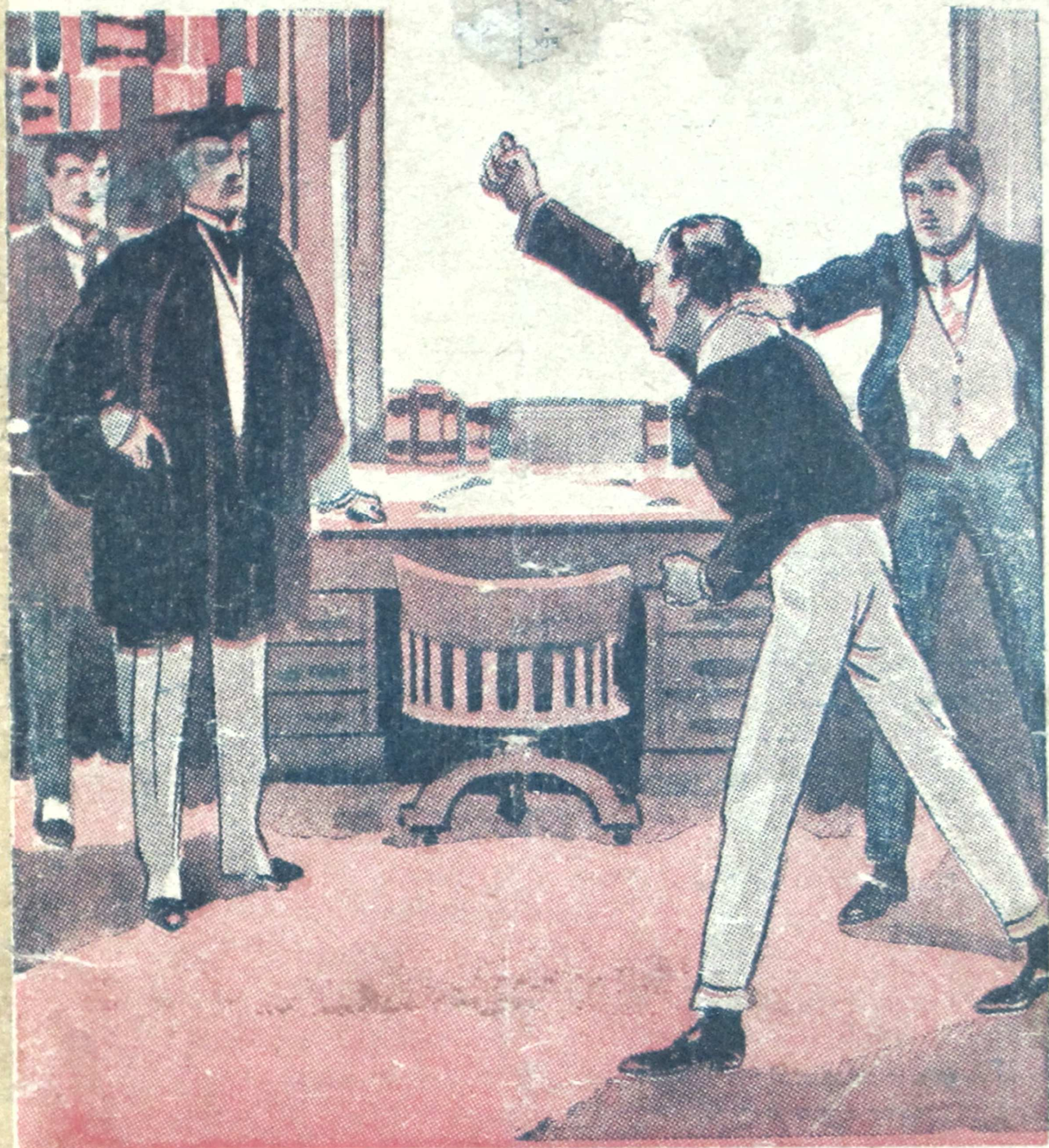


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# "Alexis the Mysterious."

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE STRANGER IN STUDY M.

"**A**ND if he says a thing like that to me again, I'll punch his skinny nose!" declared Handforth warmly. "The cheek of the cad!"

"But I don't understand, Handy," said Church.

"Neither do I," put in McClure.

Edward Oswald Handforth glared.

"Haven't I just told you?" he demanded wrathfully. "Haven't I just explained what took place in the passage a couple of minutes ago?"

"If you call that explaining, I don't," said McClure, picking up the teapot. "You charge in here, roaring something, and then you expect us to understand. Weren't you referring to the new chap?"

"Yes, I was, you prize ass!" snapped Handforth. "Move yourself, and let me sit down. Do you want all the giddy table?"

He gave McClure a shove, McClure gave a now, and the tea splashed all over Handforth's trousers.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Handforth violently. "Ow-yow! You—you clumsy fathead! I'm scalded frightfully. Ow! I'll—I'll——"

"Look out, you duffer!" gasped McClure, as Handforth rushed at him. "It was your fault! You pushed me just as I was pouring your tea out—Hi! Can't you be sensible?"

If Handforth hadn't been in pain he would have wiped McClure up on the spot. They were in Study D, in the Remove passage at St. Frank's, and tea was just on the point of being served.

Disturbances in Study D were the usual order of the day; nobody took any notice of them. Handforth had only been back from the famous summer-holiday yachting-trip for a week, but he was just the same. The rows in Study D were just as frequent. There was no alteration.

"You—you dummy!" said Handforth fiercely. "You clumsy lunatic! Look at my tracks! Clean on this morning, too!"

"Well, it wasn't my fault," exclaimed McClure. "Those white flannels certainly look a bit squiffy now, but that's your lookout. Don't make a fuss, for goodness' sake!"

Handforth sat down at the table.

"Yes," he said; "that chap ought to be kicked!"

"Who?" asked Church. "Alexis?"

"Yes, that's his dotty name—Titus Alexis!" sniffed Handforth. "What the dickens do we want chaps with names like that here for?"

"We don't want 'em," said Church. "They come. It isn't in our power to chuck chaps out of the school. If it was, I could see a few going immediately! Fullwood, for example, and Gulliver, and Bell, and Kenmore——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Handforth. "I was talking about that new kid in the Remove—Alexis. He's a greasy Greek, I believe. Greeks are all right, but a Greek kid ought to go to a Greek school. And for the cad to speak to me like that, too!"

"Like what?" asked McClure.

"Oh, I suppose I shall have to tell you again," said Handforth resignedly. "When I was coming along the passage just now, I turned the corner rather sharply, and that Greek boulder bumped into me——"

"You bumped into him, you mean?"

"What's the difference?" demanded Handforth. "We bumped into one another, if that suits you better. His toe got under my foot, and the way he howled was awful! Didn't you hear him?"

"We heard somebody yelling," said Church. "I'm not surprised, poor chap!"

"Eh?"

"You trod on my toe once, Handy," went on Church feelingly. "I felt it for a week afterwards. You can't help having big feet, of course—I—I mean—Here! Don't play the ox, Handy!"

"If you say I've got big feet, I'll empty your tea down your collar!" threatened Handforth. "I hardly touched this Alexis chap, and he howled frightfully. Then he flew round on me—just as I was saying



'sorry'—and called me a clumsy English pig! Me, you know!"

Church and McClure looked grim.

"The rotter!" said Church. "Didn't you slaughter him?"

"I didn't have a chance," replied Handforth. "He buzzed off like a streak of lightning. But I sha'n't touch him when I see him next time, although he deserves a licking for his nerve. But he's foreign, and he's a new kid. I'll give him a week to shake down, and then, if he slangs me like that, I'll make him see a thousand stars in one second!"

"But it's a bit thick for a foreign chap to come to an English school and call a fellow an English pig," said Church. "He ought to be punched, just to teach him manners. I don't like the beast, anyhow. He's too snakey for my liking. The way he talks to Crowell in the Form-room makes me sick."

The subject of Handforth and Co.'s discussion was at that moment standing in Study M. He was a new fellow in the Ancient House. He had arrived at St. Frank's only a few days earlier, at the beginning of the term.

His name was Titus Alexis, and he was undoubtedly a curious youth. Slim and elegant in attire, his appearance was spotless. His hair was coal-black, and his eyes were piercing.

De Valerie and the Duke of Somerton had not been at St. Frank's at the beginning of the term; they had belonged to the yachting-party, and it had been delayed, arriving two days after the term had commenced.

And De Valerie and Somerton were by no means pleased to find Titus Alexis in possession of their study when they arrived. But the new fellow had been placed there by Mr. Crowell himself, and objections were useless.

Alexis proved to be a queer customer to get on with. He seemed to be hostile, somehow, and both De Valerie and Somerton had failed to get on with him. He had a habit of clearing from the study as soon as they entered it.

But the original owners of Study M were genial youths. They liked to be on good terms—especially with a fellow who was with them throughout the term.

So they attempted to be friendly, and they overlooked many little irritating incidents. Alexis was not a nice fellow, and they knew it. But they wanted to make the best of him.

It had been Somerton's idea to provide a specially good spread for tea that evening. Hitherto, the Greek junior had taken his tea in Hall, but he had announced the fact that he would, in future, enjoy the meal in Study M. So De Valerie and Somerton splashed somewhat.

They had been very busy, and the table was looking wonderful. A clean cloth was spread upon it; some extra crockery had been borrowed for the occasion, and the dishes were filled with dainties of all descriptions.

It was certainly a fine spread.

But Alexis was eyeing it without favour. He had a small parcel in his hand, and he proceeded to push the plates back, and to turn up the tablecloth. Then he took two or three of the plates, and laid-out some food of his own.

Less than a minute later the genial Duke of Somerton sauntered in. He and De Valerie had been looking for Alexis for some minutes past. The duke smiled and nodded as he entered.

"So you're here, old chap," he remarked: "De Valerie and I have been looking for you. Never mind. You're here, and—By Jove! What's the idea of spoiling the appearance of the table?"

"I share the study," said Alexis. "I have a right to a third of the table. I have my third here."

Somerton stared mildly.

"But the table was set for all of us," he said. "This is the first time you're having tea in the study, so we've got something particularly decent. You're our guest for this evening. See the idea, old chap?"

"I do not wish for it," replied the Greek junior stonily.

"Eh?"

"I provide my own tea," said Alexis. "That is all. I do not want your food. You can eat it. I shall not interfere."

"But we've invited you—"

"I do not care," interrupted the new boy. "Your invitation is not welcome. You can invite your friends; but not me. I did not ask you to provide tea for me. That is enough."

Somerton nodded.

"You have a most delightful way of expressing yourself," he said calmly. "You're so wonderfully frank, by Jove! Don't you think it would be as well to decline the invitation with thanks? There's no real necessity to chuck it into my face, old chap. If you don't want to partake of our food—"

"I do not!" snapped Alexis. "Your food is not mine. I accept nothing from you—nothing whatever!"

"You'll probably accept a punch on the nose when De Valerie comes in," said the Duke smoothly. "He's not so amiable as I am, and if you talk to him like this you'll find yourself accepting all sorts of things!"

The Greek junior's eyes flashed.

"He would not dare to touch me—me!" he exclaimed. "You would not dare to touch me, Somerton. You think I would allow you—you, an English boy—to lay a finger on me? You make a big mistake!"

