twice to seriously think of depriving you of your prefectship. If anything of this nature ever occurs again I shall certainly do so."

"The kid was cheeking me, sir——" began Starke hotly.

"Silence!" snapped Lee. "I am fully aware of the facts, Starke. Mason refused to obey an order which you have absolutely no right to give, whereupon you deliberately threw him down the steps."

"He—he slipped, sir!" gasped Starke.

"That is a lie, and you shall be punished, Starke," replied the Housemaster curtly. "I positively will not allow bullying in this House. No, don't speak again! I have no wish to hear your grievance against Mason. Go, and report yourself to me at seven o'clock!"

"What for, sir?" roared Starke roughly.

"For behaviour which I cannot ignore," replied Lee. "You acted like a hooligan, Starke, and if you dare shout at me again I shall take you at once to the Headmaster. Kenmore, you will also attend my study at seven o'clock."

Starke caught his breath in with suppressed fury.

"I gave Mason two hundred lines, sir," he said viciously. "Perhaps you will see that he writes them, since you have thought fit to take this matter out of my hands."

"That will do, Starke," said Nelson Lee. "Mason will write no lines whatever. I have observed, to my great regret, that you have treated this boy harshly ever since his arrival. I will not allow that, Starke. In future you will not interfere with Mason in any way——"

"Not if he cheeks me, sir?" demanded Starke warmly. "Am I to have my authority removed?"

"In this instance, yes," rapped out the Housemaster. "The same applies to you,

Kenmore. Any future misdeemeanor of Mason's must be reported to me. I forbid you to deal with it yourselves. Your punishment for this act of hooliganism will follow later. You may go."

Starke and Kenmore, gritting their teeth with rage, walked away. Their little "amusement" had ended badly. Not only were they to receive punishment, but they were denied the pleasure of bullying Mason any further. This story, they had no doubt, would be all over the House within an hour, and they felt like kicking themselves.

"Are you hurt, Mason?" asked Nelson Lee kindly.

"No, sir, not at all," replied the junior.

"And yet a nasty graze upon the wrist is painful, surely?" asked Lee, seizing Jack's arm and examining it. "H'm! You had better go and wash this, my boy, and then bandage it. You may be sure that I shall make Starke suffer for his brutality."

Mason looked uncomfortable.

"I didn't want to cause any unpleasantness, sir——" he began.

"I can quite understand that, lad," said Lee, smiling. "And, indeed, you did no such thing. You need not tell me how this affair started; I am quite capable of drawing my own conclusions. And don't look so gloomy, Mason. I am sure that your life at St. Frank's will be much smoother in the near future."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack gratefully. "I—I don't think I could stay here if it wasn't for you, sir. You're—you're not like other schoolmasters."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Perhaps I have not been one for a sufficient length of time," he said, with twinkling eyes. "There, my lad, get along indoors, and attend to your wrist. And if you're in trouble don't hesitate to come to me. I do not mean that you are to sneak, as you call it——"

"I wouldn't do that, sir," said Mason quietly.

"I am quite sure of it, Mason," smiled Lee, "and I suppose it was rather wrong for me to suggest that you might. But I positively order you to come to me if either Starke or Kenmore persecute you again."

"Yes, sir," said the new boy.

He entered the lobby, and Nelson Lee looked after him with a thoughtful expression upon his keen, strong face.

"He won't do it!" he told himself. "Mason would rather bear persecution than appeal for assistance. And what is that about him which I seem to recognise? I can almost swear that I have seen somebody who bears some similarity to that lad."

Nelson Lee had pondered over that question more than once, and he pondered over it again as he continued on his way to the College House. It was a problem which would not be solved just yet.

But there was a solution, and Nelson Lee meant to find it.

CHAPTER II.

A RUPTURE IN STUDY E.

REGINALD PITT was preparing tea in Study E when Mason entered, after washing his wrist and bandaging it.

"Hallo, I thought you'd got lost!" remarked Pitt. "Where the thunder did you put the tea? I've been searching for it for hours!"

Jack smiled.

"It's in the vase, on the mantelpiece," he replied. "I fitted a cork to it, and it makes a splendid place for the tea—and looks tidy, too."

"What a giddy chap you are for neatness," said Pitt. "I'm blessed if I'd take so much trouble."

This was quite true, for Pitt's study had been very untidy when Mason first entered it. Since then many changes had come about. Mason had made everything tidy and neat. He kept the study scrupulously clean, and everything had a place and everything was in its place. It was perhaps the most tidy study in the Remove passage. And Mason was a most useful fellow, from Pitt's point of view. If the fire wanted lighting, Mason lit it without a grumble. Mason never thought of asking his study-mate to share the work inseparable from junior quarters. And Jack was somewhat surprised to find that Pitt had been getting tea ready.

"What the dickens have you done to your hand?" asked Pitt.

"Oh, nothing," said Mason. "Starke knocked me down the steps, that's all. But Mr. Lee made matters all right."

"Oh, you sneaked?" inquired Pitt, grinning.

"No, I didn't!" replied Mason shortly.

"Keep your hair on!" said Pitt. "You're a touchy beast, Mason. It's rather a bore, having a fellow for a study-mate who's always jumping down your throat."

"I'm sorry," said Jack. "Pass the butter over, please."

Pitt passed it, and nothing more was said for a few minutes. These two juniors were very different from the other denizens of the Remove passage. There had been tiffs on more than one occasion, and the pair were not exactly intimate.

Their characters were widely different. Mason was quiet and unassuming, and, in the words of the juniors, "a swot." He was always studying, always keen on his books.

Pitt, on the other hand, didn't care a jot for lessons, and the less he could do the better he liked it. And Pitt wasn't unassuming, and he wasn't quiet. Until recently he had been the most hated fellow in the Remove.

But the Serpent had redeemed his character by an act of great bravery; and there was no doubt that he had done much to make himself liked and respected in the Ancient House. But he had not cut himself

away from Fullwood and Co., who were the biggest young rascals in the Remove. And Pitt displayed signs of falling back into his old ways.

So it was scarcely surprising that these two study-mates did not exactly "hit it off" together. There was a chance that Pitt would influence Mason; but it was far more likely that the boy from Bermondsey would teach Pitt a few lessons.

Tea finished, Pitt lounged in the arm-chair.

"I want to have a chat with you, Mason," he said easily.

"All right," smiled Jack. "What's it about?"

"Smoking."

"Eh?"

"Smoking," repeated Pitt, producing a silver case, and selecting a cigarette. "Oh, my hat! Don't scowl like that—"

"I wasn't scowling," said Mason quietly. "I'm disgusted—that's all."

The Serpent applied a light to his cigarette and puffed away for a few moments. Then he regarded Mason amusedly through the cloud of blue smoke.

"Won't you have a cig.?" he asked.

"No, thanks," said Jack curtly.

"I had half made up my mind to chuck it all up," said Pitt. "But I'm blessed if I can see any harm in it. Why don't you be a sport and join me? Come on, old chap!"

"I'd rather not be a sport," retorted Jack. "Please, don't talk to me about it, Pitt. We shall only have a row—and I don't want that. I've often told you what I think about smoking."

"Why don't you object to me doing it?"

"It's not my business," said Mason. "We share this study, and I've no right to dictate what you shall do. But when you ask me to smoke it's a different matter."

"I know it is," replied Pitt smoothly. "Now, look here. We're not going to have a bust-up, but there's no reason why we shouldn't have a little argument. You don't know how ripping it is to have a fag now and again. I don't believe in overdoing it, like Fullwood. One cig. every now and again is good enough for me. And, as you share this study with me, I should like to see you joining in—"

"You can talk like that for hours, but it won't make any difference," interrupted Mason. "I'm not going to smoke, Pitt; and you can't make me. You ought to have more sense."

"Thanks!"

"We won't say any more about it—"

"Yes, we will," interjected Pitt, crossing his legs comfortably. "Now that we're fairly on the subject, we might as well thrash it out—a heart-to-heart talk, so to speak. We've never really talked about the matter."

"I don't want to," said Jack grimly.

"But I do—so, if you're a gentleman, you'll give way to me," was Pitt's calm reply. "I believe in smoking, and you don't. Personally, I don't see any harm in

It. Now, I want you to tell me, in plain language, what your objections are. Don't consider my feelings. Just speak bluntly."

Jack Mason's eyes gleamed.

"All right," he replied. "I'll take you at your word, Pitt. I've heard that smoking amongst juniors is quite common in a lot of public schools, but there's not much of it done at St. Frank's. The fellows don't see any harm in it, and they take it as a matter of course. You're one of that sort, and you seem to glory in the whole rotten game."

"Proceed with the lecture," said Pitt calmly.

Mason jumped up.

"I knew you'd say that!" he shouted angrily. "I won't say another word! You goad me to talk, and then accuse me of lecturing you when I do what you ask. I've finished with it."

"I'm sorry," said Pitt quickly. "That was rather rotten of me, and I didn't mean it. I should like to hear your views, Mason—and I won't accuse you of lecturing again."

"Well, I'm not going to say much," exclaimed Jack. "You want to know why I don't approve of smoking, don't you? Well, for one thing, smoking is absolutely against the school rules, and every time you have a cigarette you're taking the risk of getting into trouble."

"That's nothing," said Pitt. "I don't mind a little risk."

"But that's not the point," retorted Mason. "Deliberately breaking a strict rule isn't creditable. And smoking, in any case, is a mug's game."

"Millions of men smoke——"

"We're not talking about men!" broke in Jack quickly. "When a fellow becomes of age he can do what he likes—I shall probably smoke myself later on. But I'm a junior schoolboy now, and so are you. It's not only wrong, but it's absolutely silly, to puff at a cigarette and pretend to be manly. Why, you idiot, a boy with a cigarette in his lips only looks a young fool!"

"You told me to speak plainly, and I'm doing it," went on Mason. "And the most important aspect of the whole thing is the harm it does a fellow. Men can smoke as much as they like—if it does them any harm, that's their look-out, although a healthy man can stand it easily. In fact it might be helpful to him. But it's not helpful to a boy. If you took more interest in outdoor sports, you'd know what I mean. A fellow wants to be absolutely fit to play footer and cricket, and he can't be very fit if he smokes cigarettes. And then, last of all, there's his self-respect. You know jolly well that you don't want to smoke, and you're only doing it out of bravado."

"Am I?"

"Of course you are," said Mason earnestly. "You tell yourself five or six times a day that you're a silly ass, and you make firm resolves to give it all up. And then, instead of being strong, you

weakly give in and get worse and worse. But I'm sick of it. I don't want to tell you what you should do—you've got plenty of sense, and you ought to use it. For goodness' sake, dry up!"

Pitt sat in his chair, smiling. But it was a rather forced smile, and he knew very well that Mason's shots had gone home. He had argued with himself—he had decided to chuck it up—and he had given in weakly time after time. Mason was right—absolutely right—and it was for this very reason that Pitt became obstinate. He didn't like to realise that he had been "told off." Having asked for it, however, he couldn't say a word.

"All very interesting," he yawned. "But I don't see your point, Mason. You're dotty on the subject. Have one of these and forget those fatheaded ideas."

Pitt offered his cigarette-case, but Jack, in a sudden burst of anger, struck up his fist and sent the case flying.

"You've been jeering at me!" he shouted hotly. "If you don't shut up, Pitt, I'll punch your nose!"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Pitt, recovering his cigarettes. "Look what you've done to this—look at these dents. I've a jolly good mind to knock you down!"

"You're at liberty to try!" snapped Mason grimly.

They stood facing one another, and Pitt wisely decided not to try conclusions with the athletic new fellow. He shrugged his shoulders and walked to the door.

"You can go and eat coke!" he sneered. "I knew you were an ass, but I didn't think you were such a wishy-washy milk-sop!"

It was really fortunate for Pitt that he walked out after those words. For Mason, in his present exasperated mood, would certainly have gone for him, hammer and tongs.

Exactly as the new boy had predicted, a rupture had occurred, and he was sorry for it. If he and Pitt were obliged to share the same study, it was far better for them to be on speaking terms.

The Serpent was in a savage mood as he strode along the passage. He assured himself that he was angry with Mason, and that Mason was an arrant ass. As a matter of fact, Pitt was furious with himself, and he knew that the arrant ass was not his study-mate.

Of course, Mason was right,



Pitt admitted in spite of himself. But to admit that this street urchin—as he chose to term him—was showing him the right path was altogether too humiliating.

Pitt felt like going the whole hog. There was no harm in smoking, and so what harm was there in gambling? The old spirit was being revived. But it was under very different conditions now. Previously he had never realised the absurdity of it—the silliness of it. But he realised it now, and persisted, all the same. Perhaps it would do Pitt a great amount of good to get right back into his old habits. For it would make him disgusted with himself—and that was the finest thing that could happen.

But Pitt didn't tell himself all that. He felt in a mood to do something which would prove that he ignored Mason's advice. All this would only be on the surface, for in his heart Pitt was beginning to have doubts as to whether the game was worth the candle.

He marched into Study A, and found Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell just clearing up after tea.

"Hallo, what do you want?" demanded Fullwood. "We're just going to have a smoke, Pitt, an' we might even indulge in a little gamblin'. So you'd better clear out!"

"I'd like to join you," said Pitt savagely. Fullwood stared.

"You don't look like it," he remarked. "You look as if you'd like to join in a free fight. Who's been rubbin' you the wrong way?"

"That beast of a new kid, I expect," said Gulliver.

"I'm fed-up with him!" snapped Pitt. "I tried to get him to smoke, but he wouldn't do anything so horribly wicked. I should like to join in your game—just to get me into a good humour."

"You're quite welcome," said Fullwood heartily. "Glad to see you're gettin' sense again. Out with the cards, Gully. Just turn the key in the lock, Pitt—we don't want anybody interferin'."

Chairs were drawn to the table, cards were produced, and the four young rascals settled down with keen enjoyment to a game of nap. In a very few minutes the air was heavy with cigarette-smoke.

Fullwood and Co. and their visitor kidded themselves that they were gaining much pleasure from their questionable pastime. Pitt smiled genially, and scoffed at himself for ever having taken any notice of such an ass as Jack Mason.

In the fender a big screw of brown paper was kept handy. In the event of a master or a prefect coming, this would be quickly lighted and waved to and fro, filling the room with pungent smoke. It was a little precaution which had often saved the young rascals from punishment.

"Ripping game, this," remarked Pitt, after a while.

"Beastly, I call it," growled Gulliver.

"Two different points of view, that's all,"

chuckled Fullwood. "You've lost seven bob, Gully, an' Pitt's about nine bob in hand. We'll skin that out of him before we've finished."

"If I don't skin you," remarked Pitt presently.

Already his scruples were beginning to fade away. After all, why shouldn't he have some wild enjoyment? What was there in it? Nothing—absolutely nothing. And Pitt went on playing with an easy mind, forgetting all the good advice which Mason had indirectly given him.

At the end of an hour Reginald Pitt was chuckling with real delight. It was rather unfortunate that he should have won the sum of nineteen shillings from his companions, for he felt convinced that gambling was splendid sport. If he had "gone down," he would have been far more likely to think seriously of Mason's words. But the day would come when he would "go down" with a mighty crash.

"Lucky beast!" remarked Fullwood. "Good thing there's not much of my tin there. I'm only about three bob out. Who's the giddy unfortunate?"

"I am!" grunted Gulliver savagely.

"You should learn a lesson by it and give up gambling," grinned Fullwood. "It's a mug's game you know. You'll say that until you do us down for a quid or two next time."

They decided to finish up just after the hour; for preparation had to be done, and there was no getting out of it. So the cards were put away and Pitt took his departure.

He promised to drop in again, and went back to his own study feeling in quite a genial mood. When he arrived he found the little apartment deserted. Mason had finished his own prep. and had gone off to the school library, to spend an hour amongst his beloved books.

Meanwhile, Fullwood and Co. were grinning.

"I thought he'd come back to the fold, sooner or later," remarked Ralph Leslie. "All the better, my sons. He'll probably kick that pauper kid out of his study before long. If he doesn't, we'll give him some good advice."

"He won't need it," said Gulliver. "I'll bet he's fed-up with Mason already. You mark my words, they'll have a regular bust-up before long."

And Gulliver was not very far wrong.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLD LOCKET.

RELATIONS were decidedly strained in Study E the next day. Pitt had anticipated that Mason would be sniky and morose; that he would refuse to speak.

But Pitt was wrong. The new fellow was just quiet and reserved. He answered

readily enough when Pitt addressed him, and there was no renewal of the rupture.

Of course, a good many other fellows saw that Pitt and Mason were rather cold towards one another. I noticed it at once, and so did Tregellis-West. The latter was rather gloomy.

"I'm frightfully afraid that things ain't goin' well with Mason, old fellows," he remarked, after morning lessons. "Pitt's breakin' out again, but I'm not worryin' much."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, dear old boy, there's really nothin' to worry about," replied Sir Montie. "The very fact that Pitt an' Mason are at loggerheads proves that Pitt's influence ain't doin' the new fellow any harm. An' it's just possible that great changes will come about before long. I have hopes, you know—I have really."

"So have I," I remarked. "I've hopes that Mason will show up well on the footer field. It's only right that he should be given a fair chance. I'm going to try him this afternoon in the practice match."

Tommy Watson shook his head.

"There'll be trouble," he said grimly.

"Shockin' trouble," added Montie.

"Why should there be?"

"Begad! I'm no good at conundrums, Nipper, dear boy," said Tregellis-West protestingly. "There's no reason why there should be trouble; but there will be. I am very disappointed with the way some of the fellows are actin'. They ain't sports—they ain't, really. Mason has as much right to play footer as I have, an' it's a frightful pity the chaps don't see it."

"They'll see it this afternoon," I said firmly. "I'm Remove skipper—and I'm going to play who I like. If they choose to kick up a row, they'll have to find somebody else to captain the team. I'm either going to be a skipper with authority, or no skipper at all!"

And the matter was left at that.

I had said nothing to Mason so far, except that I intended giving him a chance. As a matter of fact, I had said nothing to anybody except my chums. The bitter feeling against Mason—the unreasonable feeling—had led me to be cautious. It would be better to spring the thing as a surprise.

After dinner Mason and Pitt went to their study. Jack knew that a practice match was to take place that afternoon, and he intended being a greatly interested spectator.

Pitt had plans of his own. He had arranged with Fullwood and Co. to cycle over to Bannington. There was a nice, quiet little inn, where it was possible to have a really good game of billiards.

"You're looking cheerful this afternoon," remarked Pitt, as he prepared to leave.

"Anything on?"

"Yes, the practice match."

"Oh, rats to that!" said Pitt. "I've got something far more interesting in view. But

I sha'n't tell you anything about it, because you'll only sneer at me."

"That's not fair," said Mason. "I've never sneered at you, Pitt. If you like to be silly, that's no concern of mine."

"I'm going to Bannington," said Pitt. "Is there anything I can do for you? I don't mind any old thing, you know."

"No, thanks."

"I'd even go to the length of pawning something if you wanted me to," said Pitt coolly. "You're used to pawning things, ain't you? That gold locket thing of yours, for example. I could get ten bob on that if you want—"

"I know you're only joking, Pitt, so I sha'n't get wild," said the new boy. "I don't see why I should say anything; but it might interest you to know that I've never been in a pawnshop—not that there's anything disgraceful in it. Pawnshops are very handy for some people, and it's ridiculous to refer to them with contempt."

"Oh, all right, you can have your opinion," said Pitt. "By the way, why don't you sell that locket? It's no good to you, and you could realise some useful cash—"

"I've had it all my life," interrupted Jack. "It belonged to my mother, I believe, and I wouldn't part with it for any sum. I can't quite make you out, Pitt."

"Can't you? What's wrong?"

"Well, why are you so interested in that locket?"

Pitt laughed.

"Your imagination," he replied. "I don't care tuppence for it. But I've seen it so many times that I'm naturally curious. What are those queer signs on it?"

"They're Arabic, I think," replied Jack. "At least, that's what my uncle used to tell me. I believe they represent half a message of some sort."

"And where's the other half?"

"Why, on the other part of the locket, of course," replied Mason. "This piece I've got is only half of it. I've never seen the other, and I don't suppose I ever shall. It must have been lost years and years ago."

"And you don't know where it is?"

"Of course I don't."

Pitt could have explained that the very article in question was reposing in the table-drawer at that very moment. But Jack was in complete ignorance of this fact.

Pitt had got to know it in a most dishonest way.

Only a few days before a Mr. David Strong had visited St. Frank's. This gentleman had come to see Jack Mason; he was a great friend, Jack having saved his life. Mr. Strong was paying Jack's fees, for he took much interest in the boy. But Jack was in ignorance of the truth; he believed that his fees were being paid out of a legacy. It was just a little trick of Mr. Strong's.

With regard to the affair of the locket, Mr. Strong had left a small sealed packet behind by accident. Pitt being left alone in the study, opened the packet, and discovered

that it merely contained the half of a gold locket. It was the fellow to Mason's half. Naturally, Pitt could say nothing, for he was not supposed to know anything.

How was it that Mason had one half and Mr. Strong the other? They were each unaware of the fact—Pitt was certain of that. Jack had possessed his half since a baby, and he had not met Mr. Strong until fairly recently. There was something rather mysterious about it all, and Pitt was curious.

"It's rather queer that you should keep that scratched old thing," remarked Pitt. "I suppose you're always hoping that the other half will turn up?"

"I never think about it," replied Mason. "Why should I?"

"Don't those Arabic signs mean anything?"

"They might; but it doesn't matter to me what they mean," said Jack. "I was going to show the locket to Mr. Strong, but I forgot all about it."

Pitt was glad of the opening.

"Talking about Mr. Strong," he said, "what are you going to do about that little package of his?"

"I'm keeping it until he comes next time, of course."

"Look here, Mr. Strong said that that package was for you," said Pitt. "Why don't you act sensibly?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's your package——"

"No, it isn't," replied Jack warmly. "I mean to keep it safely until Mr. Strong comes next time. What would he think of me if I interfered with it?"

Pitt grinned.

"My dear chap, there's no need for you to let him know that you've interfered with it," he said. "You're a surprisingly innocent chap, Mason. All you've got to do is to open it carefully, squint at the contents, and then do it up again."

"You cad!" exclaimed Mason, with blazing eyes. "If you are capable of that sort of thing, Pitt, I'm not! It would be an act of absolute dishonesty."

"Rot!" sneered Pitt. "Do as you like, of course—it's not my affair. But I know what I should do——"

"Look here, we've talked about this enough, haven't we?" asked Jack quietly. "I'm not quite an idiot, Pitt, and——"

"Really?" smiled Pitt jeeringly.

"No, I'm not!" snapped the other junior. "And I'm blessed if I can see why you're so interested in my affairs. It's not an ordinary interest—you're simply inquisitive. I don't like to talk in this way, Pitt, but you force me to. Will you please drop the subject?"

Pitt shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you please," he replied. "But I'll take jolly good care never to interest myself in any of your business again. I only wanted to be pally, and you turn round and insult me."

"I didn't mean to," said Mason quietly. "I've been trying for days past to get on

with you, Pitt. But I can't. You evidently don't mean to be friendly——"

"That's sheer nonsense!" interrupted Pitt. "Haven't I asked you to join me in a smoke, and haven't you refused? But I'm willing to let bygones be bygones. Come out with me this afternoon and we'll have a good time."

"What do you call a good time?" asked Mason suspiciously.

"Well, we can play billiards at a little pub——"

"There's nothing wrong with billiards, but I wouldn't play in a public-house," interrupted Jack curtly. "It's against the rules——"

"There you go again!" sneered Pitt. "Against the rules! You're always saying that—like a giddy parrot. What does it matter a hang if it is against the rules? Do you think I care a jot about all that rot? I'm going to enjoy myself with Fullwood and Co. I shall probably win a quid or two this afternoon; and if you come with me you can get some pocket-money for yourself with ease."

Mason shook his head.

"I don't want pocket-money of that sort. Are you going, Pitt?" he asked quietly. "These talks only lead to quarrels! So we'd better finish up. I wish to goodness you wouldn't be such a cad! You don't seem to realise the difference between right and wrong!"

Reginald Pitt laughed.

"Do you?" he asked tauntingly. "You pretend to be so very good, don't you? I wouldn't mind betting a quid that you've already opened that packet of Strong's——"

"You confounded rotter!" shouted Mason angrily.

"Do you deny it?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Then I don't believe you!" said Pitt calmly. "In other words, Mason, you're a first-class liar!"

Crash!

Jack's fist swung round fiercely, and Pitt went flying over the table in a heap. When he came to his feet he found Mason standing over him, his eyes blazing, his fists clenched.

"Call me a liar again!" he exclaimed tensely.

Pitt's glare was a bitter one. He had only called Mason a liar in the heat of the moment, because he wished to see the new fellow squirm. There was no foundation for his accusation—he knew that well enough. Indeed, Pitt was quite sure that Jack had been speaking the truth. But in his present ill-temper he allowed his tongue free play.

"I do call you a liar again!" he shouted, leaping up and punching fiercely at Mason. The blow caught the new boy upon the chest, and he staggered back. The next moment the pair were fighting fiercely.