"Do you happen to be a god?" asked Somerton, who was keeping his temper well. "Am I so degraded and low—because I'm English—that I mustn't touch your august person? This is really frightfully interesting!"

"You sneer at me!" snarled Alexis. "But you will be careful! I will stand only a little insulting from you—an English pig-boy! I will not listen to many of your words!"



Somerton bit his lip.

"I'm an awfully hard chap to upset," he said calmly. "But when a fellow goes too far I generally start in earnest. I'd better remind you that you are of Greek nationality—you are a foreigner in this country—and you are at a British school. It is a shocking pity that you haven't the decency or the manners to treat your British schoolfellows with the respect they deserve—and require."

"You will say no more!" snapped Alexis. "I will no longer listen."

"I think you will," said Somerton quietly. "Just now you called me an 'English pig-boy.' Now, I don't mind a fellow calling me an ass, or a fathead, and I wouldn't object if he called me an idiot. But I draw the line at 'pig-boy,' especially when it is uttered in a tone of stinging contempt. You'll apologise to me within a minute, Alexis, or receive a hiding. You can choose."

The Greek junior shrugged his shoulders.

"I speak what I think," he said. "You are an English pig-boy. You are one of the nation of braggarts and boasters—the nation of treacherous criminals. All the English are pigs and—"

"That's about enough, you insulting cad!" said Somerton angrily. "You must be mad to come to this school with such ideas. I'll try to knock a few of them out of you. Put up your hands!"

"I refuse——"

Smack!

The duke's hand came into contact with Alexis's cheek with a resounding smack. The Greek junior leapt to his feet, his dark eyes blazing.

"You will suffer for that, you sewer-rat!" he shouted fiercely.

"By Jove!" said Somerton. "That's rather worse than a 'pig-boy'! I'm going to punch your nose, and I'm going to blacken your eyes. Up with your hands—unless you want to take the licking lying down!"

The duke was really angry now—and he certainly had excellent cause to be angry. He had been insulted in the most outrageous fashion, and he was bent upon making Alexis realise that he could not use his tongue exactly as he liked.

Crash!

Somerton's fist hammered into Alexis's face. The Greek staggered back, gave a low cry, and hurled himself forward. He simply sprang at the duke, kicking and clawing with all his strength.

Somerton was not quite prepared for it.

The Greek's feet beat against his shins, and his finger-nails dug into his neck viciously. The fellow was like a wild-cat.

"You—you cur!" gasped the duke.

He exerted all his strength, and Alexis was flung aside. Again Somerton punched, and this time his fist crashed upon the other junior's nose. Alexis toppled back, and he clutched at the table.

His fingers encountered a table-knife, and a fierce light entered his eyes as he gripped it.

"Now!" he panted. "You will pay—you dog—you pig-dog!"

The knife flashed aloft.

"Drop that!" shouted Somerton sharply. "You madman! Do you want to injure me with that knife——"

Slash!

The knife shot down in a deadly fashion, and it would have pierced Somerton's shoulder if he had not dodged. And, in dodging, his foot slipped, and for an awful moment his back was towards Alexis.

"Ah!" hissed the Greek.

The knife was again raised, and heaven only knows what would have happened to the duke if the door had not opened at that moment. Cecil De Valerie entered, grinning cheerfully.

"What the——"

De Valerie paused. His expression changed, and he looked amazed, horrified, and furious. Then, with one swift movement, he grasped the Greek's wrist, and forced the knife out of his grasp.

"What's this?" rapped out De Valerie. "A game? It's a bit too dangerous!"

"Thanks, old chap!" said Somerton huskily. "He was going to stick that knife into me—I missed it once by dodging! The murderous hound! He ought to be put into a strait-jacket!"

Alexis sat down in a chair, breathing heavily.

"It is over," he said. "I lost my temper, but you compelled me."

"You ought to be kicked!" said De Valerie angrily. "Good heavens! You don't mean to say that Alexis was really trying to stab you, Somerton? I thought it was just make-believe!"

"He meant it," said the duke quietly.

De Valerie was horrified.

"We can't let a thing like this pass," he said. "You'd better hurry along to the Head, Sommy——"

"I don't want to sneak."

"It wouldn't be sneaking," said De Valerie. "Great Scott! We might be stabbed at any time if this chap is like that! He ought to be sent away—he's dangerous! How did it start?"

"I invited him to tea," replied Somerton. "He rejected the offer with about as much contempt as he could manage. I stood that, but when he called me an 'English pig-boy' I thought it about time to start doing something!"

"I eat my own meals," said Alexis fiercely. "I want nothing from you—nothing! You understand? It was a mistake to take that knife, but I was excited. I regret the incident. That is enough."

"Is it enough?" said De Valerie grimly.

"I'm not so sure about it!"

"Oh, let it drop," said the duke. "He's apologised, in a way. And I suppose he's an excitable beggar. We shall have to be careful, that's all. We mustn't start punching him when there are knives about."

Alexis smiled sneeringly, and left the study.



"I don't like it," said De Valerie slowly. "That chap makes me feel uneasy. There's something so jolly mysterious about him. He hates us, old man—he hates everybody in the school, I believe."

"It is strange why he came," remarked Somerton. "But I'm not going to worry about the beastly spiffire. Thanks awfully for saving me, old chap."

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "I didn't know I was saving you. I thought Alexis was playing a joke, and as it seemed dangerous I jumped on him. I'm blessed if I quite believe that he was serious, even now."

"I think he went mad for a minute," said Somerton. "He hardly knew what he was doing. These Greek chaps are terribly excitable, you know, and they have frightful tempers. But Alexis seems to be an unusual specimen."

De Valerie nodded grimly.

"Well, we'll let this affair drop," he exclaimed. "But if Alexis tries any more of his murderous games I shall go to Mr. Lee, or to the Head. The fellow seems to be positively dangerous."

And Titus Alexis was dangerous!

## CHAPTER II.

### MAKING AN ENEMY.

"WHY that worried brow, fair youth?" The Duke of Somerton turned as I addressed him. Tea had been over for some little time, and I was just sauntering out into the Triangle, en route for Little Side. My study chums, Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, were with me.

"By Jove!" said Somerton mildly. "Was I looking worried?"

"You were," I replied, "and you are now, as a matter of fact. Has anything occurred to upset the balmy tranquility of your mighty mind?"

The duke grinned.

"As a matter of fact, old chap, something has happened," he exclaimed. "But it's nothing much, and I'd rather not explain, if you don't mind. But to be insulted by a new kid— But we'll say no more."

"I think you've said enough," I chuckled. "So Alexis is the cause of the wrinkled brow? I don't wonder at it. He seems to be a queer kind of proposition, by all that I can see—and I haven't had much to do with him, either. If your hair begins to turn grey, we shall know the cause."

Somerton smiled, and walked on.

"I'm frightfully afraid that there is trouble in Study M," observed Sir Montie, shaking his head. "Alexis has got into trouble with a good many fellows, I believe—mainly through snappin' at them—so it stands to reason that he must be a shockin' trial to his own study-mates."

"Oh, let him alone," said Watson. "He's a new kid, and he's foreign. He doesn't

understand our giddy ways yet. Before long he'll understand how things go, and I expect he'll settle down."

We strolled across the Triangle in the direction of Little Side, and I noticed that the object of our discussion was standing beneath one of the elms, glaring moodily across at nothing particular.

Titus Alexis did not seem to be very happy at St. Frank's. But, if it comes to that, all new boys were unhappy until they had shaken themselves down.

I also noticed that two shining members of the Third Form were amusing themselves with an aged cricket-bat and a still more aged ball. They were Heath and Lemon, and they appeared to be highly interested in their occupation.

Heath had the bat, and he struck hard as Lemon tossed him the ball. It whizzed away, and I gave a start as I noticed the direction it was taking.

"Hi! Look out, Alexis!" I yelled.

The Greek junior did not turn; he took no notice of me at all. And the cricket-ball struck him fairly on the chest—not with any particular force, and he was not at all hurt.

But the expression of fury which came into his face was rather startling. He glared round, flushed and quivering.

"Sorry!" shouted Heath, grinning. "This way, please!"

My chums and I were walking along during this little incident, but we paused as Alexis picked up the ball. There was something about his attitude which caused us to halt. He looked really murderous.

"You little rats!" he shouted. "Here is your ball!"

He hurled it with all his strength, and it was easy to see that he had deliberately aimed it at Chubby Heath. The fag was not expecting any such move, and he had no time even to dodge.

Crash!

The hard cricket-ball struck him on the head, and Heath sank to the ground with a low moan.

"You will not throw balls at me again!" exclaimed Alexis fiercely. "You understand? If you are hurt, all the better!"

Lemon looked as pale as death.

"Oh! You've killed him!" he screamed. "You've killed him!"

Heath lay upon the ground, still and silent.

"Begad! What a frightful ruffian!" exclaimed Sir Montie, his eyes flashing behind his pince-nez. "He threw that cricket-ball deliberately at Heath's head! He ought to be put in prison——"

"He's going to be knocked down!" I said grimly.

I was simply boiling with rage. The exhibition of violent temper had aroused me to fever-heat, and I rushed across to the spot where Alexis was standing. Watson and Sir Montie hastened to the side of the fallen fag.

"You cad!" I exclaimed hotly.

The Greek junior turned on me with baleful eyes,



"It is not your business," he muttered. "You will not interfere. I will stand no nonsense from——"

Smash!

My fist shot out, and it landed fairly between Alexis's eyes. He gave a tremendous howl, and measured his length in the Triangle. But he was on his feet again in a second, and he sprang at me with the fury of a wild beast.

"So that's the game, is it?" I said sharply. "Look out, you fool! Keep your finger-nails out of my eyes! Why, confound you, I'll soon put a stop to that game, you cur!"

I was in earnest now, and I hit out with all my strength. Alexis received three powerful blows, and again he went over.

"Nipper!"

I turned, panting, and saw Nelson Lee striding rapidly towards me. As the House-master of the Ancient House, it was the gov'nor's duty, of course, to punish me if I broke any of the school rules. I had certainly broken one now, for it was strictly forbidden to indulge in fighting in the Triangle.

"Yes, sir?" I said respectfully.

"What is the meaning of this, Nipper?" said Nelson Lee, in a stern voice. "How dare you make such a disgraceful scene as this in public? Good gracious! Alexis is in a terrible condition!"

I looked at the Greek junior, and nodded.

"Yes, he does look a bit groggy," I said, with much satisfaction.

Titus Alexis stood near by, his nose streaming with blood, his left eye rapidly closing, and with his lip cut. He was smothered with dust from head to foot, and he was decidedly a wreck. I was scarcely touched.

"You will attend in my study immediately, Nipper," said Nelson Lee angrily. "I have half a mind to take you before the Headmaster."

"Yes, sir," I said meekly.

"This is the first occasion on which you have forgotten yourself to such a disgraceful extent," went on the gov'nor. "I shall cane you severely, and impose a heavy imposition——"

"That is not enough!" interrupted Alexis savagely. "He must be flogged—I insist! Nipper must be flogged until he begs for mercy——"

"Silence, Alexis!" said Nelson Lee.