They went at it hammer-and-tongs, but Mason was easily the better of the two. But

Pitt's fury was at its height, and all his old venom returned.

He snatched up an inkpot madly and flung it at his opponent. Very fortunately Mason dodged, but not before great streaks of ink had smothered his face and collar. The glass pot clattered and splintered into the fireplace.

"Oh, you cad!" panted Jack.

Pitt sent the table flying, leaving the centre of the study clear. And then they came to grips once more and fought desperately. The noise they created was considerable, and the dust rose in clouds.

Pitt was certainly receiving the most punishment, and even in the heat of that moment he knew that he deserved it. It had been his fault from the start; he was in the wrong—of course he was in the wrong. And the very thought maddened him.

Handforth and Co., who resided next door, were in the middle of one of their heated arguments at the time—and, needless to say, no sound of the fight came to their ears until Handforth ceased speaking. His voice was capable of drowning a thunderstorm.

But in a lull, so to speak, McClure suddenly started.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Do you think you're going to diddle me like that?" roared Handforth. "That's always your way when you're getting the worst of an argument! I tell you that the football is all mismanaged. I'm the only chap who knows anything about—"

"Listen!" exclaimed Church suddenly.

"I'm not going to! Oh, my hat!"

Handforth paused, and stared at the wall.

"There's trouble going on next door," he said. "Sounds as though half a dozen free fights were—"

"Let's go and see what's wrong," suggested McClure.

They all made for the door, and out in the passage they ran into Tregellis-West and me. As a matter of fact we were just about to pay a visit to Study E, and the noise which was proceeding from that quarter proved that something was wrong.

"Only shiftin' the furniture, I suppose," said Sir Montie.

"Then they're pretty original in their methods of doing it," said Handforth grimly. "Great pip! There goes the coal-scuttle! We'd better look in."

I was already opening the door. One glance told me that Jack Mason and Reginald Pitt were not on amiable terms. They were punching at one another furiously, and the study was half a wreck.

"Stop it, you asses!" I shouted sharply.

The fighters took no notice.

"Lend me a hand," I said grimly. "We can't allow this sort of thing to go on. Separate 'em!"

Handforth and Church grasped Pitt, and Sir Montie and I gave our attention to Mason. The two heated juniors were dragged apart with great difficulty.

"Lemme go!" yelled Pitt. "I'm going to smash him!"

"No, you're not!" I said grimly. "What's the matter? If you want a fight, why can't you have it decently? These scraps will get you into trouble."

"We were both silly," said Mason, panting.

"Glad you know it," I remarked. "What's the trouble, anyhow? It's rotten for two study chums to fight like you were fighting—"

Pitt nodded.

"Quite right," he said, becoming calm. "Silly rot, ain't it? And I was getting the worst of it, too. Jolly good thing you chaps came. If not, I should have been beaten to the wide!"

"Extraordinary!" said Handforth. "He actually admits that he was getting whacked!"

"Why not?" asked the Serpent, wiping his face. "Mason's a better man than I am, and I should be an idiot to say anything else. Look at my face, and look at his! He's hardly touched."

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Pitt," exclaimed Mason quietly. "I don't know why I whacked you in the face; but you drove me to it. I'm sorry. Suppose we shake hands and forget it?"

"Pitt'll forget it in about a week!" grinned Handforth.

But the Serpent surprised us.

"I don't bear any malice, Mason," he said quietly. "After all, I drove you to it, didn't I? There's my fist!"

They both shook hands, and Pitt strolled out of the study. He was evidently in pain, but didn't seem to care a rap. And the very fact that he had taken Mason's hand made me delighted. It proved that his character was changing. At one time Pitt would have been bitterly antagonistic for days. Moreover, it was rather staggering that Pitt should have admitted that his was the blame.

"I'm awfully sorry that happened," said Mason, looking round.

"Yes, there's about two hours' work clearing up this mess," remarked Handforth. "What started it?"

"Oh, nothing much," replied Mason.

"Don't be inquisitive, Handy," I put in. "It's none of our business. I'm glad it's all over, Jack."

Mason looked at me sharply.

"Thanks!" he said quietly.

"What the dickens for?"

"For calling me Jack," said the new boy. "It's the first time I've been called that since I've been at St. Frank's—and you're not even a chum of mine."

I laughed.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't be a chum of yours," I replied. "And Jack's your name, isn't it? I came here to fetch you, and I want to have a little chat. Come along to Study C."

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth.

"You'll find out if you live long enough," I replied sweetly.

Handforth snorted and walked away. And Sir Montie and I carried Jack Mason off to the privacy of Study C.

CHAPTER IV.

TROUBLE IN THE ELEVEN.

TOMMY WATSON was busily pumping up a football when we entered, and I noted that Mason's eyes gleamed with pleasure as he saw it. Watson paused in his efforts, and stared.

"Who's been ornamenting your face, Mason?" he asked politely.

"Oh, that's nothing," I put in. "Mason only had a bit of a tiff with Pitt. It's all over now."

"Rather a forcible tiff, I should think."

"Dear fellow, you would have reason to say that if you could see Pitt's face," remarked Sir Montie languidly. "It's in a shockin' condition. I shall take good care to keep on good terms with Mason, begad! He'd simply eat me up, you know!"

Mason grinned awkwardly.

"I don't like you fellows to think that I'm a quarrelsome chap," he said. "Pitt said that it was his fault, but I don't think it was. I punched him first——"

"My dear man, we don't want to hear anything about it," I interrupted. "For one thing, we haven't got time. There's a practice match on this afternoon, and all the reserves will be playing. The Ancient House Eleven will be divided up, and each side will be made up to strength by reserves. I'm going to captain one side, and De Valerie will captain the other."

"That's splendid," said Mason. "I'll be a keen spectator."

"Wouldn't you like to play?" I asked.

"Play?" repeated Mason, catching in his breath.

"Certainly."

"You—you don't mean that you're going to give me a chance in this match?" he asked eagerly.

"Just to see what you're worth," I nodded. "The other day you shaped pretty decently at the nets, but a fellow isn't really tested until he has a chance in a match. You'll play outside left."

Mason's eyes were alight with excitement.

"Thanks awfully!" he exclaimed. "I—I say, it's jolly good of you, Nipper. In the forward line, too!"

"It's only a practice match, remember," I reminded him. "It doesn't matter which side wins, and I'm only having it to give some of the reserves a chance. If you turn out O K, Jack, you might be included in a House team before long. It all depends upon how you shape—and I think your place in the field is in the forward line. Buzz upstairs and change."

Mason looked uncomfortable.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Well, I haven't got any footer togs," he

admitted. "I had some at home, of course, but——"

"Oh, that's all right," I interrupted. "We can rake up some for you. Come along upstairs and we'll see about it."

Twenty minutes later we were all in footer rig, and Mason looked well in that scanty attire. He was well built, and his athletic figure showed itself off to advantage.

He was greatly excited, although he strove to conceal it. And the pleasure with which he looked forward to the match was very manifest. But the very thing which I had feared looked like taking place. I had said nothing to the other fellows about Mason's inclusion in the team. But now, of course, they would have to know.

Quite a crowd was collected round the pavilion, and other fellows were punting a football about in the field. All those near the pavilion stared when we came up.

"Hallo!" said Hubbard. "What's Mason doing here?"

"Going to watch the match, I suppose," said Owen major. "Rather a silly thing to get into that rig, though. He'll catch cold standing about."

"Don't be silly!" I exclaimed. "Mason's playing."

"What!" exclaimed Armstrong. "Here, I say, we're not going to play with that Bermondsey outsider!"

"Rather not!"

"Tain't likely!"

Mason flushed deeply.

"I—I didn't know that the Eleven would object to me——" he began.

"Look here, Jack, you stand still and say nothing," I said grimly. "Don't take any notice of these cads. I'm skipper of the Ancient House Junior Eleven, and I'm going to have my own way."

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

"Yes, I am!" I retorted. "Why can't you be decent? Has Mason done anything to you that you should be so confoundedly bitter?"

"That's not the point."

"Of course not," put in Hubbard. "Mason ain't one of us."

"How do you make that out?" I demanded.

"Isn't Mason just as much a member of the Remove as you, Hubbard? Isn't he entitled to all the advantages that you get? If you talk that rot to me I shall get wild."

Hubbard frowned.

"Mason's an outsider," he muttered. "I don't see why we should be called upon to play in the same field with him. If he plays, I don't!"

My eyes gleamed.

"You'd better go and change your things, Hubbard," I said grimly.

"What do you mean?"

"That's an unnecessary question," I answered smoothly. "Mason's going to play—and therefore you're not."

Hubbard looked dismayed.

"I didn't mean it exactly——" he began hastily.

"You shouldn't say what you don't mean!" I snapped. "You're not playing in this

match, Hubbard. You can get off the field as soon as you like. Understand? I'm skipper, and I'm not going to be dictated to. You elected to take up this attitude, and you can't grumble at the consequences."

"Hear, hear!" said De Valerie.

"Begad! You asked for it, Hubby—you did, really," said Montie.

"Look here!" roared Hubbard violently. "Do you think I'm going to be pushed off the field by that cad?"

"You're being pushed off the field by me," I replied.

"I won't go!" hooted Hubbard. "You can go and eat coke! I'm going to play in this game, and the other fellows will back me up, too. Mason ain't one of us!"

"Yes, I think you're riding the high horse," said Doyle warmly. "We ain't going to stand this sort of thing, Nipper. If Hubbard goes, I shall back him up—and a lot of other chaps will, too. It's not the thing to play a chap like Mason."

The new boy touched me on the arm.

"I won't play, Nipper," he said quietly.

"Won't you?" I said.

"No; I don't want to cause any discontent—"

"That's just where you're wrong," I said grimly. "It's these snobs who are causing discontent. You can play as well as they can—and perhaps a lot better. I mean to include you in this match—and you needn't try backing out. I'll settle this point."

By this time there was quite an angry crowd round us. The really decent fellows were taking no part in the squabble. Handforth and Co. and Burton and Farman—in fact, quite a number—were standing in a group near-by, grinning amusedly. They were entirely in sympathy with Mason, and were ready to back me up if necessary.

"Well, are we going to start?" I asked.

"I'm ready," said De Valerie. "Now then, you chaps, we've got to beat these other fellows. By the way, Nipper, who's Mason going to play for?"

"My side," I replied.

"He's not going to play at all!" bellowed Hubbard. "I call upon you chaps to back me up. We ought to make a stand over this. Mason has no right to be included with decent fellows—"

"Did you say decent fellows?" I interrupted.

"Yes, I did."

"Then you've made a bloomer," I retorted. "I shouldn't think of calling you a decent fellow after what's happened now. And you come under the same head, Armstrong—in fact, every fellow who's making this snobbish fuss."

"There's nothing snobbish about it at all!" snapped Armstrong. "We're butting against it because Mason isn't the sort of fellow to play. What does he know about decent football? I expect he's only played in a London street—"

"You don't know anything about it," I cut in. "And I'm just about fed-up with this waste of time. If it'll please you, I don't mind letting Watson captain my side."

"Good!" said Hubbard heartily.

"I don't object," said Watson. "But you needn't look so jolly pleased about it, Hubbard. You're not going to play, anyhow. Mason, we'll get into the field—"

"This is sheer rot!" shouted Armstrong. "We're not going to have Watson captain the side—he's just as bad as Nipper. The only thing to do is to make a stand and refuse to play. How many of us object to Mason?"

"Eight—no, nine!" said Hubbard viciously.

"Well, we'll all strike," said Armstrong, grinning. "They can't play the giddy match without us, so Nipper will have to give in. That's the best way to settle it."

The other dissenters nodded.

"You refuse to play?" I demanded.

"Yes!" they roared.

"All right, I'll give you just one minute," I said angrily. "If you don't agree to play with Mason within a minute, I won't let a single one of you play at all!"

"Oh!" sneered Hubbard. "And what about the match?"

"I'll go and get nine Third-Formers!" I retorted grimly. "Some of those kids can play a decent game, and they'd jump at the chance. It's only a practice match, and my object is to test Mason thoroughly. He'll really have a better chance if some Third-Formers are included on his side—because he'll get more work."

"Rippin', old boy," beamed Sir Montie. "That's made them look sick!"

"I don't believe in that rot—" began Armstrong.

"Only half-a-minute left," I interrupted. "I give you my plain word that you'll all be barred if you don't agree at once. As soon as the minute's up you won't have a chance. I'm going to have my way!"

The discontented juniors looked at one another in dismay.

"Time's up!" I said, stowing my watch away. "You've lost your chance now. Watson, you might run and fetch nine Third-Formers—"

"Here, I say!" gasped Armstrong. "We'll play!"

"And we won't object to Mason!" exclaimed Doyle quickly.

I hesitated.

"If I give in, I shall be doing you a favour," I said. "Every chap who objects to Mason must shake hands with him and beg his pardon. If you don't, you don't play!"

There was much gnashing of teeth, but I had my way. All the discontented fellows were obliged to eat humble pie. They shook hands with Mason and apologised—rather than be chucked out of the match. But Hubbard refused, and I ordered him off.

This was rather a pity, because Hubbard was quite a decent chap, really. But I meant to put a stop to this nonsense once and for all. It was the only thing to do. Mason had been treated most unfairly, and it was only just that he should share the privileges of the whole Remove. To treat him as an outsider was outrageous.

He was very grateful for my championship.

"Thanks, Nipper," he said softly. "You're a brick."

"Rats!" I replied. "There's nothing to thank me for, my son. A football skipper is no skipper at all if he can't play whom he likes. I believe in consulting the eleven over general matters, but this was quite different. It was snobbery, pure and simple."

"I hope I shall shape decently," said Mason. "I'll try to."

He did try—hard.

The elevens lined up, and the match started. Clapson, of the College House, was referee, and he was quite impartial. Just at first Mason showed signs of nervousness, and I noticed several smug grins when he muffed a good kick.

But it wasn't long before he gained confidence, and then the fellows who had objected began to wish they hadn't. For, to put it bluntly, Mason proved to be hot stuff.

I passed to him whenever I could, for my object was to give him as much work as possible. The first two or three times he shaped fairly, making no brilliant display. I wasn't expecting it, and I was quite surprised that he was displaying any good form at all.

And then he woke up.

Trapping the ball neatly from Farman, he streaked down the field, dribbling the ball in the most finished manner. Two half-backs rushed at him. He stopped dead, calmly and coolly gave the ball a slight push, and the disgusted halves went past the mark. Meanwhile, Mason was speeding up again. It was really a very pretty piece of work.

Handforth roared with delight when the new fellow tricked the only back who barred his progress.

Whiz!

The ball left Mason's foot, shot through the air as true as a die, and went into the net with such terrific speed that Conroy minor, in goal, was completely beaten.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well kicked!"

"Good man!"

Mason found himself surrounded by an enthusiastic mob. The goal itself didn't matter a ha'penny—for it was of no consequence which side won—but Mason had proved his worth with a vengeance.

"Great!" I exclaimed, thumping his back. "Why, you're better than any of my reserves, and as good as any outside-left in the team!"

Mason flushed.

"It's jolly good of you to say so——" he began.

"Why didn't you tell us that you were so hot?" asked the Duke of Somerton. "You're topping, old chap—simply topping!"

Owen major and Doyle and one or two others said nothing, but they looked rather uncomfortable. Armstrong, however, was heard to remark that it was only a flash in the pan.

But it wasn't.

By half-time Mason had conclusively proved

that he was a player of excellent quality. His speed was remarkable, and there was no doubt that in placing him in the forward line I had done the right thing.

And it was rather a come-down for St. Frank's to find that this despised junior introduced some new tricks. He made us open our eyes by the manner in which he trapped the ball again and again. His dodging tactics were different from any I'd ever seen.

Instead of going at it deliberately he deceived his opponents time after time. They were simply left standing while he continued on his way.

By the time the game was nearly finished I had positively resolved to include Mason in the next House match. Indeed, there was no reason why he shouldn't be given a place in the Junior Eleven proper. Christine, the College House skipper, had been looking on, and he was enthusiastic.

"Play him?" he exclaimed, when one of his chums made a suggestion. "I should think we will play him! He's absolutely a mountain of strength. I've never seen—Look at that! Go it, Mason!"

Mason was going it. He beat everybody on the field and slammed the leather into the net for the third time during the game. The enthusiasm was general.

There was no doubt that Mason had taken us all by storm. He wasn't merely good, but splendid. There was no player in the junior team who could beat him. And his sustained form proved that it was not merely an isolated effort.

It was Mason's game, pure and simple. My side scored five goals, and three of those were Mason's. I was responsible for one other, and Tregellis-West had scored the fifth—from a beautiful pass from the new fellow.

The other side was hopelessly whacked, for De Valerie's men only scored a single goal. And when the whistle blew Jack Mason, the "outsider," was the centre of attention. He bore his honours modestly, and the most surprising thing was that he seemed almost as fresh as when he had started.

"You swindler!" I exclaimed grimly. "What do you mean by showing us up like this? Why didn't you tell us you were a giddy professional?"

Mason laughed.

"It would have sounded like boasting if I'd said anything," he replied. "It was better this way, wasn't it?"

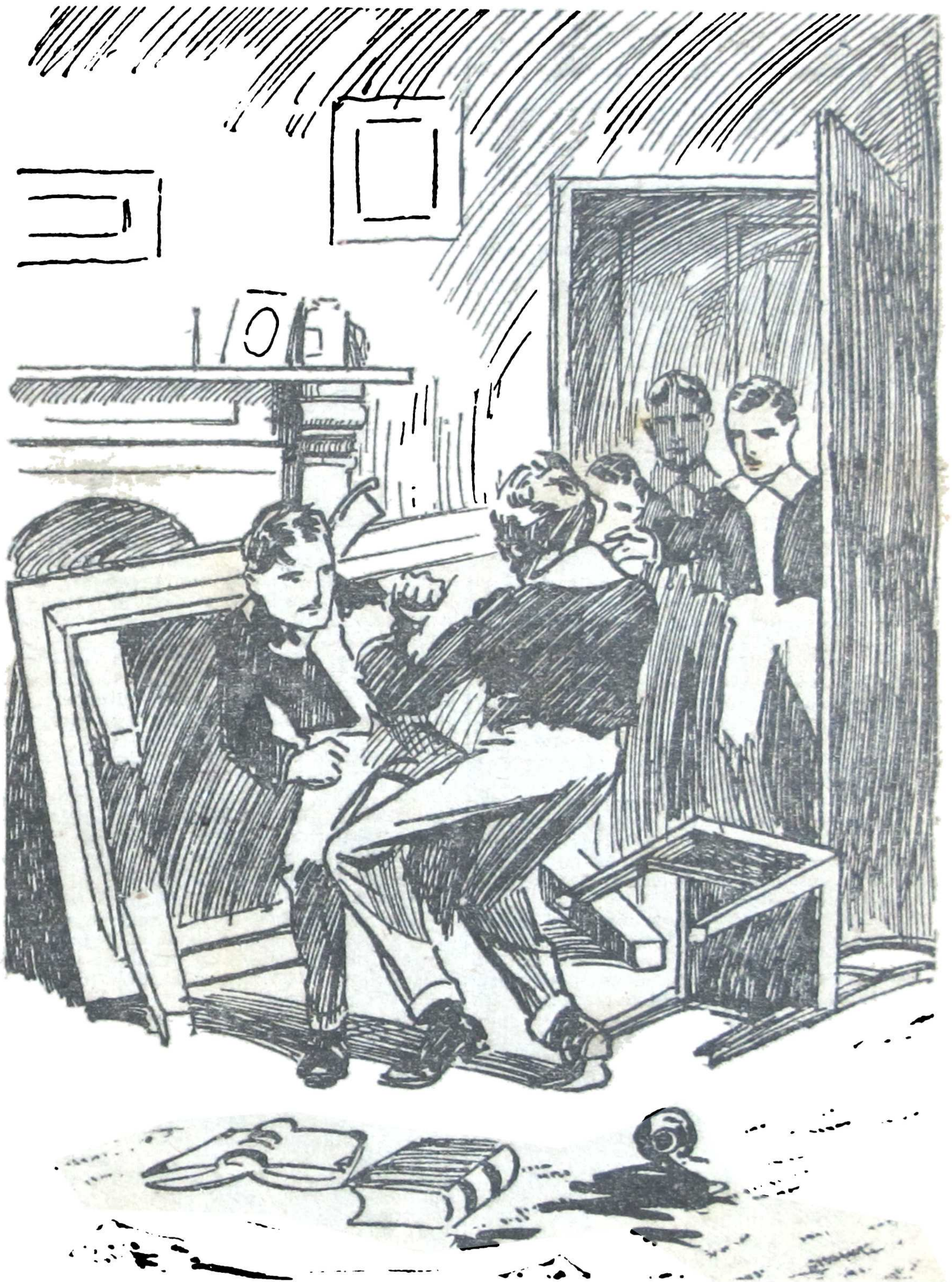
"Yes, rather," I said heartily. "You'll play in the House match on Saturday, Jack, my son—and it's a ten-to-one chance that you'll be included in the School Team when we go over to Redwood next week."

"It's very good of you——"

Mason was interrupted by the arrival of Hubbard.

"What the dickens do you want?" I demanded sharply.

"Oh, nothing much," said Hubbard, looking red. "The fact is, Mason, I'm going to beg your pardon. I acted rottenly before



Pitt and the new boy were fighting furiously, and their study was half a wreck.

"Stop it, you asses!" I shouted. But they did not even hear me.

(See page 10.)

the match, and it served me jolly well right to be kicked out. Will you shake?"

"Of course I will!" said Jack heartily.

"Good man!" I exclaimed, slapping Hubbard's back.

It was jolly decent of him to come forward in that way—for he had to swallow his dignity completely. But Mason's performance had wrought a very great change. All the other fellows who had objected to him had the decency to come forward and apologise for a second time—they had done so forcibly at first, but now they were sincere.

That afternoon was a triumph for Jack Mason, and the bitter feeling which had been growing in a certain section of the Remove had vanished completely.

And while that match had been in progress certain events were occurring in London which were to make a great difference to Mason's life at St. Frank's.

So I think we'd better shift to London for a bit.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERER.

MR. SIMON GRELL walked briskly along Thornley Street, Bermondsey. The district was not exactly a salubrious one, but Thornley Street was distinctly respectable and quiet.

Mr. Grell was a short, thick-set man, with a ruddy, bronzed complexion. His age was possibly forty-five, and he was clean-shaven. Attired in a blue reefer suit, with a peaked cap, it was obvious to anybody that he was of the seafaring profession.

He came to a halt at the gate of No. 30, and glanced up at the windows of the house with a certain amount of interest. A smile flitted across his rugged face as he caught sight of a vase peeping between the curtains of the front-parlour.

Mr. Grell recognised that vase, and a certain anxiety was lifted from his mind. It was nearly five years since he had walked down Thornley Street, and it was gratifying to discover that No. 30 had not changed its tenant.

He walked up the short strip of path and hammered at the door. After a short wait it was opened by a buxom lady with a somewhat hard cast of countenance. She gazed at the visitor without recognition for a few moments, and then her eyes opened very wide.

"Simon!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Home at last, old girl," said Mr. Grell, stepping inside. "There, there! Don't carry on like that. You're lookin' younger than ever, blamed if you ain't!"

"I thought you was dead, Simon," exclaimed Mrs. Grell, in a startled voice, as she led her husband into the kitchen at the rear. "I thought you was dead."

"You ain't got married agin?" asked Mr. Grell, staring.

"Don't talk such nonsense!" exclaimed his

wife. "I should think one husband is enough for me—I might get somebody even worse than you next time. What have you come back for?"

Mr. Grell sat down and grinned.

"Well, I must say that you're givin' me a hearty welcome," he said sarcastically. "Ain't you pleased to see me?"

"Not particularly," replied Mrs. Grell, with great frankness. "I s'pose you've come 'ere after money? I can't think of no other reason why you should come!"

"You allus was quick with it," said the returned wanderer. "Yes, old girl, I've come back arter money."

"You won't get any here——"

"We'll see about that later on," said Mr. Grell.

It will be easily understood that Mr. and Mrs. Grell had not spent an extremely happy married life together. The cold truth was rather distressing. They had had many quarrels in the past, and Mr. Grell had been absent for five years. His wife had been fondly hoping that he would never turn up again—but here he was. And his object was the same as of old.

"We won't see about it later on," said Mrs. Grell quickly. "Do you think I'm going to slave away at dressmaking for you? Ain't you big enough to earn your own money?"

"I've had bad luck——"

"Then you'd better go and find some good!" snapped Mrs. Grell, whose temper was of a very short nature. "I'm having a hard struggle now that the boy has gone——"

"The boy!" repeated Mr. Grell.

"Jack," explained his wife.

"Oh, that little nipper. He was only ten when I left," said the man, filling his pipe. "Where's he gone to? Dead?"

He spoke of the matter with perfect ease, as though he didn't care whether Jack were dead or not. As a matter of fact, he didn't.