"I will not be silent! I have a right to speak——"

"One more word, my boy, and I will cane you, too!" said the gov'nor sharply. "I have not the slightest doubt that you provoked Nipper before he struck you; but that does not concern me. Nipper has no right to——"

Somebody was tugging at the gov'nor's sleeve, and he paused and looked round. Lemon was there, still pale and panting breathlessly.

"Well, my boy?"

"Can—can you come over to Heath, sir?" asked Lemon, with a gulp. "I—I believe he's dead!"

"Dead!" ejaculated Lee. "What nonsense are you talking?"

"It's not nonsense, sir—it's true!" wailed Lemon despairingly. "Heath won't say a word, and he's got a terrible bruise on his head!"

Nelson Lee was not a man to hesitate.

"I will attend to you later, Nipper," he said crisply. "Come, Lemon!"

They went off together, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie grabbed hold of me. They were both fairly excited.

"Why didn't you explain, you duffer?" said Tommy warmly.

"Begad! It wouldn't have been sneaking

"Mr. Lee will find out the truth soon enough, Montie," I broke in. "I don't mind much if I do get a caning, anyhow; I've made this cad's face look a bit silly! He ought to be horsewhipped!"

Alexis was standing alone, dabbing his nose and eye.

And, meanwhile, Nelson Lee had walked over to the spot where a little crowd of scared fags and Removites had collected round the prostrate figure of Chubby Heath. They parted at once as Nelson Lee appeared.

"He's getting better now, sir," exclaimed Owen minor. "But it's a jolly good thing you came. I believe the poor chap was stunned."

Nelson Lee looked grave as he gazed down upon Heath. The latter was sitting up now, looking dazed and bewildered. He had a very ugly bruise almost in the middle of his forehead, and he was feeling it with much tenderness.

"Good gracious, Heath!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "What on earth have you been doing? How did you obtain that injury to your head?"

"A cricket-ball hit me, sir," said Heath weakly. "Oh, I do feel rotten, sir! My head's aching like a top, and I can't see things properly. I—I'm all dizzy——"

"I don't wonder at it, Heath," said Lee. "Let me see."

He bent down, and examined the bruise.

"Yes, it is rather severe, but you need not be alarmed," he exclaimed, after a moment or two. "An ugly bruise, Heath. You must tell me how the accident occurred, for I suspect that it was due to some act of gross carelessness on the part of your school-fellows."

"Carelessness!" snorted Lemon. "It was done deliberately, sir!"

Nelson Lee looked somewhat startled.

"That statement can scarcely be correct, Lemon," he said. "I cannot believe that any boy would deliberately injure another boy in this fashion."

"But it's true, sir!" exclaimed Owen. "That foreign beast——" He paused.

"Well, Owen?" hinted Lee.

"I—I don't want to sneak, sir——"

"Dash it all, it's not sneaking in a case like this!" broke in Lemon. "It was Alexis, sir. Heath and I were having a bit of a game, and the ball happened to hit that Greek chap—only a light touch. And the



vindictive least throw it with all his strength at Heath's head."

Nelson Lee looked stern.

"Is this true, Lemon?" he asked sharply.

"If you are exaggerating——"

"He's not, sir," said Heath weakly.

"Alexis did chuck the ball at me. Nipper saw it, and he knows."

"We all saw it, sir," said many voices.

"It wasn't an accident, sir!"

"It was deliberate!"

"The chap ought to be kicked out of the school!"

Nelson Lee helped Heath to his feet. The lag was not hurt half so seriously as the other juniors had at first believed. Within an hour or two he would probably be as lively as ever. But he certainly had a very ugly bruise on his forehead, and he was pale.

"You think you will be all right now, Heath?" asked Lee gently.

"I—I think so, sir."

"Perhaps you'd better go to the matron," went on the Housemaster, in a kindly voice.

"She will bandage your head——"

"Not likely, sir!" said Heath. "I don't want to go about looking like a—wounded soldier! I shall be all right before long, sir."

Heath walked off, with a crowd of lags round him. And Nelson Lee turned and came back to the spot where I was waiting with my chums. The gov'nor regarded me without anger.

"Tell me exactly what happened, Nipper," he said quietly.

"But you know, sir," I said.

"Did Alexis throw that ball deliberately at Heath?"

"Yes, sir, he did!" broke in Watson. "We all saw it. Nipper went for him, as he deserved. And if Nipper hadn't gone for him, I should have wiped him up! And I don't mind if you give me a hundred lines for saying so, sir!" added Watson breathlessly.

"I shall give you no lines, Watson," said the gov'nor, "and I shall not punish you, Nipper. It seems to me that you were fully justified in knocking Alexis down. You were provoked, and I cannot blame you for losing your temper." Nelson Lee turned. "Alexis?" he said sharply.

The Greek junior did not even look round; on the contrary, he walked away.

"Come here, Alexis!" ordered Lee grimly. Still the new boy took no notice.

"The idiot!" exclaimed Dr. Valeric. "He's asking for trouble!"

Nelson Lee strode after Alexis and grasped him by the shoulder.

"Did you hear me, boy?" he rapped out.

"Yes, I did!" snarled Alexis. "I will take no notice!"

"Indeed!" snapped Nelson Lee. "You appear to forget, Alexis, that I am your Housemaster, and that it is your duty to obey me. You may be strange to this school, but you are fully aware of the rules——"

"I will not be touched by you!" shouted

Alexis, shaking himself free from the Housemaster's grasp. "I am injured! That dog of a boy assaulted me——"

"Silence!" thundered Nelson Lee.

"I will not be silent!"

"For this insubordination, Alexis, and for your vicious action in hurling a cricket-ball at Heath, you shall be severely punished," said Lee grimly. "You will come with me to my study."

Alexis quivered with rage.

"I will not come!" he yelled. "I wish I had hurt the little brat more—I wish I had thrown the ball harder! He hit me, and I hit him. What is the difference? Why should I be punished? I will not come!"

"I think you are mistaken," said Nelson Lee sternly.

He fairly lifted Alexis off his feet, and sent him hurrying towards the Ancient House. The Greek junior screamed and shouted, and all the fellows who were watching could feel nothing but contempt for the enraged boy.

He was forced along the passages until, at length, he arrived at Nelson Lee's study. He was pushed in, and Lee followed, closing the door after him. The Housemaster-detective was very incensed.

"I intend to thrash you!" he said. "You may count yourself lucky, for you deserve to be taken before Dr. Stafford—you deserve a flogging. But as you are new to the school, I will deal with this matter myself, by the administration of a caning. Hold out your hand!"

Alexis stamped his feet upon the floor.

"I will not hold out my hand!" he screamed.

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Lee.

Alexis looked about him wildly, picked up a book, and hurled it at Nelson Lee with all his strength. Lee dodged, and the book flew harmlessly past. The next moment the Greek junior was firmly in Lee's grasp.

"Now, Alexis, I will teach you a lesson!" panted the Housemaster.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

The cane rose and fell, and the dust came out of the yelling junior's clothing. He refused to receive a caning on his hands, so Nelson Lee was giving him the caning somewhere else.

The yells and shrieks could be heard half-way down the passage, and at length Nelson Lee flung the boy aside in sheer disgust. Alexis ran to the door, pale with fury and pain.

"You shall pay!" he snarled. "You shall pay!"

"Go!" ordered Nelson Lee curtly. "And if I have any more of your impertinence, Alexis, I will take you straight to the Headmaster."

Alexis opened his mouth to speak.

"Go!" thundered Nelson Lee.

The Greek junior was awed at last, and he was afraid to say another word. He opened the door, and passed out into the passage. He slammed the door violently, and strode down towards the lobby.



"I shall remember!" he shouted. "It was Nipper who caused all this—and Nipper shall suffer!"

"Don't talk out of your silly hat!" said Handforth, who was in the passage. "You yelling cad! You ought to be kicked!"

Alexis made no reply, but walked straight on. And all the fellows he passed stared at him with looks of absolute contempt. Sir Montie Tregellis-West was in the lobby, and he turned to me with a grave expression in his eyes.

"You must be careful, Nipper, old boy," he said quietly.

"Eh? Careful?" I said. "What for?"

"You have made a dangerous enemy."

"I'm not afraid of that Greek cad, if that's what you mean," I said lightly. "The chap is absolutely beneath the notice of any decent fellow. If he isn't kicked out of St. Frank's within a fortnight, I shall be surprised!"

Sir Montie looked troubled.

"A lot can happen in a fortnight, dear old boy," he said. "Alexis is dangerous, begad! He is, really! An' you'll have to be frightfully careful, an' keep your eyes open all the time."

I grinned.

"I can look after myself, thanks," I said. "Don't you worry."

### CHAPTER III.

#### STRANGE BEHAVIOUR.

**T**ITUS ALEXIS remained to himself during the rest of the evening.

He couldn't very well do anything else, because most of the fellows barred him completely. He had never been popular, and when the news got round of his vicious action in the Triangle he was avoided more than ever.

But, in addition to this, he made himself scarce. He was not even in Study M during the whole of the evening. Somerton and De Valerie saw nothing of their strange study-mate.

It was clear, in fact, that he prowled about in the open, alone. Alexis was rather mysterious in his habits and ways, and the fellows hardly knew what to make of him. He was a very queer character.

When bed-time came, however, Alexis went up to the dormitory with the rest of the Remove. I had an idea that the juniors would rag him, and aggravate him further; but it wasn't my business, and I said nothing. We certainly didn't want a terrific row in the dormitory.

But Alexis was allowed to go his own sweet way, except for a few hostile glares, and one or two muttered remarks of contempt. The most prominent glare of all was that which Handforth bestowed upon the new boy.

McClure nudged his chief rather forcibly.

"Better go easy, Handy," he murmured.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "What have I got to go easy for?"

"That new kid——"

"Confound the new kid!" said Handforth promptly.

"Yes, but we don't want to have a giddy scene up here," said McClure. "You know what he's like; he'll fly at your face, like a cat, if you say half a word to him. He's no like a human being."

Handforth sniffed.

"I sha'n't interfere with him," he said. "I wouldn't soil my hands by touching the beast. He's no good, and it's my opinion that he ought to be kicked out of the school!"

Alexis was looking at Handforth with baleful eyes.

"Don't talk so loud!" whispered Church. "He can hear you."

"What do I care?" snapped Handforth. "I'm not ashamed of what I'm saying. You'd better dry up, Walter Church. It won't take me long to punch your nose if you start giving me any of your blessed advice!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

"All right—you asked for it!" said Handforth grimly.

He paused in his undressing, rolled up his shirt-sleeve, and made for Church with the obvious intention of punching his nose.

"Back me up, old man!" gasped Church.

McClure was near at hand, and the pair of them rather took the wind out of Handforth's sails by charging at him before he could charge at them. They bumped into him with great force, and Handforth reeled back.

"Why, you—you—— Yaroooh!" hooted Handforth.

He had fallen across my bed, and the noise he created was appalling. Everybody looked round, and Handforth was still roaring.

"Ow!" he howled. "Yow-ow!"

"What the dickens is the matter with you, you ass?" I demanded.

"Ow!"

"Shut up, you idiot!"

"Dry up, Handy!"