"No, Jack ain't dead," said Mrs. Grell. "He's nigh on fifteen now, and he's at a big school in Sussex—St. Frank's, they call it, I believe. It's a proper swell place."

Mr. Grell stared.

"Ho! So that's the game, is it?" he asked. "You're slavin' away, an' spendin' all your money on payin' the fees of that darned kid at a swell school. Look here, missus, I won't allow——"

"Don't be such a fool, Simon," snapped his wife. "How do you think I could pay such fees? It's pounds an' pounds—every month! I could live like a lady, with my carriage-and-pair, with the money that's bein' paid for that dratted boy!"

Mr. Grell laid his pipe aside.

"If you ain't payin' the fees, who is?" he demanded suspiciously. "What's the game, old woman? Jack ain't payin' all that money hisself, an' I didn't know there was anybody kind enough to chuck money away on a little urchin——"

Mrs. Grell made an impatient gesture.

"It's no good talkin' to me," she in-

interrupted. "I'm in a muddle over it. We had a solicitor's letter, an' it said that some money had been left to pay for the boy's education at St. Frank's. I thought you had died out in Canada, an' that you'd left the money."

"Me?" repeated Mr. Grell incredulously. "Me leave money to be chucked away at a rotten dudes' school?"

"I always thought it was impossible," said Mrs. Grell nastily.

"Let me see that letter," said her husband.

"I don't know where it is now—I've lost it," said the woman. "Jack went up and saw the solicitors, an' he made all the arrangements. I was glad to get rid of him, anyhow!"

"That's the worst of wimmen," said Mr. Grell contemptuously, reaching out for his pipe and lighting it. "I've allus said they was no good. You must have been mad to let the boy go. Why couldn't you have took charge of the money?"

Mrs. Grell smiled grimly.

"Don't you think I tried?" she asked. "It wasn't no good, Simon. The money was in the hands of the lawyer, an' he pays the fees an' does everything. Jack simply had to go down."

"An' supposin' he hadn't gone?" asked the man. "Couldn't he have touched the money? Not you, I don't mean, but him. Couldn't he have took the money for hisself?"

"I don't know about that," said Mrs. Grell. "I was reg'lar muddled. But Jack was just mad to go to St. Frank's, an' he wouldn't have touched the money, even if he could. I thought you'd left it."

"That's rich!" growled Mr. Grell. "I s'pose you've been calling me all sorts o' nice names, an' hopin' that my soul will rest in peace, hey?"

"Yes, I have!" said Mrs. Grell. "But I'll take care not to do that again. I was a silly thing to believe that you could have been so generous."

"I shall have to think about this affair," said the man. "We'll see wot Master Mason's game is. He must ha' bin up to somethin' without you knowin' it, old girl. And yet he wasn't wot I'd call an artful kid. It's mysterious, that's wot it is."

He got up from his chair and paced up and down for a few minutes.

"Look here, missus," he said. "You don't want me here, do you?"

"No, I don't," replied Mrs. Grell. "What are the neighbours goin' to say? They've been thinkin' you dead for years, an' there'll be ever such a fuss—Did anybody see you come in?"

"Not that I know of," replied Mr. Grell. "You won't be bothered with me for long, Martha. I don't love my home enough to want to stop here. Just give me five quid and I'll clear out."

"I haven't got five shillings," said Mrs. Grell grimly.

Her husband sat down.

"All right," he said comfortably; "I'll stay here until you're able to tell the truth. An' you ain't said nothin' about my face. I had a beard when I went away—"

"Do you think I didn't notice the difference?" snapped Mrs. Grell, going to the door. "You ain't improved your looks, Simon!"

She went out, and Mr. Grell grinned placidly and winked at the fender. Three minutes later Mrs. Grell came back.

"It's all I've got," she said. "I've been scrapin' an' scrapin', an' now you come an' take it all. What sort of a husband do you call yourself?"

She handed over four pounds, and Mr. Grell took it.

"Thanks, old girl," he said. "What sort of a husband do I call myself? Well, I'm a modest man, an' I don't believe in a feller payin' hisself compliments. Where's that school, did you say?"

"In Sussex."

"What town's it in?"

"It's just beyond Bannington," replied Mrs. Grell. "But what do you want to know for? I s'pose you're goin' down there?"

"If you don't ask no questions you won't be told no lies," said Mr. Grell calmly. "Just you forget all about me, Martha, an' go on with your dressmakin'. That kid's got money—lots o' money—an' I don't see why I shouldn't touch some of it."

Mrs. Grell sniffed.

"You'll have your pains for nothin'," she declared. "An' if you come back here again I sha'n't give you nothin' else. That's a fair warnin', Simon!"

Mr. Grell grinned, and passed out of the house without even bidding his wife a good-bye. Considering their strained relations, this was not very surprising.

The time was now late afternoon, and Mr. Grell left Bermondsey and went to his lodgings in the neighbourhood of Commercial Road. Here he sat down and thought things out thoroughly.

As a direct consequence a stranger alighted from the evening train at Belton Station on the following day. It was fine and clear, with a touch of frost in the air. London had been somewhat foggy on this early November day, but Sussex was very different.

The stranger was Mr. Simon Grell. His attire was now different, consisting of a good tweed suit, an overcoat, and a soft felt hat. He could not, however, eradicate the bronzed colour of his face. It was obvious that he was a much-travelled man, and any observant person could tell that he had been accustomed to the sea.

Mr. Grell, of course, was Jack Mason's uncle, the uncle that had "died" out in Canada. Jack and his aunt had never had any direct communication, but a friend of Mr. Grell's had paid a visit one day, and he had given the information—probably in all sincerity—that Grell was dead.

There had been no love lost between Jack Mason and his aunt. It was for this

reason that the benevolent Mr. Strong had been anxious to get the lad away. It was Mr. Strong who was the unknown benefactor, but he had concealed his activities very completely. Jack had no notion that his fees were being paid by the kindly old gentleman whose life he had saved.

It was only natural, perhaps, that Mr. Grell should be covetous upon learning that his nephew was at St. Frank's. That famous school was only for the sons of rich people, and since Jack was there, it stood to reason that he had money.

Mr. Grell meant to find out all about it. If it could possibly be worked, he meant to take the boy away and appropriate the legacy for himself. There was no telling. And the first step was to discover the actual facts.

Jack's uncle considered that he had a perfect right to any money which had been left to the lad.

"I brought the kid up, looked arter him, an' treated him like a young prince," Mr. Grell untruthfully told himself. "He never had anything but kindness from me an' his aunt, an' he ought to be only too pleased to give us the benefit of this here legacy. It's his dooty. An' if he don't turn out reasonable, I'll half-skin him!"

It will thus be seen that Mr. Grell's love for his nephew was not of a very intense nature. He didn't care a snap of his fingers for the boy—he had proved that all Jack's life—but he certainly did care for the money which was being used for Mason's education.

"What the thunder does he want to be educated for?" demanded Mr. Grell, addressing the hedges as he walked into the village from the station. "It ain't reasonable. Jack wasn't brought up to be educated in a swell school like this. The lazy young hound oughter be in an office, earnin' his livin'."

But there was a difficulty in the way. Mr. Grell could not walk up to St. Frank's boldly. He had sufficient sense to realise that his presence at the school would cause unwelcome comment. He might even be severely "ragged" by the boys. Mr. Grell had heard of such things.

And he met with a piece of luck.

After pausing at the White Harp, in order to obtain liquid refreshment, he entered upon the lane which led to St. Frank's. It was dusk, and Mr. Grell was feeling warmed and confident. He had no set idea as yet regarding what he should do. But he thought it highly probable that he would be able to spot Jack by looking in at the gates.

At all events, that would do for a start. And then he became aware of the fact that a boy was walking down the road towards him. He was a junior boy, of about Jack's size. Therefore Mr. Grell decided to speak to him.

And this was the piece of luck. For the boy happened to be Reginald Pitt. There was nothing remarkable in this meeting, for

Pitt was merely going into the village in order to make a purchase.

He eyed the stranger interestedly as they drew near to one another, and he was somewhat surprised when Mr. Grell addressed him.

"Just half a minute, matey," said the thick-set man genially.

Pitt stopped, and eyed Mr. Grell with even greater interest. For him to be called "matey" by such a respectably dressed man was rather puzzling.

"Well, what's wrong?" asked the Serpent.

"I don't know as anythin' is wrong," said Mr. Grell, removing his pipe from between his teeth. "I take it that you're one o' the boys from the big school—St. Frank's?"

"What a marvellous deduction!" said Pitt calmly.

"I don't want none o' your sauce, my boy," frowned Mr. Grell. "Are you open to acceptin' a shillin'?"

"I couldn't take it!" said Pitt gravely. "That's more than I get during the whole term. Why, if I had a shilling, I should only squander it and make a beast of myself!"

Mr. Grell grinned.

"Quite a witty nipper, ain't you?" he remarked. "I was only jokin', young shaver. I just want you to do me a little favour. Can you tell me if there's a kid named Mason at your school?"

Pitt became intent at once.

"Jack Mason?" he asked.

"That's the boy."

"He's in the Remove," said Pitt.

"Oh, is he?" asked Mr. Grell. "An' wot may the Remove happen to be? Is he goin' to be shifted?"

"The Remove is a Form—a class," grinned Pitt. "It's really the Fourth Form, but we always call it the Remove. And Mason's not going to be shifted that I know of. As it happens, you couldn't have spoken to a better chap than me if you're wanting to see Mason."

"Oh! How's that?"

"Well, I'm Mason's study-mate," explained Pitt. "We both share the same room in the Ancient House."

Mr. Grell was very pleased.

"Then you're his chum?" he inquired.

"Well, I'm not going to say that," replied Pitt. "We don't exactly hit it off together, but there's no bad feeling, except for occasional rows. I suppose you want to see Mason about something?"

"That's the ticket," said Mr. Grell. "Now, look here, my boy, can you keep a little secret? Since you're Jack's chum, I don't mind tellin' you somethin'."

"I'll promise not to split," said Pitt solemnly.

"He's my nevvie—see?" asked the stranger. "My name's Grell, an' I'm Jack Mason's uncle. I thought I'd come down just to have a look at him."

Pitt nodded.

"Good idea!" he said. "I'll show you the way up——"

"No, I ain't wantin' to go to the school," interrupted Mr. Grell. "If you could fetch my nevvie down to me, you'd be doin' me a nice little favour. I want to have a chat with him in privit. Besides, them young hounds at the school—them young gents, I mean—might not care for my appearance."

"Quite likely," said Pitt calmly. "In fact, I think you'd cause a sensation. Mr. Strong was bad enough, but—— Well, I don't want to offend you, Mr. Grell, but we don't have visitors like you at St. Frank's."

Simon Grell grinned.

"There's nothin' I like better than a ont-spoken boy," he said. "You're just the kind o' young shaver I like to meet. I know that you don't have visitors like me, an' that's why I don't want to go. But who's that Mr. Strong you were talkin' about?"

"Oh, a friend of Mason's."

"Wot sort of a friend?"

"A seedy-looking sort of old chap," replied Pitt. "Well, look here, if you'll stay here I'll pop back to the school and bring Mason down to you. He'll be delighted to see you, I know."

Mr. Grell nodded.

"Break it to him gently," he said. "Jack ain't seen me for years, an' you don't want to give him no shock. Tell him that his lovin' uncle has come down to see him."

"Trust me," said Pitt, nodding.

He turned and walked rapidly back towards St. Frank's. Pitt, in fact, was highly pleased with himself. This development was rather rich. Fancy that beery-looking individual being Mason's uncle! Pitt's thoughts were not far wrong, for Mr. Grell's ruddiness was not entirely due to salt spray and tropic suns.

Pitt had not forgotten that fight in Study B. True, he had shaken hands with Mason at the finish. But the thought of that scrap rankled—more particularly since Pitt had had a chat with Fullwood and Co. The Nuts considered that Pitt ought to cut Mason dead; but the Serpent was not inclined to adopt this plan.

It would be sufficiently gratifying if he could cause Mason some little embarrassment; and it would be decidedly rich for the school to see this bright specimen of an uncle.

The vindictive strain in Pitt's character was not so pronounced as it had been at one time of day, but it was still there. He had no intention whatever of keeping the secret which Mr. Grell had given him.

On the contrary, he meant to make the thing entirely public. He would fetch Mason, according to his promise, but he would fetch quite a crowd of other juniors, too!

Mason had been treated almost royally since his triumph on the football field the previous day, and this "show up" would come as a very effective damper, and Reginald Pitt would obtain a neat revenge.

And the Serpent hurried on towards the school.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

NELSON LEE left the post-office in Bell-ton, glanced at his watch, and set off towards the school at his usual brisk pace.

He was very pleased with the manner in which Mason had "made good." He had chatted with me on the subject only that morning, and he certainly agreed that the new fellow ought to be included in the junior eleven.

Passing up the lane, Lee noted the figure of Mr. Simon Grell leaning carelessly against the old stile, placidly smoking his pipe. The man was a stranger, and strangers were not common in this quiet neighbourhood.

Mr. Grell, too, eyed Lee interestedly as the latter came along. The schoolmaster-detective was wearing his gown and a mortar-board adorned his head. Lee had become quite accustomed to this attire of late. He was instantly labelled a schoolmaster, and Mr. Grell nodded genially to him as he came up.

"Evenin', sir," he said pleasantly.

"Good-evening," returned Nelson Lee, looking at the other rather closely. "I don't think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance?"

"Oh, my name's Grell," that individual replied. "I'm just waitin' here to have a chat with one of your boys."

Nelson Lee frowned. He did not like the look of this stranger, and to learn that he was waiting to interview a St. Frank's fellow was not very gratifying. Lee thought that it was necessary to inquire further.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "And what is your business, Mr. Grell?"

"Oh, a friendly chat——"

"No doubt; but may I inquire why you wish to have a friendly chat with one of my boys?" asked the Housemaster. "Whom do you wish to see?"

"That ain't no concern o' yours," said Grell, realising that he had made himself rather too agreeable.

"You will pardon me, but it is my concern," said the detective sharply. "You apparently do not understand that the St. Frank's boys are not at liberty to make just what friends they choose. I must ask you to state your business, and to tell me the name of the boy you are acquainted with."

Mr. Grell considered. After all, why shouldn't he tell this bumptious schoolmaster that he was Mason's uncle? There was nothing wrong in it, and he had a perfect right to visit the lad. It was only the boys Grell was nervous of. This master would probably take him straight to the school, ensuring him a safe passage, so to speak.

"Well, if you're so inquisitive, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you everything," said Grell. "The boy I want to see is Master Jack Mason, an' I'm his uncle. No harm in a man comin' to see his nevvie, I suppose?"

Lee looked at the man intently.

"Are you sure you are Mason's uncle?" he asked.

Grell laughed.

"I can prove it in half a minit if you want me to," he said. "My address is Number Thirty, Thornley Street, Bermondsey. I can give you all the information you like about Jack, if you're so inclined."

"You need give no further details, Mr. Grell," said Lee.

The detective was somewhat astonished. Mr. Strong had told him that Grell was dead. Obviously there had been a mistake. Moreover, Nelson Lee was quite certain that he had met this man before—but with a beard.

For the moment, however, he could not "place" Mr. Grell. The latter was regarding him with an amused eye as he pulled at his pipe.

"Mebbe I'll come up the road to the school presently," he said easily. "Bein' a relative of one o' your boys, I reckon I'll be given a welcome, eh?"

"You will be treated with the consideration which is accorded to all visitors, Mr. Grell," replied Lee. "When you do come up, will you be good enough to ask for me? I will see that you are given full attention. I am Mason's Housemaster, and my name is Lee."

Grell removed his pipe.

"Lee?" he repeated. "What—L-e-i-g-h?" he added, spelling the name.

"No, L-e-e," said the detective. "My name is Nelson Lee——"

"Hey?"

Mr. Grell started visibly, and nearly dropped his pipe.

"There's a 'tec named Nelson Lee," he said suspiciously, regarding his companion with greatly increased interest. "Why, blame me, I believe that you——"

"You are quite right," nodded Lee. "I am the person you refer to."

Mr. Grell's placid expression changed with amazing speed. A look of black hatred, intermingled with fear, came into his eyes. He stared glaringly, and then took a quick step forward.

It was a menacing step, and Grell's whole attitude was threatening. He seemed about to hurl himself bodily at Nelson Lee, and his eyes were blazing with fire. The detective stood as steady as a rock.

Then, abruptly, Mr. Grell remembered himself.

He cursed under his breath, laughed foolishly, and turned away. And as he walked down the lane he thrust his pipe into his pocket, kicked a stone violently, and spat into the hedge with vicious force.

Nelson Lee whistled softly to himself.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is quite remarkable."

He continued his walk to St. Frank's in a very thoughtful mood. Mr. Grell had looked back, and he saw that Nelson Lee had departed from the spot. And, remembering that Jack Mason would soon be down, he turned back.

"He don't know me," he told himself. "How should he know me? I ain't the same as I was at one time o' day. And what's the idea of him bein' here, a school-master? There's somethin' queer about it."

And Mr. Grell, recovering from his alarm, reseated himself on the stile. He was quite sure that he was safe, but he was puzzled; and he meant to ask Jack Mason a few questions of considerable importance.

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee was entering the gateway of the school. In the Triangle he nearly ran into me as I was crossing from the gymnasium.

"I want you, Nipper," said the guv'nor.

"Now, sir?"

"Yes."

"But I'm going over to Christine about the football——"

"Never mind the football," interjected Nelson Lee grimly. "I want you at once. Follow me to my study—or, better still, come with me now."

"Oh, all right, sir," I said.

I wondered what was in the wind. The guv'nor was certainly looking rather serious, and I judged that something special was afoot. We arrived at his study, and then Nelson Lee lit a cigarette.

"Where is Mason?" he asked abruptly.

"Somewhere in the House, I expect."

"Do you know if he has been out this evening?"

"I don't think he has, guv'nor."

"Well, then, do you know if he has had any communication with his uncle recently?" asked Nelson Lee.

I stared.

"His uncle?" I repeated.

"Yes."

"But his uncle's dead!" I exclaimed. "You told me——"

"Quite so; but I have every reason to believe that Mason's uncle is as alive as I am myself," said the guv'nor. "Has the boy received a letter——"

"I don't think so, sir," I broke in. "Anyhow, he hasn't said anything to me—and he's getting quite pally with me just now. Mason's a decent chap, and I like him better every day. I can't quite believe that he's only a common kid."

"He isn't, Nipper. He is a most uncommon boy," said Nelson Lee. "Mason has pleased me immensely since he arrived at St. Frank's. But we are getting away from the point. I wish to ask about this uncle."

"I don't follow you, sir," I said. "How do you know anything about Jack's uncle?"

"I met him ten minutes ago, in the lane."

"Mason's uncle?" I asked wonderingly.

"Exactly. And I received a very considerable surprise, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I knew, of course, that Mr. Grell was not exactly a man of gentle upbringing; Mr. Strong made that quite clear to me. Mason, indeed, has had a very unhappy home life—or what must be termed his home life. For his aunt and uncle never provided him with a real home. The lad has been badly treated."

"But what was the surprise, sir?" I asked.

"Just this, Nipper," replied the guv'nor. "When I met Mr. Grell I was quite certain that I had seen him before somewhere several years ago. I could not place him in my mind—until I told him my name."

"And how did that do the trick?" I asked.

"Simply because Mr. Grell changed his whole expression—and I knew him in a second," said Nelson Lee quietly. "You will not remember the affair, Nipper, but just about five years ago I was engaged upon a rather important case at the London docks. There is no need for me to go into any details, but one of the men suspected of being concerned in a series of marine robberies escaped at the last minute. That man, Nipper, is in the lane at this moment."

I gave a gasp.

"Mason's uncle?" I exclaimed, staring.

"Yes, Nipper—Mason's uncle," replied the guv'nor. "I do not think that he is the man—I positively know it. At that period Grell had another name—probably a false name; but he was known to the police as 'Captain Jim,' owing to the fact that he had knocked about the world a great deal in ships. He escaped to Canada, or the United States. There was no actual proof against him, but there would have been plenty if he had remained."

I looked very serious.

"I say, it's rather rotten, sir," I exclaimed. "Fancy a chap like that—a giddy criminal—being the uncle of such a straight fellow as Jack Mason. Isn't there some mistake about it?"

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"There may be; but I don't think so, young 'un," he replied slowly. "At all events we shall be able to judge after Mason has seen his uncle. We can easily find that out without asking the lad any direct questions. Just keep your eyes open, and remain on the alert. If Mason meets this man and acknowledges him, then there can be little doubt about the matter. And he will certainly acknowledge him if he is really a relative."

"But it's rotten, sir——"

"My dear Nipper, I don't see it," interrupted Lee. "It would not be fair to judge Mason by his uncle. The man may be a crook, but Mason himself is one of the finest specimens of British boyhood I have met. He is admirable in every way, and his uncle is his misfortune."

"That's what I think, of course," I replied. "But when I said it was rotten, I was thinking of the other fellows. Mason's getting on nicely now, and if it becomes known that this bounder is his uncle, it'll do him a terrific amount of harm. Half the House will shun him."

Nelson Lee frowned.

"That would be most unfair, but I suppose you are right," he said. "The boys are extremely hasty in their judgment, and I do not altogether approve of their methods."

But there is only one way to guard against the danger, Nipper. Nobody must know this secret—and I am quite sure that Grell will not reveal it himself."

"Well, I sha'n't say a word," I promised. "Poor kid! How rotten it must be to have an uncle like that! Do you think the fellow will have the cheek to come to the school?"

"I don't think so, my boy," replied Lee. "If he does it will be a pity; but we really can't prevent him. He is the boy's uncle, and he has a right to pay a visit if he wishes to. Providing he does not make a nuisance of himself, he will be treated courteously. And there is another point."

"You mean regarding Grell's presence here?" I asked.

"Exactly. I don't believe for a moment that the man has come down for the mere pleasure of seeing his nephew," said Nelson Lee, stroking his chin. "There is some other motive for his visit—and I suspect that it is an evil one. We must keep our eyes open, Nipper."

"Rather, sir," I agreed heartily. "And if Mr. Grell gets up to any tricks, he'll be sorry for himself. Our job is to guard Jack, and I'm rather glad that you're on the spot, guv'nor. There's no telling what might happen!"

But I did not anticipate the somewhat startling events which were destined to take place before long. Mr. Grell's visit was a sign of coming excitements.

CHAPTER VII.

MASON ISN'T HAVING ANY.

"WHERE'S Pullwood?"

Pitt asked that question with his head in the doorway of Study A. Gulliver, who was there alone, looked up from a book.

"I don't know," he exclaimed. "You might find him in Merrell's study. He said he was going along there——"

"All right! You come with me!" interjected Pitt briskly.

"Rats! I'm reading this——"

"That doesn't matter. There's something on."

"Oh!" said Gulliver. "Who's concerned?"

"Mason."

Gulliver jumped up with alacrity.

"I'm in with you," he exclaimed, grinning. "There's been too much said about Mason to-day. I've heard his name hundreds of times since that rotten football match. You might think he was a tin-god!"

They passed along the passage until they came to Study G. Pitt tried to open the door, but it was locked.

"Who's that?" demanded a voice.

"Only me!" snapped Pitt. "Open the giddy door!"

It was unlocked, and the Serpent and Gulliver were admitted. The air was rather heavy with smoke, and both Pullwood and Bell were within, in addition to the study's

rightful owners—Merrill and Noys and Marriott. They had been disturbed in the middle of a game of banker.

"Going to join us?" asked Fullwood gently. "The more the merrier. Hallo! So you've come along, Gully? I thought you wanted to finish that beastly book?"

"Pitt dragged me in here," explained Gully. "He said there's some game on against Mason."

"Oh, blow Mason!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm fed up with the chap. Give him a rest! Join us in this game, Pitt—"

"Not just now," replied Pitt. "Look here, we can play banker any old night, but we can't have such a ripping rag as we're going to have with Mason's uncle."

"His which?" asked Marriott.

"His uncle," grinned Pitt. "Oh, my hat! You'll have to come and see him—he's a regular boulder. Looks like a brick-layer, with a beery face, and talks regular Bermondsey style."

Fullwood and Co. were greatly impressed.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bell. "Is this chap in the school?"

"No—he's down the lane," replied Pitt.

And he went into details concerning his meeting with Mr. Grell. The Nuts were unanimous in their decision to chuck up their game and to go down the lane in a body—in order to see the meeting between uncle and nephew.

"I'll tell you what!" said Fullwood, with a chuckle. "We'll have a lot of fun out of this. You can take Mason down to the meetin'-place, Pitt, an' we'll slip down on the quiet. It wouldn't do to give the chap a hint."

"My idea exactly," said Pitt. "You chaps get ready, and follow Mason and me down, and then spring out after we've met this Grell boulder. Then we'll hustle him to the school—pretending to be genial—and we'll show him off to all the fellows. It'll be the joke of the term."

"Rather!" grinned Fullwood. "We'll rag him, too. I don't see why we should put up with Mason's rotten relatives at St. Frank's. He's had enough himself, but we don't want his whole beastly family. They'll be all trotting down here if we don't give this uncle a lesson!"