"The ass can't be hurt!" snapped Church. "We only just touched——"

"I'm stabbed!" gasped Handforth, struggling off my bed with his face screwed up with pain. "Yow! I'm wounded!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" I said sharply. "How can you be wounded? My bed's soft enough, you duffer. I've slept in it enough times, and I ought to know. Don't make all that hullabaloo!"

"Begad! It's frightful!" said Sir Montie severely.

Handforth, who already had his trousers half off, displayed a long scratch on his left thigh, just above the knee. It was bleeding, and our grins changed abruptly. Handforth was really hurt.

"That's queer!" I exclaimed. "How did you get that scratch, Handy?"

"Feel your rotten bed!" said Handforth huskily.

I went over to my bed, and a good many other fellows went with me. There was nothing unusual to be seen. I placed my



hand upon the quilt, but pulled it up again with much speed.

"Great Scott!" I muttered.

My hand had come into contact with a sharp spike, like the end of a needle. Bending closer, I could see the point projecting. And I saw three others, too. No wonder Handforth had made such a noise!

"Great pip!" exclaimed Owen major. "What the deuce can it mean?"

"Who could have put those pins in your bed?"

"My only hat! What a rotten trick!"

"Poor old Handy!"

Handforth was not badly hurt. He only had two scratches, and they were not severe. Still, he had been justified in howling. It was a piece of bad luck—for him—that he should have fallen upon my bed in that way. For me it was a piece of very good luck indeed.

"Thanks, Handy," I said grimly.

"What?" said Handforth, staring.

"I was just thanking you," I explained.

"What the merry dickens for?"

"For warning me," I replied. "If you hadn't fallen across my bed, I should have known nothing of those spikes, and I should have pulled the clothes back, and jumped into bed in my usual way. And those spikes would have injured me pretty badly. We'd better investigate."

"I should think so," exclaimed Pitt. "A thing like this isn't a joke—it's a criminal act! The culprit ought to be put in prison!" I pulled back the bedclothes, and we could then see that the spikes were sticking up almost in the centre of the bed, and projecting a quarter of an inch through the lower sheet. Feeling them, they seemed to be firmly embedded; and then I discovered that the spikes had been entered from below.

"They go right through the mattress!" I exclaimed in amazement. "So they couldn't have flattened down if all my weight went on to them. I might have been terribly gashed!"

"Begad! Rather!"

"But who could have done a filthy trick like this?" I asked.

"Fullwood!" snapped Handforth.

"That's a lie!" roared Fullwood. "I haven't touched the dashed bed!"

"We don't take your word, Fullwood—"

"I can't help that!" shouted Fullwood indignantly. "I don't exactly love Nipper, but I draw the line at doing a vicious trick of that sort! Hang it all, there's a limit!"

"Even for you," said Pitt.

"I think Fullwood is telling the truth this time," I said quietly. "In fact, these spikes couldn't have been inserted by any of the Nutty inhabitants of Study A. They're first-class cads, but I don't think they're capable of this kind of thing."

"That's very kind of you!" sneered Fullwood.

"If they didn't do it, who did?" demanded Handforth. "There's not another chap—"

By George!" he broke off abruptly. "I'll bet it was Alexis!"

"My only hat!"

"Handforth's guessed right!"

"That Greek bounder must have done this!"

"Did you fix these spikes in Nipper's bed, Alexis?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

Alexis scowled.

"I know nothing!" he exclaimed sullenly. "Leave me alone—I do not wish to speak with you. I know nothing. It is enough!"

"Oh, is it?" said Handforth. "We'll soon see about that! You threatened to do something to Nipper, and it's obvious—"

"We've got no proof, Handy," I broke in. "It's hardly fair to accuse a fellow upon mere suspicion. I haven't come to any harm, so it doesn't matter."

"Yes, but I've come to harm!" roared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to cackle!" snapped Edward Oswald. "These beastly scratches might get inflamed, and then I shall have blood-poison! It's quite on the cards that I shall peg out within a week!"

"What a relief!" murmured McClure.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Didn't you say it would be a relief?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"Well, blood-poisoning is painful," said McClure vaguely. "I—I— That is to say, you'll be relieved to peg out after a week of agony, Handy. You don't think I was suggesting that your death would be a relief to us?"

"It sounded like it!" growled Handforth.

"We wouldn't wish for anything like that, old man," said Pitt soothingly. "A month's illness wouldn't be so bad—anything to get you out of the way for a bit. The only time we get relief is when you're laid up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly fatheads!" sniffed Handforth.

I pulled the spikes out of my bed, and I noticed that Alexis had already got into his, and had snuggled right down. I was quite certain in my own mind that he was responsible for the cowardly trick.

I might have been nastily hurt by those spikes but for Handforth. There was not another fellow in the whole Remove who could have performed such a brutal act; we knew that Alexis was capable of it.

"The truth ought to be brought to light, you know," said De Valerie. "This is a serious thing, Nipper."

"Tremendously serious!" growled Handforth.

"Well, we can't do anything to-night," I said. "The best thing we can do is to let it drop—because I don't suppose we shall ever succeed in finding any positive proof."

The fellows soon tumbled into their beds, and I could hardly help grinning when I noticed that most of them gingerly felt the mattresses before venturing in. They didn't want to be caught.



But my bed was the only one which had been tampered with. It was a mysterious occurrence altogether, and it would be no good questioning Alexis. He would certainly deny all knowledge of the matter—in fact, he had done so already.

After lights out the juniors were soon sleeping. I dozed off, and was soon slumbering soundly.

But I'm generally a light sleeper, and any slight sound will awaken me. I suddenly found myself with my eyes wide open and alert, in the middle of the night. I didn't know what the time was, and I didn't know why I had been aroused. But I was certain that something unusual had occurred.

The dormitory was dark and silent—silent, at all events, except for the steady breathing of its inmates. I lay for some little time with my eyes open, and I was about to close them again when a very slight sound near the door attracted my attention.

Somebody had just entered the dormitory. I guessed that Fullwood and Co. had been on a night trip to the White Hart—a not unusual occurrence. But only one form entered. Practically as it did so the moon emerged from behind some clouds, and a few weak streams of moonlight came into the dormitory.

The figure walked into the small patch of moonlight, and I instantly recognised who it was. Titus Alexis!

What he had been doing was more than I could imagine. It was not probable that he had been out gambling, and I observed that he was only half-dressed, with no collar and no vest.

And he did not immediately get back into bed. He stole quietly up and down the dormitory, and I was surprised to hear that he was muttering to himself under his breath—muttering in his own language.

The fellow's strange behaviour made me rather uneasy. He was undoubtedly the most extraordinary junior we had ever had in the Remove, and I told myself that I should be very pleased when he received the order of the boot—which, I felt convinced, would come before long.

Alexis continued his walk up and down the dormitory for fully ten minutes. Then he went to his bed, slipped between the sheets, and was soon breathing regularly. It wasn't long before I dropped off again, too.

And when the rising-bell rang out in the morning I rose, fresh and lively. I was generally the first fellow out of bed of a morning, but this time Pitt had the better of me.

"Beaten you, my son!" he said cheerfully. "I wouldn't be so energetic, only I want to clean my bike up before brekker—Hullo! Alexis has beaten all of us! He's up and gone!"

The Greek junior's bed was empty, and I guessed that he had arisen in advance of all the other boys in order to avoid the ordeal of dressing amongst them. Alexis hated everybody at St. Frank's like poison.

"He's a rummy sort of fish," I remarked, as I pulled my socks on. "I can't quite make him out. He was wandering about the dormitory in the middle of the night, jabbering to himself in his own lingo."

"Where did he come from, before he arrived at St. Frank's?" asked Somerton.

"A lunatic asylum, I should think!" said Pitt.

"Or else a reformatory," remarked Jack Grey.

"A reformatory is where he ought to go back to, then," said De Valerie grimly. "It's no good for a fellow of his sort to be at a public school."

"Leave it to time," I said. "We've had a few queer specimens at St. Frank's on different occasions, but Alexis takes the biscuit! Before long he'll take his hook, too. He'll be kicked out."

"And the sooner the better!" declared Handforth.

Nothing was seen of the new boy until breakfast-time, when he entered the dining-room. He was almost the last fellow to appear. He went to his place without looking at anybody, and he seemed to be oblivious of the many stares which were cast in his direction.

Titus Alexis had made a bad start—and, by all appearances, he was destined to make a bad finish!

## CHAPTER IV.

### PLOTTERS IN COUNCIL.

"CAN I speak to you?"

Titus Alexis asked that question, and it was addressed to Ralph Leslie Fullwood, who was just emerging from Study A, in the Remove passage. Fullwood paused, and stared at Alexis curiously.

"It seems to me that you are speakin' to me," he said. "Well, what do you want? Spit it out!"

Alexis bit his lip, but he made no hot retort, as Fullwood had half expected. To tell the truth, Fullwood was not at all anxious to hold any lengthy conversation with the Greek junior.

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were unprincipled young rascals, and they did not possess many scruples when it came to perpetrating a mean trick. But they had all agreed Alexis was a bit too wild for them. They were not at all anxious to get friendly with him.

"What I have to say must be said in private," exclaimed Alexis. "You agree? The matter is of importance—to you."

"Oh, is it?" said Fullwood. "Well, you can come into the study for a minute, if you like. But I'd better tell you plainly that I don't feel inclined to give you more than three minutes."

"It will be sufficient."

Fullwood turned back into Study A, and Gulliver and Bell, who were just getting



ready to clear the tea-things away, looked up with some surprise.

"What's the idea?" asked Gulliver.

"We don't want that chap in this study," said Bell bluntly.

"He's got a marvellous idea—a matter of importance," explained Fullwood. "So I'm giving him three minutes to explain it. If it's no good, we're goin' to kick him round the study."

"Well, that's somethin'," said Gulliver pleasantly.

"I'd better put my heavy boots on," added Bell.

Alexis scowled.

"This is foolish!" he snapped. "You are silly!"

"Are you lookin' for a thick ear?" demanded Gulliver warmly.

"Hah! You make me sick!" said Alexis angrily. "You English boys are all the same—you always speak of thick ears and black eyes, and noses that bleed! You are all for violence!"

"Well, you seem to be an expert in that respect," said Fullwood pointedly.

"I am not so clumsy," said Alexis. "We all dislike Nipper—eh?"

"That's agreed upon, certainly."

"We would all like to see him punished?"

"Yes."

"Then I have the idea."

"Oh, that's all right," said Fullwood. "If we want to have a go at Nipper, we can do without your help, thanks all the same. The door opens quite easily. Slide, will you? Buzz off!"

Alexis had an expression of surprise in his piercing eyes.

"I do not understand you," he said. "I wish to explain——"

"We don't want any explanations," said Fullwood. "Stickin' spikes into a fellow's back doesn't strike me as bein' a sensible idea for inflictin' punishment. It's too dashed risky, an' it's a bit rotten, too."

"I know nothing of the spikes," said Alexis firmly. "Why do you accuse me?"

"Because you're the only fellow who would think of a beastly trick of that sort," explained Fullwood. "Well, we won't continue the subject. As I said before, if we want to punish Nipper, we can do it without your help——"

"But you must listen," interrupted the Greek. "I insist. My idea is good. It is splendid. It is of the best."