Pitt nodded.

"There's no time to waste," he said. "You chaps had better slip out of the window into the Triangle and wait there until you see Mason and me go out. Nabby? I'll pop along and find Mason and break the news to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll have the time of our lives to-night!"

"And so will Mason's uncle!" grinned Gully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt left the study and passed along the passage. He entered his own study, and found Mason there, buried in his books. The new boy looked up with a cheerful smile on his face. He little guessed the mean trick

which Pitt was anxious to play upon him. But he soon received a hint.

"Hallo! Coming to do your prep.?" he asked.

"Not just now," replied the Serpent easily. "I came for you, Mason. You're wanted by somebody in the lane."

Mason looked at his companion wonderingly.

"Who on earth can want me in the lane?"

"Well, it's rather a delicate matter," said Pitt mysteriously. "I don't want to give you a shock, old man, but you'd better prepare yourself for a surprise. You'll be overjoyed when you hear the news. You're not liable to faint, I suppose?"

"I don't know what you're getting at," said Jack quietly.

"Well, the truth is, there's a relative of your father's anxious to see you," explained Pitt. "Does that give you a hint?"

Jack Mason started.

"You don't mean——" he began. "You can't mean that my aunt has come to St. Frank's? Oh, but she wouldn't!" he added.

Pitt chuckled.

"No, not your aunt, but you're near the mark," he replied. "You see, I'm breaking it gently. It's somebody of the same nature, so to speak. Can't you guess now?"

"I think you're very silly!" said Jack, in his straight way.

"Thanks! But as it happens, I'm not a bit silly," was Pitt's reply. "And as you're so dense, I'll bring it out bluntly." Your uncle, Mr. Grell, is waiting to see you against the old stile. I've promised him that I'll take you down."

All Mason's wonderment left him.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, smiling.

And he went on with his work again with quiet unconcern. Pitt, feeling that his great news had fallen very flat, glared at his study chum.

"You don't seem to care much!" he said sharply.

"Don't you think you'd better try something else?" asked Jack. "You startled me for a moment, Pitt; but that story's not quite good enough. And I must say that it isn't in very good taste either."

"Don't you believe it?" roared Pitt.

"Of course I don't!"

Mason's smile was very irritating. Pitt had not thought of the possibility of this attitude, and he was rather nonplussed. If it had been a faked tale he wouldn't have been so taken aback. But it was true—actually true—and Mason wouldn't believe it!

"Of course you don't!" shouted Pitt, echoing Jack's words. "I tell you that Mr. Grell is waiting down the lane. I met him there, and he asked me to give you the tip. Do you believe that?"

"I'm not quite so silly," replied Jack.

He rose from his chair and strolled over to the window. It was getting dark outside, and Mason meant to pull down the blind before switching on the electric-light. But his attention was attracted towards a knot of

juniors who stood in the dusk a short distance away.

Mason looked at them casually—but his eyes gleamed.

For the fellows were Fullwood and Co. and several of their followers. They were all grinning and whispering together. Evidently some joke was afoot, and Jack needed only normal brain-power to put two and two together. He realised the truth in a second. Pitt was a decoy, and a jape was being prepared.

Jack pulled the blind down, and Pitt switched on the light.

"Well, are you coming, you disbelieving ass?" demanded the Serpent.

"No, thanks!"

"But your uncle's waiting!" roared Pitt, in exasperation.

"Look here, Pitt. I don't know why you are trying to fool me like this," said Jack quietly. "You've apparently forgotten what I told you the other day. My uncle is dead—so you can't expect me to credit that absurd story of yours."

Pitt nearly danced with annoyance.

"Haven't I told you that your uncle's alive?" he shouted. "I broke the news gently, and you won't believe it! Your silly uncle's waiting for you down the lane, and he asked me to fetch you—"

"Don't repeat it all over again," interrupted Mason. "If my uncle was actually alive he would come straight here, and I'm surprised at you attempting such a fat-headed trick on me."

Pitt began to realise that the whole thing did seem like a trick.

"I give you my solemn word of honour —" he began.

"Don't go too far with it!" interjected Jack curtly.

"Are you coming?" howled Pitt.

"No"

"All right! Take the consequences!"

And the Serpent flung himself out of the study and slammed the door. If he had had any doubts about the "jape" he had been about to perform, they vanished now. He was wild—and Pitt was at his worst when he was in a temper.

He found Fullwood and Co. waiting.

"That silly fool won't believe me!" growled Pitt savagely. "Says that his uncle's dead, and won't come. What do you think of that?"

"I expect he wants to think that his beastly uncle's dead," said Fullwood. "Well, I'll tell you what. You go down to this bargee chap, and tell him that Mason wants him to come up to the school. It will be all the better, really, because we can rag him thoroughly. By gad! We'll make Mason squirm!"

"Supposing Grell won't come?" demanded Pitt.

"He will," said Fullwood. "If he doesn't like the idea, though, we shall be on hand—and we'll jolly well yank him here. I'm beastly curious to see the frightful bounder."

"All right!" growled Pitt. "I'd better be going—I'm late, as it is."

And he hastened across the Triangle and passed out through the gateway. Fullwood and Co. followed leisurely. The stile was just round the bend, so the juniors could proceed almost openly down the lane without fear of being seen by the waiting Mr. Grell.

While this was going on I was telling my chums in Study C all about the arrival of Jack Mason's undesirable relative. They were rather concerned, and agreed that the matter ought to be kept secret—with regard to Grell's record, I mean. I had told Sir Montie and Tommy, because they could be trusted; moreover, the gov'nor had given me permission to let them into the secret.

Mason was hard at work in his study, and I naturally concluded that everything was O.K. I didn't know that Reginald Pitt was intent on bringing the disreputable uncle up to the school, in order to "show him off."

The Serpent found Mr. Simon Grell leaning against the stile in a somewhat savage mood. Captain Jim—to give him the name which the gov'nor had told me he was known by—had been thinking over things, and he wasn't altogether pleased. He was quite positive in his own mind that Nelson Lee had not recognised him, and so he was easy on that score.

Furthermore, Lee would be able to do nothing, even if he did recognise him. There was no actual proof against him now. At the same time it was decidedly disquieting to find that Nelson Lee was established at St. Frank's. Mr. Grell realised that his little game would not be quite so easy. And he was very anxious to see Jack Mason. He wanted quite a lot of questions answering.

Therefore when he saw Pitt coming down alone his temper wasn't improved.

"Where's my nephew?" he demanded roughly.

"The fact is," said Pitt, "Mason won't believe that you're here, and told me to bring you up to the school—just to prove that I was speaking the truth. So, if you'll come up, I'll lead you to his study."

Mr. Grell swore.

"What the thunder's the good o' that?" he snapped. "I want the boy here—d'ye understand? I want him here, an' if you don't go an' fetch him, I'll clip your ear!"

Pitt lost his good humour.

"You'd better not try it!" he retorted. "I've done the best I can for you, and this is all the thanks I get! I don't mind doing you a favour, but I like you to recognise it."

"Have you told anybody I'm here?" growled Captain Jim.

"No, not a soul!" said Pitt glibly.

It was a most unfortunate thing that Mr. Grell glanced up the road just then. For he caught sight of at least three heads, surmounted by school caps, peeping round the bend. Those heads belonged to Fullwood and Co., who were incautiously having a look on.

"You young liar!" roared Mr. Grell.

"Eh?" gasped Pitt. "What the dickens—"

"You've told all your sneakin' little pals!" shouted Grell. "You're tryin' to trick me, blame you!"

"Don't talk nonsense——"

"D'ye think I'm blind?" demanded Captain Jim hotly. "Look at them boys up the lane there! Why, I'll shake the life out of you for playin' this trick!"

Pitt backed away hastily, but not before Mr. Grell had grasped him angrily. And there was a look in the man's eyes which Pitt did not like.

"Here, leggo!" he yelled. "Rescue, Remove! Leggo!"

Pitt began to feel very sorry for himself. His scheme wasn't working out at all as he had planned. And he gritted his teeth as he realised that Fullwood and Co. were to blame—for allowing themselves to be seen.

"Yes, I'll let you go!" snarled Mr. Grell savagely. "Try to play games on me, would you? We'll see about that, young shaver!"

He cuffed Pitt right and left, and the boy was quite unable to withstand the onslaught. Fullwood and Co. had come into view now, but they stood there and looked on, without offering any assistance.

"Help!" bellowed Pitt.

His assailant realised that he would not do himself any good by continuing the assault, so he gave Pitt a final cuff and sent him flying backwards on to the grass bordering the lane.

Pitt went staggering back, and Mr. Grell strode down the lane in a savage mood. He took no notice of a wild yell which sounded behind him. If he had remained he would have had the extreme pleasure of seeing Pitt perform a feat which had not been reckoned upon.

The Serpent was unable to recover his balance by the time he reached the grass-border. He toppled over, rolled down a slope, and—squelch! He plumped with terrific force into the black mud at the bottom of the ditch.

The unfortunate junior went right in, for the mud was close upon two feet deep. Fullwood and Co. saw the disaster and came rushing up. They beheld a most remarkable sight.

A horrible black object staggered out of the ditch. Reginald Pitt was simply coated from head to foot with black, clinging mud. He was almost unrecognisable as a human being.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Fullwood. "What the dooce is it?"

"You rotters!" came a spluttering voice from the figure. "Why didn't you come to my rescue?"

"It's talkin'!" roared Gulliver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How are you feelin', Pitt?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you awful beasts——"

"It's no good blamin' us," said Fullwood. "It was your idea, anyhow, so what the dickens are you grumblin' at? It's a pity you made such a mess of it—an' such a mess of yourself. But we ain't to blame."

Fullwood and Co. roared again, and Pitt, gnashing his teeth, dashed in amongst the Nuts, squirting mud out like a dog which had just emerged from a duck-pond, and succeeded in hugging Gulliver and Marriott. These two juniors were both in a shocking condition within ten seconds.

"Oh, you frightful cad!" howled Gulliver. "I'm smothered."

"Serve you right!" snapped Pitt. "You shouldn't laugh at me!"

He didn't wait for any more, but rushed up the lane at the double, hoping that he would be able to get into the Ancient House without being observed. Fullwood and Co., at least, did not feel like grinning any longer. The whole jape had been a most ghastly fiasco.

Pitt's hopes were in vain. He succeeded in reaching the lobby in perfect safety; but then he ran into Handforth and Co. Those three startled juniors stared at the apparition in dazed astonishment.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Handforth. "Look what's blown in!"

"Get out of my way!" hissed Pitt furiously.

"It's Pitt!" roared McClure. "Ha, ha, ha! Who's been treating you to a mud bath, Pitty?"

"You'll have the whole Remove down here if you cackle like that!" gasped Pitt. "Can't you let me pass, you blighters?"

He charged at the trio, and they scattered wildly. But the commotion had already brought other fellows out of their studies. The unfortunate Serpent was obliged to run the gauntlet of dozens of pairs of eyes, and by the time he reached the bathroom half the House knew of the affair.

By great good luck, however, not a single prefect arrived in time to discover what was in the wind, and the Sixth-Formers did not think of looking into the bathroom. This was extremely lucky for Pitt, for he would have had some difficulty in accounting for his condition.

Sir Montie and I had seen him, and we were quite puzzled. But we both agreed that Pitt had probably deserved the mud-ducking. At all events, Reginald Pitt did not receive much sympathy from the Remove.

He stripped himself completely, bathed, and dressed in a complete new rig. After that it was necessary to remove the traces in the bathroom. But Pitt was now feeling better and was capable of reasoning.

When he finally descended to the Remove passage he took no notice of the inquiries which were fired at him from all quarters. He marched straight into Study E, and found it empty.

The Serpent flung himself into a chair, and

laughed. This was just like Pitt. He was a fellow of queer moods.

"Well, that was a nice jape—I don't think!" he muttered. "It only shows that it's a fatheaded thing to be too sure. I wanted to get Mason into trouble, and only got it in the neck myself!"

He suddenly rose to his feet and glared at his reflection in the mirror.

"I'll tell you what," he exclaimed, addressing his image. "That was a beastly cadish thing to do, and I'm hanged if you didn't deserve that ducking!"

It was rather remarkable that Pitt should recognise his own fault in this manner. But it conclusively proved that he was no longer in that state of mind which failed to recognise the difference between right and wrong. He knew that he had been a cad—and he admitted it.

"And, what's more," he went on, "you're a silly fool not to take more notice of what Mason tells you. He's a straight chap, and

you're as crooked as a hairpin! You'd better straighten yourself out a bit!"