"There's nothin' like modesty," murmured Bell.

"Oh, let him spout," said Gulliver. "What's the wheeze, anyhow?"

"I will tell you," said Alexis, sinking his voice. "My wish is to get Nipper where we shall have him alone. We dislike him—we hate him. It is time that he received punishment. If we can get him alone—and I have a simple idea for that—we can do with him exactly as we please."

"Stick spikes into him, for example?" sug-

gested Bell. "Or throw cricket-balls at his head?"

"You are always talking of nonsense!" snapped Alexis. "We need not do that; we need not harm the wretched dog. It will be sufficient if we perform what is called here a 'rag.' Eh? It will be easy."

Fullwood looked thoughtful.

"Will it?" he said. "Not so easy as you seem to imagine. Nipper isn't the kind of chap to be caught in a trap. He's got his wits about him—we must acknowledge that."

"Yes, rather," said Gulliver and Bell.

"He's the smartest chap in the Remove," went on Fullwood. "He'll smell a rat in a tick if we try any of our dodges—an' I don't suppose you can think of anythin' good enough to diddle him."

"My idea is simple——"

"Then it's hopeless," said Fullwood.

"I think not—I am sure it is not," declared Alexis. "It is so simple that it cannot fail to act. You will see. Nipper is smart—yes. If we attempted anything big he would smell the rat. But my idea is so simple, and so natural, that Nipper will not suspect."

"Oh, rot!"

"Listen!" said the new boy.

Fullwood & Co. did listen, and after Alexis had been talking for some little time they were inclined to alter their tone. Fullwood regarded the visitor with a little show of respect.

"Well, it's not so bad," he admitted.

"It is good!" snapped Alexis.

"Perhaps it is," acknowledged Fullwood. "It's quite a decent wheeze, in fact. An' it ought to work, too. As you say, it's so simple that it can't fail. An' we shall have Nipper in our hands, an' we can do as we like with him."

"I suggest glue," said Gulliver. "We've got a big tube of glue in the cupboard. An' there's plenty of paint out in the woodshed. I think we'd better freeze on to this idea, my sons."

"We will!" declared Fullwood.

And the Nuts of the Remove entered into the plot with enthusiasm. And they talked over the scheme until it was all cut and dried.

About two hours later, just as it was getting dusk, I happened to be crossing the Triangle. There was nobody about at the time. I was off into the College House, to have a chat with Bob Christine about the cricket. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie were doing their prep. in Study C.

It was rather gloomy out in the open, and there was a promise of rain in the air. The situation could not have been better for the little plot which was afoot.

I was half-way across the Triangle when I was brought to a standstill by a sudden roar of pain. It was loud, and it was immediately followed by a howl.

The sound was coming from the little belt of trees which hid the ruins of the monastery from the Triangle. And as I stood quite still I distinctly heard the shrill voice of a jag.



"Oh, you beast—you cad!" shouted the fag frantically. "I'll scream if you don't let me alone! Lemme go, you beast!"

"I will not let you go!" came another voice. "How do you like this?"

"Ow!" screamed the fag. "Ow-yow! You're killing me, you Greek rotter! Keep that knife away!"

"I will finish you, you English brat!" came the voice of Alexis.

I clenched my fists. It seemed quite clear to me that Alexis was playing some more of his tricks—he was acting in a brutal manner towards the fag. The Third-Former's voice was known to me. I recognised it as Fullerton's. This junior belonged to the College House, and he was one of the worst little rascals in the Third—indeed, the worst.

He would have been pally with Fullwood & Co. if they had allowed it; but their dignity was too great for them to allow a mere Third-Former into the circle of Nuts.

At the same time, I did not like to hear even Fullerton howling with pain. Titus Alexis was giving vent to his venom once more, and I simply could not walk on and leave the matter as it stood.

"Lemme alone, I tell you!" screamed Fullerton. "Oh, you cad—you—— Yow!"

"My hat!" I muttered. "I must see about this!"

I hurried to the trees, and as I broke through them I heard a loud gasp, a snarl, and then a sound of running footsteps. Fullerton had broken away, and was rushing towards the ruins.

I caught sight of him as he entered them, and Alexis was only just in his rear, rushing after him at full speed. The Greek junior was waving a knife in his hand, and my heart was in my mouth.

"That chap'll commit murder before he's done!" I panted.

I dashed into the ruins, but by that time they had both vanished, and I realised that Fullerton had fled down the circular staircase which led into the famous vault, far below the surface.

And Alexis, close in his rear, was descending, too!

Down in that vault, he would have the fag at his mercy, and I was filled with alarm. I did not waste a second, but pelted to the stairway, and commenced the descent.

As I did so I pulled out my electric torch, and flashed it on. This enabled me to make the descent more swiftly. But I was filled with alarm all the time. I knew how dangerous Alexis could be when he was really angry!

And he had looked terribly dangerous as he pelted after Fullerton! I could hardly think that he meant to use the knife he was brandishing. But he was such an excitable fellow that he was capable of plunging it home before he knew what he had done.

It's a wonder I didn't stumble and fall as I descended those ancient stairs. But somehow I negotiated them in safety, and at last

arrived at the bottom. I charged into the vault breathlessly.

"Good!" exclaimed a voice. "He's taken the bait!"

"On him!"

"Hold him tight!"

The next second, to my startled amazement, four forms emerged out of the darkness. The electric torch was snatched from me, and I was hurled to the ground. And then I realised the awful truth.

It was a trap—and I had fallen into it!

To say that I was furious would be putting it mildly. And I wasn't furious with the tricksters. I was enraged with myself, for having been caught napping so easily. But the harm was done.

I struggled in vain.

The odds were too many, and almost before a minute had passed my hands were bound and my ankles were secured. When this had been done several candles were lit, and I saw the grinning faces of Fullwood & Co. The Third-Former was grinning, too; but Alexis looked fierce and dangerous.

"What price that for a neat dodge?" chuckled Fullwood.

"You—you spoofing rotters!" I gasped.

"I did it well, didn't I?" grinned Fullerton. "I put those howls on especially for your benefit, Nipper. It was awfully obliging of you to come into the Triangle on your own."

"I'll pay you for this, my son!" I said grimly.

"Rats!" said Fullerton. "That ain't sporting, and we all know you're a sport. Just a little joke, you know—nothing more. It was this Greek chap's wheeze. Smart, ain't he?"

"Well, you'd better get on with what you're going to do," I said tartly. "I was a juggins to fall into the trap, and I deserve all that I'm going to receive. Get busy, and have it finished with."

"Certainly!" agreed Fullwood obligingly. "We've been waitin' for a chance like this for a long time, and now that it's come we're going to make the most of it. You won't know yourself when we've done with you!"

And somehow I felt that Fullwood was right!

## CHAPTER V.

GLUE, PAINT, AND A FEW OTHER THINGS!

THE nuts were looking very pleased with themselves, and I had no doubt that they had planned a particularly unpleasant ordeal for my benefit. Fullwood & Co. were not the fellows to take a large amount of trouble for nothing.

I had an idea that they meant to give me a tremendous licking; that was the type of punishment which appealed to them.

"Why don't you start?" I asked irritably.

"Have patience, fair youth, and you will soon be satisfied," said Fullwood, with a grin.

"We have to mix the stuff yet."



"Stuff?" I repeated.

"The mixture!" said Fullwood.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't know what the game was, but I soon found out. A large tube of glue was produced, and Fullwood drew on an ancient glove.

"I don't want to soil my hands, you know," he remarked. "This liquid glue is sticky stuff—glue generally is sticky——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right—grin!" I said sourly. "I'm blessed if I can see anything funny!"

"You wouldn't!" grinned Fullwood. "This glue is goin' to be spread over your hair; it's the finest lotion you could imagine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll make your hair grow like one o'clock," went on Fullwood. "And all these patent hair-creams you see advertised are completely outclassed by this stuff. This'll fix your hair amaz'n'ly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be so strongly fixed that you won't be able to do anythin' with it—until you've had about twenty baths," went on Ralph Leslie. "But that's your look-out. An' after the glue we shall start with the second course. "Oh, you're goin' through it properly this time!"

"You—you bounders!" I exclaimed. "If you put glue on my hair I'll half skin you when I get free!"

"Rats!" said Gulliver. "Didn't Handforth and a crowd of other fellows shove glue on Christine's hair the other week? You didn't say anythin' about that. An' we're just as entitled to work off a jape as anybody else is."

I could say nothing in response to that. Glueing a fellow's hair was not considered to be a vicious action; it was a joke—a joke, at all events, to everybody except to the unfortunate victim.

And I was rather surprised to find Fullwood & Co. were content to adopt such measures. I had expected them to be far more drastic—and I was almost sure that they would be, before they were finished.

"Come on, Bell," said Fullwood. "You can squeeze the giddy tube."

Bell was only too willing to oblige. He squeezed the big tube of liquid glue on to Fullwood's gloved hand. The sticky stuff was smeared all over my head, and rubbed into my hair.

I said nothing, for it wouldn't make matters better if I objected. But it would take me hours to get that glue out, and the scent of it would remain hovering about me for days.

"That's all right," said Fullwood at last. "What do you think of him now, Alexis? How does that suit you?"

"It is good," said the Greek junior. "But it is not enough. Oh, no! We must do much more yet. Much—much more!"

"Well, get it over, for goodness' sake!" I snapped. "You thoroughly understand,

don't you, that you'll have to suffer for this later on?"

"If you're goin' to sneak——"

"Oh, I shan't sneak—you know that," I replied. "But Study C will have something to say—and Study C will have something to do. All this will be returned with interest, my humorous youths!"

But Fullwood & Co. only chuckled.

Then a large paint-pot was produced, and a big brush. Fullwood stirred the paint round with great relish.

"You'd better shut your eyes an' your mouth," he advised. "We're goin' to convert you into a nigger. By the time we've finished, you'll look just terrific. The design alone is worth quids."

They proceeded to paint my face, and they did it thoroughly. I couldn't see myself, of course, but by the howls of laughter which arose I judged that I was looking extremely grotesque.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bell. "Ain't he a sight?"

"Paint some white rings round his eyes," chuckled Gulliver. "The paint will mix a bit, but that doesn't matter. Oh, my goodness! Won't the chaps roar when they see him?"

"An' they can't touch us, either!" grinned Fullwood. "This is just a usual rag. The whole Remove will be yelling!"

I could quite believe him. It was, as he said, a usual "rag." The fellows thought nothing of ruining clothes, and that sort of thing. I was rather at a loss to understand Fullwood's attitude. I had expected something far more violent than an ordinary ragging.

"There you are," said Fullwood at last. "How's that?"

"Ha, ha ha!" roared Bell. "Fine!"

"Rippin'!" grinned Gulliver.

"He's gorgeous!" said Fullerton. "Oh, it's worth quids!"

"It is good, but the wretch has not suffered!" said Alexis. "We must do more! We must punish this British beast——"

"Steady!" interjected Fullerton sharply. "I'm British, don't forget. You'd better not get cheeky, you foreign bounder! It wouldn't take us two ticks to paint you up like this!"