And, having given his reflection that sound advice, he sat down in an armchair and proceeded to light a cigarette. This was, indeed, a striking contradiction. But Reginald Pitt was coming round.

It was a slow process, and it was quite on the cards that he would become worse before getting better; the disease had to run its course. But there was a sign of improvement within a minute.

For the Serpent took the cigarette out of his mouth, looked at it, and then flung it into the fire.

After that he drew his chair to the table, settled himself to his prep., and dismissed all other thoughts.

As for what happened to Jack Mason, in consequence of his uncle's appearance in the neighbourhood, that is quite another episode. Mr. Simon Grell was on the spot, and there was every sign that some stirring times were ahead.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY,

UNDER THE TITLE OF

"The Golden Locket!"

Is another magnificent Yarn concerning the Boy from Bermondsey, whose past seems to be shrouded in mystery.

Remember the Title:

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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, which gets cast adrift. Later on Grainger, the Captain, sees Challis at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven. Meanwhile Basil suspects Myers of casting the punt adrift, since he found a coin belonging to him near the spot. Unsuspectingly he puts the coin in a drawer in his cubicle. It vanishes, and Basil suspects Myers. The next day the match between the eleven and the sixteen takes place. Challis plays a splendid innings, but Ponsonby foolishly gets in the way of a hard drive, and is laid out. He is taken to bed, and a lot of the boys turn against Challis. Ponsonby himself becomes very friendly towards Challis.

*(Now read on.)***JOHN CHALLIS MAKES GOOD.**

PONSONBY was better. The doctor had pronounced him out of danger, and he was allowed to leave his bed. In a day or two he would be about again. Such was the news that fled like wildfire through the school. And there was more besides, more that chagrined Myers and those of Challis's enemies who had never a good word to say of him, and had counted upon his being sent down; it was that Ponsonby and the cad were as thick as thieves. Why, Challis was doing his lessons in Ponsonby's room, spending some of his time reading to him, and that young idiot of a Basil was helping to lag for them both.

Was there ever such rot known at Littleminster?

The Fifth were taken aback at the turn events had taken.

Mr. Evans showed the cad marked favour. Grainger had been seen walking with him arm-in-arm, and in the notice that stated that the trial match would be replayed the

following Saturday, Challis's name figured once more.

Myers made no attempt to conceal his disgust.

"Things are coming to a fine pass," he said to Chalfont after school one morning. "when we have that duffer forced on us like this. I saw nothing in his batting to make a fuss about. All his hits were beastly flukes. I've a good mind not to play."

"You can please yourself about that, Myers," said a quiet voice behind him, and, turning, he saw the school captain standing at his side. "If you don't want to play I can easily get someone else to fill your place. Only let me know soon, that's all."

Chalfont grinned. There were moments when he felt he disliked Myers, and this was one of them.

"Oh," faltered the discomfited grumbler, "I didn't mean that exactly, Grainger. I'll play."

"All right. Only let me hear no more of these cowardly attacks on Challis. He's had a good deal to put up with, and has stood it like a man. His cricket was sound. That's why he's being given another trial. Ponsonby admits that the accident was his own fault, which no fair-minded critic would deny." And, turning on his heels, Grainger strode away.

Myers studied the list of names on the notice-board. Badger, of the Fifth, was put in Ponsonby's place—a steady all-round man without being a flyer. The teams promised well.

The rest of the boys, now that Ponsonby was better, began to discuss the prospects of the replay with enthusiasm. Challis's name was as often as ever on their lips, though they spoke of him in qualified terms.

He was making headway was Challis. He made more headway on the Saturday following, when the trial match was played out.

Round the pitch the schoolboys gathered, basking in the hot sunshine, most of them facing the keen breeze which swept across the ground.

Overhead was a blue sky, speckled with white cloud.

The masters Gray and Evans acted as umpires, as before. Basil, hovering about the pavilion, soon learned that the eleven had won the toss, and rushed out with the news.

A moment later Grainger, the captain, and Moreash came out to open the innings for the school.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

Myers and Chalfont were the bowlers for the sixteen.

The field spread out, and Vernon having placed his men well, it looked as if runs would be mighty hard to get.

But Grainger, as keen as ever, began to hit out from the start, and the runs came freely. Twenty-five were recorded in the first fifteen minutes, when it looked as if the batsmen were well set. But after Grainger had scored seven more, making his individual total twenty-three, he got under a loose ball of Chalfont's, and Griggs, running quickly in, held it.

Grainger, with a rueful laugh, ran straight for the pavilion. Bless you, he was every inch a sport was Grainger. He had made a mistake, and had paid for it, but he didn't really mind.

After that things began to mend for the sixteen, especially after Vernon took Myers off and put Griggs on to bowl in his place.

Into the full details of the game it is not necessary to go, but after some good batting and some very fair bowling the school were dismissed for a hundred and three—not at all a bad score.

The sixteen retired, and six minutes later began their innings with Vernon and Digby. Vernon was cautious, while Digby, lashing out at everything, hit a few boundaries before he was caught on the ropes by Moreash.

Myers was next in. He went to the wicket with a supercilious smile on his face.

"Look at him, the conceited ass! Thinks it'll be easy to score. He's always showing off!" yelled Basil to young Winter, of the Fourth, a particular pal of his. "But, you see, he won't stay long. My! Andrews is going to bowl!"

The field had crossed over, so that Myers had to stand up to the first ball of the crack fast bowler.

Andrews wanted a heap of playing sometimes, and there was something almost venomous in the way he sent his first ball down.

Myers had scraped and gardened at his crease until it had seemed he would never be ready to play. He lashed out at the ball, which seemed safely off the wicket, but it broke in a full couple of feet and sent his middle stump flying clean out of the ground.

"A duck! Myers has got a duck!" yelled Basil, dancing for joy, and that youth made his ignominious exit amid the jeers of the boys.

Chalfont was next man in, and having hit the ball full down the field for two, was clean bowled.

Three wickets were down for fifteen on the board, and still the rot went on.

Digby was the next to go, with four runs to his credit.

"Challis," said Vernon, "you'd better go in next and see what you can do. Beware of Andrews. He's in great form."

Challis, with a nod, donned the pads, and with flushed cheeks went to the wicket.

He did not stay long, batting for twenty minutes in all. But in that brief space of time he did some startling things.

A fine figure in his white flannels, keen of eye and determined to do well, he concentrated all his thoughts on his task.

Andrews' yorkers and fast, low balls had no terrors for him.

He sent the fast bowler three times to the boundary in one over, and the score began to move as if by magic.

Thirty-three he scored before he stepped out to hit at a loose ball of Moreash's, only to miss it completely, and click, the balls were whipped off in a trice.

But the cheer he received as he walked briskly back to the pavilion was worth it all, and when Vernon came to him with outstretched hand and cried, "Well played, Challis!" he felt proud indeed.

The sixteen made eighty-seven that innings, and on the school going in a second time, and declaring with the score at eighty for seven wickets, the sixteen played out time. Challis went in to open the innings, and was still playing when stumps were drawn. He had been handing out a cautious game, and his total read twenty-three not out.

The sixteen made fifty-one for six wickets. Myers, as before, claiming a duck. The honours of the game went to the eleven; but of all the individual performances, Challis's was declared to be the best. For not only had he batted well, but as a change bowler he had performed tolerably well, while in the field he was as good as the best of them.

"Challis," said Vernon, "you're a brick! It's an honour to me to tell you how much we have all misjudged you. And I'll let you into a secret. Now that Ponsonby looks like standing down from cricket for the rest of the term, Grainger is almost sure to give you his place in the school eleven."

Myers heard, and with darkening face muttered an oath beneath his breath.

"Grainger will choose Challis, will he?" he said to himself. "Well, we shall see! He won't if I can prevent it! We shall see!"

HOISTED.

It seemed that at last the fortunes of John Challis had undergone a change. The good impression his stout batting had made in the first trial match had been swept away by the unfortunate accident to Ponsonby; but his display in the second game, even though it had not saved his side, had won for him the approval of his captain, of most of the members of the school eleven, and of all fair-minded critics the school through.

Most of all it had won over Ponsonby.

John shrank from the expressions of goodwill which were uttered by the more generous of the boys, blushing hotly, like a timid girl.

The following morning he was astonished to receive a letter from the school captain.

"Dear Challis," it ran, "I have much pleasure in informing you that you have been unanimously chosen to fill the place in the

(Continued overleaf.)

school eleven left vacant by the accident to Ponsonby, and the committee cordially hope that you will find time to practise, and do as well for the school as you did for the next sixteen.—Yours very sincerely,

PERCY GRAINGER."

As he read the note a pleased smile flickered at the corners of the student's mouth. He put the letter in his pocket and resumed his labours with redoubled energy.

Meantime the notice announcing the captain's choice had been set upon the board, and many were the pairs of eyes that scanned it. It appeared to please most of the boys, to annoy a few, and to enrage at least one. The last was Myers.

"Grainger's almost as big a cad as Challis!" he growled. "He must be hard up to fall back on the likes of him. I wouldn't play for the team now even if I had the chance!"

"Sour grapes!" said a voice. "You know you'd never get one!"

Myers turned with a savage cry, and saw Basil Hood grinning at him.

The bigger boy had a heavy book in his hand, and forthwith shied it at the fag. Basil ducked, and, as luck would have it, Mr. Evans, who was passing through the hall, received the blow full in the face.

"Who threw that book?" he demanded, feeling the place, tears of agony welling into his eyes, for the sharp edge had cut.

Myers edged away, trying to screen himself behind the other boys who were gathered in front of the notice-board.

Too late! A weak, squeaky voice piped:

"It was Myers, sir!"

"Stand forward, Myers!" said the master, his eyebrows meeting together in a frown of anger.

Myers sulked a pace or two forward, and faced the master.

"There was a time," said Mr. Evans, eyeing him sternly, "when I held a high opinion of you, Myers. But I am sorry to say that during the last two terms you have given me cause to change my mind. Half the mischief in the house seems to be inspired by you. I will have something to say to you in school, later."

And he hurried away, Myers watching him aghast until he disappeared.

"Yah! Does your hand tingle, bully? Got any lemon-juice? Think he's going to have you hoisted, bully Myers?"

The taunts came from all around him, and, eyeing the boys savagely, the culprit slunk away, his fists clenched and anger raging in his heart.

Was it Basil Hood who taunted him? He could not be sure, but he believed so. Very well, he'd make the kid pay for it. Only let him wait, and then see!

Myers was silent during breakfast, and ate moodily.

In class he took his place with the rest, but barely had he done so when the master's voice called his name.

Myers walked up to where the master stood.

Instantly Mr. Evans's fingers closed about a thin and decidedly vicious-looking cane.

"Hold out your hand!" said he sternly.

Myers, as white as a sheet, obeyed. The master's hand was raised. "Swish!" the cane descended, but the boy drew his hand back so quickly that the blow missed and struck the master on the leg.

"Ah, that will do!" said Mr. Evans, and there was a hiss in his voice. "Chalfont, come here!"

Chalfont, once a true and particular chum of Myers, hurried up to the desk.

"Take off your coat and waistcoat, Myers!" commanded the master.

"But, sir, you don't mean to say that you're going to—"

"Did you hear me? Remove your things! Now, Chalfont, hoist him!"

Chalfont, with a flicker of a smile, turned his back, and, seizing Myers by the wrists, bent down so that the boy was lifted from the floor, the curve of his body offering a splendid target for Mr. Evans's blows.

Up rose the cane. "Swish!—swish!—swish!"

The cane rose and fell again and again.

"Oh! Ow! Oo! Huh! He! How! H'm! Hss! Ow! Oh! O-h-h-h-h!"

To the intense satisfaction of the majority of the boys Myers screamed and yelled until the schoolroom echoed with his cries.

The more he yelled, the more Mr. Evans thrashed him and the harder became the blows. Nor did Chalfont show the boy the least mercy.

He did not intend that Myers should escape, and held on to his wrists like grim death.

At last the master, with a grim smile, tossed the cane on to his desk.

"That will do," said he; and Chalfont let the cad down. "Now go to your place, Myers, and see if you can behave yourself better in the future."

Myers dropped to his feet, and, pulling on his coat and waistcoat, faced the master, livid with passion. His eyes blazed. His lips trembled with rage.

"You cad! You coward! You bullying cur!" he cried. "I'll tell Dr. Mason about this! I'll write to my father! I'll have you removed! Yes, I will!"

"You will write me out two hundred and fifty lines extra this afternoon!" said the master, pointing to the vacant seat. "Now go, before I punish you further!"

Myers scowling about him, and seeing none but grinning faces turned towards him, slunk away.

(To be continued.)