"Bah!" muttered Alexis. "It is not enough, I say!"

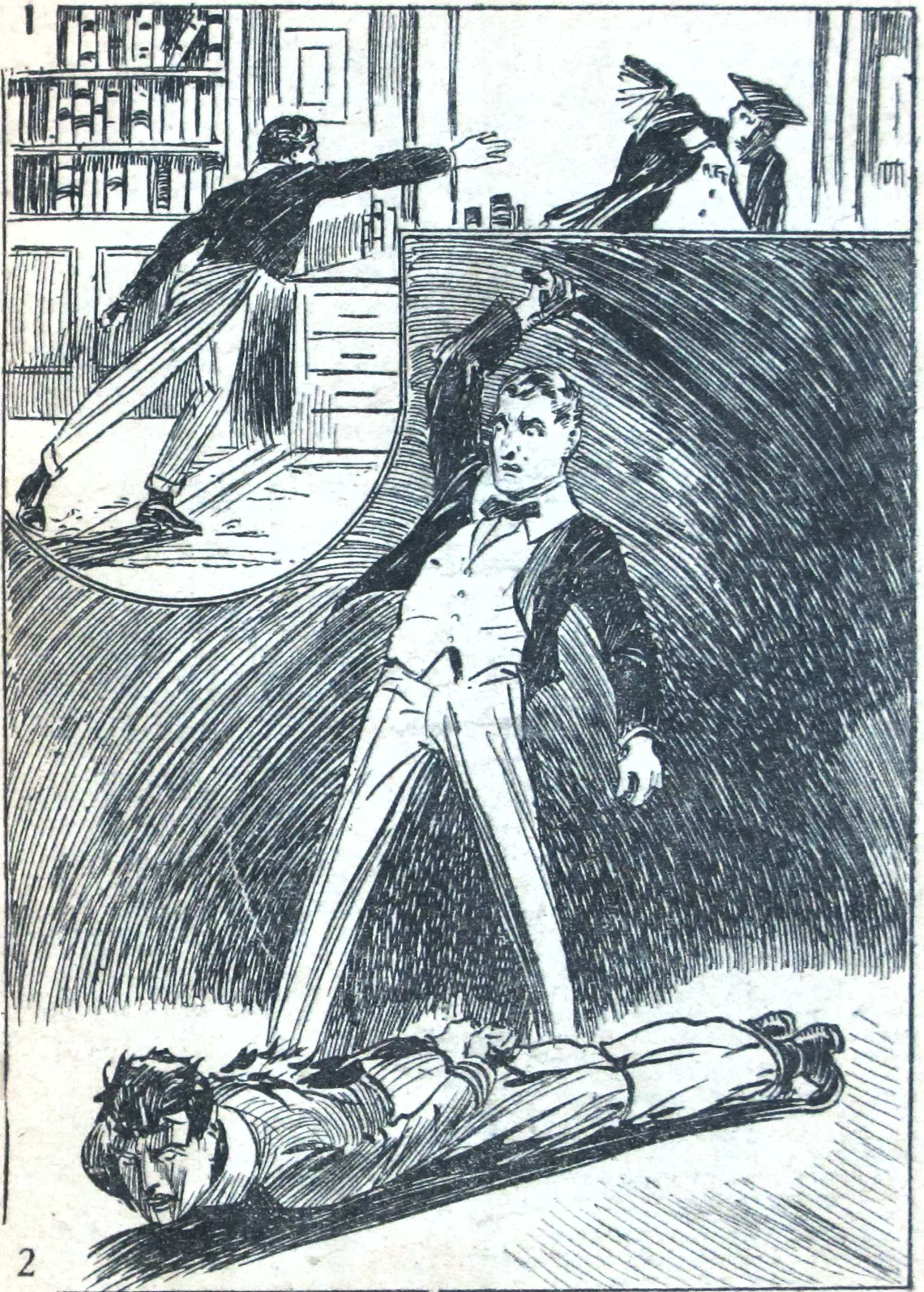
"Well, I don't feel inclined to do anythin' more," said Fullwood. "The chaps can't touch us for this, but if we do anythin' else they can touch us. The rotters would half skin us if they could, an' I'm not takin' any risks!"

"Rather not!" said Gulliver and Bell.

That, of course, was the secret of their moderation—they feared the consequences. Before they considered that I was quite finished, they propped me up upon an old box, and tied my feet round it. I couldn't move an inch—I was helpless.

Then my collar and tie were placed round my left leg, and several other small details were attended to.





1. Alexis picked up a book and hurled it at the House-master with all his strength.

2. "Scream, you fool—scream" shouted Alexis, as the cane fell on my shoulders with merciless fury.



"I reckon we can go now," said Fullwood. "Most of the crowd will be in the common-room, an' we shall just catch 'em. This idea of yours, Alexis, is worth a lot, an' we're pleased with you."

"I am flattered," sneered Alexis.

"An' so you ought to be," agreed Fullwood. "Ready, you chaps?"

"Yes."

"Then get a move on!"

"What about the candles?" asked Bell.

"We'll leave them burnin'," said Fullwood. "They're practically new, an' they'll last for an hour yet. The other chaps will be down within twenty minutes, an' they'll need plenty of light to see the colour effect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Nuts took their departure, and I heard them ascending the stone steps. Soon their footfalls died away, and all was quiet in the grim old vault. It was not a pleasant situation for me.

I was horribly uncomfortable. My head felt awful, smothered with liquid glue as it was. The glue was drying into my hair, and the sensation was not at all nice. I was sickened by the smell of paint, and I constantly got the wretched stuff into my mouth.

And I couldn't move. I had been bound so tightly that any attempt at escape was hopeless, unless I had had hours in front of me. But Fullwood & Co. meant to send a crowd of fellows down almost at once. So it would have been a sheer waste of energy for me to struggle with my bonds.

Meanwhile, the japers had reached the surface.

It was dark now, and the school was twinkling with scores of lights from the numerous windows. Fullwood & Co. made their way through the trees, and crossed the Triangle.

As they were entering the Ancient House, Fullwood looked round.

"Where's that Greek blighter?" he asked.

"Blessed if I know!" said Gulliver. "He slipped off somewhere."

"Oh, let him go," snapped Bell. "I don't like him."

So the Nuts entered the Ancient House, and made their way down to the junior common-room. But Titus Alexis had remained behind with a purpose—a purpose he had had in mind even when he mooted the whole idea to Study A.

He descended into the vault again, and he carried something with him. I knew nothing of his presence until I heard a slight sound near the foot of the staircase. The Greek junior had crept down like a shadow.

He stood regarding me with a gloating light in his queer eyes.

"So!" he exclaimed softly. "You are helpless—and I am alone with you!"

"Both your remarks seem to be right," I said. "What's the idea of this, Alexis? You'd better be careful——"

"Silence, you dog!" snapped Alexis.

I stared at him.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked. "You seem to have got your knife into me,

my son. If you want to get on well at St. Frank's you'll find it necessary to alter your tone a good bit——"

"I want to hear no talk from you!" interrupted Alexis. "You are helpless!"

"That's what you said before."

"And you are at my mercy," went on the other. "We are alone—and shall be alone for at least fifteen minutes. Excellent! I can do much in that time. I can make you suffer!"

"I am suffering already," I said. "Your presence is bad enough."

"You cur!" snarled Alexis—"you English cur!"

I made a resolve that the cad would suffer for that insult. I longed to be free; I ached to get my fist at his nose. But I was unable to lift a finger. He had me at his mercy.

"I will tell you what I mean to do," went on Alexis, his voice quivering with rage. "You were the cause of my getting caned——"

"I was," I echoed.

"You hit me when I threw that cricket ball at the small boy——"

"You deserved to be hit!" I snapped.

"Mr. Lee came, and he heard all—because of you!" snarled Alexis, "I was hurt, and I still feel the pain!"

"You seem to be beastly soft!" I said contemptuously. "Well, what about it?"

"It is my will that you shall suffer!" exclaimed the new boy. "Do you understand? Do you realise the full truth of your position? Listen! I planned this thing with Fullwood and his foolish companions. They thought it was a joke; but it is not!"

"You seem to think it's a tragedy," I said. "I hope you won't get busy with a knife or a chopper. You wouldn't like to spend a few years in prison, would you? I don't suppose you are old enough to be hanged——"

"Silence, you fool!" rapped out Alexis. "I planned all this so that it should work out in this way. And you are alone here—I shall do what I wish. And none can interfere!"

"You'd better buck up," I said calmly. "The minutes are going, you know."

"I shall waste no further time!" exclaimed Alexis. "I was thrashed because of you—and you shall be thrashed!"

"By you?"

"Yes, you pig-dog, by me!" snapped the Greek. "You smile! Ah, I will make you smile differently soon! I will thrash you until you beg for mercy—until you cry to me to cease!"

"Really?" I said. "I shall cry for mercy? My dear idiot, you can whop me until I am blue in the face—but you won't find me yelling for mercy. That sort of thing seems to be more in your line!"

"We shall see," said Alexis—"we shall see!"

"I was expecting something of this sort," I went on. "So you're going to take your



revenge in this way, eh? Well, get on with it. The only time you can hit me is when I am helpless. That ought to make you feel very pleased with yourself. There must be a lot of pleasure in striking a fellow when he isn't in a position to hit back—you cad!"

He had struck me heavily in the face, and I could do nothing. It was awful. I would have given any amount to be free at that moment.

"You will cease talking!" shouted Alexis. "Your tongue is too loose! I will soon make you howl—and you will have no time for talk!"

He produced a thick, heavy length of cane. It slashed through the air, and he looked at me gloatingly. Probably he expected to see some signs of fear. If so, he was greatly disappointed.

"You do not wince!" he said. "Very well! We shall soon see!"

I looked at him squarely.

"Just listen to me for a moment," I said, in a grim voice. "If you touch me with that cane—if you give me just one slash—I'll give you the biggest hiding of your life!"

Slash!

The cane descended upon my shoulders with stinging force.

"Now!" panted Alexis. "How is that?"

"Well it's booked you for a first class licking," I said grimly. "I expect you are going to hit me some more yet. Well, the more you give me, the more I'll give you. I can't do a thing at present—but I shan't always be helpless like this. And when I get free—Oh!"

I uttered the cry involuntarily; for Alexis had brought the cane down again. And this time he used all his strength. The pain was considerable, and I had great difficulty in keeping my face straight.

Slash! Slash!

The blows were awful, and my back was already feeling numb. I was so furious that I could hardly speak. For the brute to attack me like this was altogether unexpected.

"Stop, you madman!" I gasped.

"Ah, you are calling for mercy already—"

"Don't be an idiot!" I snapped. "I'm not asking for mercy. But you must be mad! You don't realise what you are doing, Alexis! Put that cane down and listen to reason—"

Slash!

I broke off as he swiped at me again. In spite of his slim build, he possessed great strength; and he wielded the cane with tremendous force. The weapon struck me repeatedly.

I felt like gasping with pain, and once or twice I nearly let out a cry. But, by clenching my teeth and compressing my lips, I managed to keep all sounds within me. Alexis heard nothing.

"You feelingless log!" he panted. "Will you ever cry?"

Swipe! Swipe! Swipe!

I was feeling almost sick with the pain; my back was tingling as though it had been burnt with red-hot irons. My head was dizzy,

and the flickering candles, and the walls of the vault commenced to dance before my eyes.

"Scream, you fool—scream!" shouted Alexis.

Without a pause he used the cane, and I felt that if I did not shout aloud I should explode. How I stood the ordeal I hardly know. But I held out the longest.

For, at last, Alexis lowered the cane.

"So!" he said huskily. "You refuse to appeal for mercy? Very well! You will receive none!"

"Alexis," I said, "you'd better stop this fooling before it's too late. I'm not a fellow to meek, but if you go on much longer it won't be a question of meekness at all. If I'm carried up out of this and into the school, there'll be an inquiry—and then the truth will come out. You'd better go easy!"

The Greek boy laughed.

"You think I have finished?" he asked fiercely. "Fool! I have barely commenced! I will show you!"

Slash! Slash!

After the short rest his strength was renewed—and the pain on my back was greatly intensified. I could not shift my position, owing to the fact that my feet were secured to the box on which I was seated.

I honestly believe that I nearly fainted.

This is not a nice admission to make—because I hate people to think that I'm tender. But it's a solemn fact. That beating was absolutely awful. Alexis used all his strength—and he hit madly.

I hardly remember what happened towards the end. Everything was dim and uncertain. Even the pain was a dull, numb sensation. The candles were just a blur of light.

And then, at last, the ordeal was over.

I heard Alexis speaking, but I don't know what he said. His voice was just a gloating sound droning in my ears. After that came complete silence, and I sat upon the box, my head sunk upon my chest, indifferent to everything.

Titus Alexis had had his revenge!

But there was a reckoning to come!

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DISCOVERY.

RALPH LESLIE-FULLWOOD entered the junior common-room with a smile on his face. Bell and Gulliver followed him—and they, too, were looking unusually happy. The fellows noticed the difference at once.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "What's wrong with you, Fullwood?"

"Nothing," said Fullwood. "What do you mean?"

"But you're looking amiable!" ejaculated Handforth amazedly.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped Ralph Leslie, scowling.



"Ah! That's more like it!" said Handforth. "That's your usual expression. Well, I'm jiggered! You're smiling again! And Gulliver and Bell are smiling, too!"

"Amazing!" said Reginald Pitt, grinning.

"What's happened?" asked De Valerie.

"Have you suddenly come into a fortune, Fullwood, or have you just performed some particularly caddish trick on somebody? That's the kind of thing that would make you smile."

"Oh, rats!" said Fullwood. "I didn't expect to be chipped like this when I came into the common-room. You can go and eat coke—all the lot of you! Mind your own business!"

Fullwood and his chums walked over to one of the tables. Fullwood sat upon the edge of it, and grinned again.

"Seen anythin' of Nipper?" he asked casually.

"No," said Watson. "Have you?"

"I saw him about ten minutes ago——"

"No, you didn't!" chuckled Gulliver. "He wasn't visible under that coating——"

"Ha, Ha, Ha!" roared Bell.

Tommy Watson stared.

"They're dotty!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Didn't you know that before?" asked Handforth. "They've been dotty ever since they came to St. Frank's!"

"But what the dickens are they cackling about Nipper for?" demanded Watson. "I don't believe they have seen him, either. Montie and I left him out on Little Side nearly an hour ago, and he promised to be in within ten minutes. And we haven't seen a sign of him."

"Not a sign, begad!" said Sir Montie. "It's frightfully queer, too. We went out an' looked for the dear fellow, but we couldn't see a sign. I expect he's gone down to the village for something."

"Ha, Ha, Ha!" roared Fullwood & Co.

"There they go again!" exclaimed Watson. "I believe the rotters know something about Nipper."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if we do," said Fullwood. "There's no telling, you know. As I said before, we saw Nipper—or a part of him—ten minutes ago. An' if you don't like to believe it, you needn't."

"You saw a part of him?" asked Church.

"Exactly."

"Has he been chopped up, then?" yelled Watson. "Don't be an ass!"

"Of course, if you fellows like to look for him, instead of wastin' your time here, it's quite likely that you'll find him," said Fullwood calmly. "There's all sorts of places where you could look—but there's one place in particular which it would pay you to visit."

"It's not far from here," remarked Bell thoughtfully. "Only just across the triangle, and down a lot of steps."

"Stone steps," said Gulliver. "Some of 'em are broken."

"By jingo!" said Watson, with a start. "Do you mean that Nipper has gone down into the old monastery vault?"

"I'm not explainin' anythin'," said Full-

wood. "But if you like to draw your own conclusions, you are at liberty to do so. You might be right—an' you might be wrong."

"Oh, they're dotty this evening," said Watson. "And I'll bet they've been up to some monkey business, too—that's why they're looking so jolly pleased with themselves."

"You won't see Nipper for a long time—if you don't go and look for him," remarked Bell. "It's jolly awkward when a chap's unable to move——"

"Oh, rather!" said the others.

They strolled out of the common-room before they could be questioned further, and the remainder of the juniors looked at one another rather uncertainly. Watson was the first to speak.

"I'm going down into the vault," he said firmly.

"An' I'm with you, dear old boy," said Sir Montie.

"So am I," declared Handforth. "There's been some foul play, unless I'm mistaken. Those Study A bounders have been up to some of their rotten tricks. My hat! I'll slash 'em up if they have hurt old Nipper!"

"No you won't," said Watson grimly. "Study C will attend to 'em—it's our concern, don't forget."

"Well, let's get a move on," said Pitt. "I'll come too, if I'm not in the way. Any objections?"

"You can all come, if you like," said Watson.

About a dozen fellows decided to go—for it was quite obvious, from the veiled remarks that Fullwood & Co. had let pass, that something of an unusual nature had occurred—and a visit to the old vault would be fruitful.

They lost no time in setting out across the Triangle. They had brought no lights with them, but they all knew the way into the vault. Watson led the way down the broken stairs, and the whole procession of juniors followed him—Montie and Handforth and Co. and Pitt and several others.

"Better go easy, down there," called out Pitt. "These stairs are treacherous, and if you once start falling you'll find it difficult to stop—he angle is so jolly steep."

Nobody tripped, however, and at last the vault was reached.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Watson, just before he got to the bottom. "It's true enough! There's a light down here!"

They all hurried on, and half of them crowded into the vault at the same moment. They stared before them.

Candies were burning in two or three places, and almost in the middle of the vault a figure sat huddled up on a box. The figure belonged to me, but nobody recognised it. My face was bent down on my chest, and the new-comers could see very little of me.

"Look at that!" roared Watson. "He's bound up—hands and feet! And what the dickens is the matter with his hair—Oh, my goodness!"



"Great Scott!"

"Help!"

I had just raised my face, and the juniors gazed at me with blank amazement. There was not the slightest doubt that I looked several kinds of a freak, with my face all daubed with paint.

"Is—is that you, Nipper?" gasped Watson.

"Yes, I think so," I said huskily.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Pitt. "I—I can't help it—ha, ha, ha! But you look so jolly funny that I must laugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody else yelled.

"It's shockin'!" declared Sir Montie. "His face doesn't matter so much—but just look at his clobber! Dear boys, it's in a frightful state!"

"So this is why Fullwood and Co. were grinning!" said De Valerie. "They've been playing a trick. You don't seem to be very lively, Nipper. I should have thought you would be roaring!"

"I don't feel like roaring," I said, with a sickly grin. "I'm too raw!"

"My hat! Is that a pun?" asked Handforth.

"If you like!" I said weakly.

"What's the matter with you, you ass?" demanded Watson, slapping me on the back.

"Ow!" I shouted, gasping. "Oh! You ass! Oh—oh!"

"But I hardly touched you!" said Watson, staring.

"I—I'm sorry," I said. "I wasn't quite expecting it, old man. My back's a bit tender——"

"Have those cads been whopping you?" demanded Handforth suddenly. "Great pip! If they've laid a finger on you, Nipper, we'll slaughter 'em!"

"Rather!" said the others.

"His back seems to be pretty tender," said Tommy—"and he's sort of dazed. Who's got a knife?"

About four were produced, and my bonds were quickly slashed through. Then Watson helped me to my feet. I staggered a bit, then sank down on the box again.

"Have a look at my back," I muttered painfully. "I should just like to know if it's been bleeding. It—it feels awful. I wish somebody would fetch some cold water and a sponge. I'm not a coward, but I feel awfully groggy just now."

"See if he's back is bleeding!" ejaculated Handforth. "My only hat! You don't mean to say that you've been hit as hard as all that?"

"Lend me a hand!" said Watson sharply. My jacket was removed, and then my waistcoat.

Two or three of the fellows pushed my shirt back while some of the others held candles. And then I heard a chorus of horrified gasps.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Pitt hoarsely.

"Oh, it's terrible—terrible!" muttered Watson, looking pale.

"Is it bad, then?" I asked.

"Bad!" gasped Tommy. "Your back is all raw—it's a mass of livid weals! You're in an appalling state!"

"Poor old chap!" exclaimed Somerton feelingly. "Oh, by Jove! You must have received a terrible slashing."

"I did!" I said faintly. "But I shall be all right before long. I can stand a little pain, I hope. But it only finished a few minutes ago, you know, and I haven't quite got over it——"

"And those cads were grinning!" said Handforth, in a terrible voice. "Who's coming with me to slaughter 'em?"

Handforth dashed for the stairway, and eight or nine fellows followed him. They rushed up to the outer air, pelted across the Triangle, and dashed into the Ancient House.

All they thought about was getting hold of Fullwood and Co. First and foremost in Handforth's mind, was the necessity to take immediate measures with the cads of Study A.

Fullwood and Co., surprisingly enough, had made no attempt to hide themselves away. They were lounging in the lobby when the crowd rushed in.

"Well?" chuckled Fullwood. "Any luck?"

"Did you find him?" grinned Bell.

"You cads—you murderous, brutal cads!" shouted Handforth furiously.

"Oh, come off it!" snapped Gulliver.

"There's nothing brutal in what we did. We can indulge in a jape if we like, I suppose?"

"Do you call it a jape to beat a chap on the back until he is nearly stunned with pain?" asked Pitt harshly. "Do you call it a jape to make his back raw and nearly bleeding?"

Fullwood and Co. stared.

"I don't know what you mean!" snapped Fullwood.

"Don't know what we mean?" roared Handforth. "You caddish cur——"

"Steady on!" said Gulliver. "There must be some mistake. We were jolly moderate this time—that's why we were grinning. All we did was to paint Nipper's face, and put some glue in his hair."

"Didn't you touch his back?" demanded Church.

"No."

"Not with anything?"

"Not even with our little fingers!"

"You liars!" shouted Handforth. "Nipper's there, with his back looking as though it had been whipped with a cat-o'-nine tails. If you try to deny the truth you won't be believed——"

"But look here!" interrupted Fullwood. "Is this true? Is Nipper's back really slashed about?"

"Yes; in the most awful manner," said Pitt.

Fullwood and Co. exchanged startled glances.

"Well, I don't expect you to believe me, but I give you my word that we're not re-



sponsible," said Fullwood. "All we did was to play a jape. We didn't hurt a hair of Nipper's head——"

"That's an evasion," said Handforth grimly. "We were not talking about Nipper's head—we were talking about his back!"

"I was only usin' a figure of speech," said Fullwood. "We didn't hurt his head, or his back, or any other part of him."

"I don't believe you," said Handforth flatly.

Many of the other juniors didn't believe Fullwood's denial, either. His propensity for lying was too well known in the Remove. He would probably have been captured ~~then~~ and there, but for the arrival of Tommy Watson.

"Where's Alexis?" gasped Watson breathlessly.

"Blow Alexis——"

"But I want to find him—I want to smash him into little bits!" shouted Watson. "It was he who slashed Nipper like that—Nipper has just told us."

"Alexis!"

"Yes, the brutal cur!"

"What about Fullwood?" asked Pitt.

"Nipper said that Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell didn't touch him," said Watson. "Then went out after they had painted him up; but Alexis came back, armed with a great thick cane."

"Now do you believe me?" asked Fullwood tartly.

"I'll bet you put Alexis up to it," snapped Handforth.

"We didn't! We didn't know a thing about it until you told us just now," said the leader of Study A. "I had an idea that Alexis wasn't satisfied with what we did, but I never dreamed that he'd go back."

"Has he hurt Nipper much?" asked Gulliver.

"The poor chap is nearly fainting with pain," said Church.

"Look here! I want you chaps to believe me," said Fullwood earnestly. "You're not always ready to take my word, an' I suppose it's been my own fault. But this time I give you my solemn promise that we didn't do a thing to Nipper that anybody would be ashamed of—an' we hadn't the faintest idea that Alexis would go back. I'm jolly sorry about the whole thing."

"Well, we needn't say any more," said Watson bluntly. "Yes, I believe you, Fullwood. I generally know when a chap is telling the truth. But where's Alexis? I mean to smash him!"

By this time I had been brought up from the vault, and the fresh air of the Triangle did a lot to revive me. I felt so much better that I didn't want any assistance, and I came to a decision.

Sir Montie and two or three other fellows were with me.

"Look here, you chaps," I said. "There's no need to make a song about this. I'll settle with Alexis within a day or two. We

don't want any of the masters to know that I've been hit——"

"But they must know, you ass!" exclaimed Somerton.

"Why must they?"

"Because you'll have to have your back dressed!"

"Some of you fellows can do that for me in the dormitory to-night," I said. "Anyhow, I don't want the Head to know."

"Well, I think you're an ass!" declared Owen major. "Alexis ought to be sacked——"

"If he was sacked I shouldn't get a chance to lick him," I interrupted. "I want him here. I want to lick him until he can't see. And I sha'n't be able to if the masters get to know what has happened."

Meanwhile, Watson and many other juniors were searching for Alexis. As luck would have it, they caught sight of the Greek junior just as I was crossing the Triangle with Sir Montie and the others. Alexis had been skulking amongst the trees, it seemed, and now he was attempting to dodge into the house.

"There he is!" shouted Watson. "Hold the cad!"

Many fellows obliged, and a few seconds later Alexis was cut off, and he found himself in the grasp of many determined Removites. He struggled fiercely to get free.

"Let me go—let me go!" he shouted.

"You brutal hound!" exclaimed Watson, rushing up. "You've made Nipper's back almost raw——"

"That is splendid!" gloated Alexis. "I am glad. I am pleased. Yes, it was I who punished him—as he deserved. If you do not allow me to go I shall scream until help arrives."

"Scream, then!" shouted Watson fiercely. "Do you think we care? We're going to make you suffer for what you've done——"

"Let me go, you curs!" shrieked Alexis wildly. "You pigs—you dogs! Let me go! I will not be held!"

He continued to scream at the top of his voice, and he fought like a wild-cat. It was necessary for three or four fellows to hold him down. And when he at length showed signs of becoming quiet, quite a commotion had been caused.

Seniors and juniors were pouring out of both houses to find out who was being murdered. Windows were being pushed up, and two prefects appeared upon the scene with canes in their hands.

"What's the trouble out here?" demanded Fenton, of the Sixth.

The captain of St. Frank's strode over to the group of juniors. But before he could reach them Mr. Crowell, the Fourth Form master, put in an appearance. Alexis had given himself away by his outcry.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful noise?" asked Mr. Crowell sternly. "Boys! Who was it screaming just now?"

Nobody answered, and Mr. Crowell strode



forward to the spot where a number of fellows were collected in a thick clump. He had just reached the spot when a sudden commotion commenced in the middle of it.

"Sir!" panted a wild voice. "I want your protection! These boys intend to harm me, and you must prevent them."

"Alexis!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "Oh! So it was you who made those most unearthly screams just now?"

"I was calling for help——"

"When you call for help another time, Alexis, you will kindly do so in a different manner," said the Form-master curtly. "I verily believe that your voice was audible right down in the village. Allow Alexis to go, boys."

"But we're going to slaughter him, sir!" roared Handforth.

"Do not be so ridiculous, Handforth!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "If you cannot use a less absurd term, I shall punish you. Let Alexis go at once. Do you hear me?"

"But he's done something terrible, sir!" said Watson breathlessly. "Yes, I'm going to tell! I don't care what Nipper says! It's only right that such a young criminal should be exposed!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's not sneaking, in a case like that!" said Handforth. "I'm dead against sneaking, but there's a limit."

"Rather!"

Mr. Crowell listened with mild astonishment.

"Do you know what this means, Fenton?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the captain of St. Frank's. "I haven't the faintest idea. But it seems that Alexis has done something to incur the anger of the juniors."

I came forward, but concealed myself behind some of the other juniors. I remembered that I was unrecognisable.

"Hold on, sir," I said huskily. "It's all right. Don't take any notice of Watson. There's nothing that we can tell you. Alexis has a little difference with me—but I'll settle that privately, later on."

Mr. Crowell turned.

"I need an explanation," he said grimly. "Come here, Nipper."

I had not been expecting that.

"Sorry, sir!" I stammered. "I—I can't come just now!"

"You cannot!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "How dare you, Nipper? Come here at once, and explain what this means."

I realised that the only safe course was for me to escape. So I dodged away—and ran right into the arms of Morrow, of the Sixth.

"No, you don't!" grinned Morrow, grabbing me. "Come back——"

"Oh!" I yelled. "Oh!"

I simply couldn't help it. Morrow had grasped me by the shoulder, and the yell of agony left my lips involuntarily.

"What's the matter, you young idiot?" snapped Morrow. "I didn't hurt you."

"His back's sore!" hissed Handforth.

"Sore!" said Morrow, slapping my back.

"Don't talk nonsense—— Great Scott!"

That second blow made me absolutely giddy, and I reeled, hit against Morrow, and nearly fell. At last the prefect realised that something was really amiss. He caught me, and held me firm.

"What's the matter, young 'un?" he asked kindly. "Why, what—— You're as black as a nigger! You stink of paint—— Well, I'm hanged!"

Mr. Crowell came striding up.

"I really fail to understand all this mysterious behaviour!" he exclaimed. "Nipper, why did you refuse to obey me just now?"

"I think he's been the victim of a rag, sir," said Morrow. "His face is all painted black, and his back seems to be sore. I expect some of the fellows have been hitting him. Their fun is sometimes rather severe."

"Is your back sore, Nipper?" asked Mr. Crowell.

"Er—yes, sir!" I admitted.

"Morrow, bring Nipper into the lobby," ordered the Form-master. "I will examine his back myself. I do not agree with these 'rags'; they are frequently brutal and inhuman. If Nipper has been harmed I shall punish the culprits severely."

The fat was in the fire then. I couldn't resist, and I was taken into the lobby, followed by a crowd of fellows. Most of them were glad that Mr. Crowell had decided this way—for they wanted to see Alexis punished.

Mr. Crowell was staggered when he saw me—in the electric light.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "Is—is this Nipper?"

"Yes, sir," smiled Morrow. "His back seems to be—— Good heavens!" gasped the prefect. "Look here, sir—look here! His back is—raw!"

Mr. Crowell gazed at my back, horrified.

"This—this is ghastly!" he exclaimed. "Great goodness! Is it possible—is it conceivable—that the junior boys have committed this vile assault? I cannot believe it, Morrow!"

The prefect looked grim.

"I think I know the truth, sir," he said. "Alexis did this!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### LESS THAN HE DESERVED.

MR. CROWELL started. "Alexis!" he exclaimed. "But that boy could not have committed the assault single-handed! Nipper, you must tell me the truth. I insist!"

"I'd rather not say, sir——"

"This matter must be sifted to the very bottom," declared Mr. Crowell sternly. "I cannot possibly allow such a grave affair to be passed by. Your back is in a shocking condition."



Fullwood stepped forward.

"May I speak, sir?" he asked.

"What do you want, Fullwood?" said the Form-master.

"Gulliver and Bell and I painted Nipper up like that, sir," said Fullwood. "The truth is bound to come out now, so we may as well own up. But we didn't touch Nipper's back. Alexis did that, the young ruffian!"

I was rather surprised to find Fullwood owning up! But, as he had said, the truth was certain to come out; so it was easy enough for him to earn a little cheap glory by owning up.

"It is impossible for me to deal with this grave matter," said Mr. Crowell. "You will come with me to the Headmaster's study, boys—yes, all of you. Nipper, Fullwood, Bell, Gulliver, and Alexis."

"But I can't go like this, sir!" I protested.

"That is exactly how you must come, Nipper," said Mr. Crowell. "Dr. Stafford shall see how you have been treated. No, objections are useless. You must come with me at once."

Alexis's eyes flashed.

"I will not go!" he said angrily. "I refuse——"

"Oh, you refuse, do you?" exclaimed Morrow. "We'll see about that!"

He seized the Greek junior firmly, and rushed him along the passage. Alexis yelled and screamed, but it made no difference. He was compelled to go. And the rest of us followed at a more sedate pace.

There were crowds of fellows waiting about the passages—waiting to hear the result of the visit to the Head. The whole truth was bound to come out now. There was no help for it.

Dr. Stafford nearly had a fit when he saw me, and it was some few moments before he realised that I was actually Nipper.

"This is appalling," he said. "The lad's hair is smothered with glue—he is painted like a savage—his clothing is all disarranged! I am shocked in the extreme!"

"There has been a 'rag,' sir," explained Fenton.

"There has been something disgraceful!" said the Head curtly.

He listened to Fullwood intently. Fullwood explained everything; he had no particular scruples about sneaking. He told how Alexis had first mooted the idea, and he told how the scheme had been carried out.

"We left Nipper in the vault, sir," concluded Fullwood. "It was only a jape, sir, after all. We didn't harm Nipper—as he'll say himself."

"No, sir, they didn't harm me in the least," I agreed. "I have no complaints to make against Fullwood."

"Alexis must have gone back into the vault after we left, sir," said Gulliver. "He had Nipper at his mercy—bound and help-

less. And he laid it on heavily with a stick of some sort."

Bit by bit the truth was revealed; and the Head was utterly horrified when he had learned everything. My back was in a nasty state, and the Head was pale after he had looked at it.

"Terrible—terrible!" he exclaimed. "And Alexis is responsible for this unprecedented act of brutality! Alexis, what have you to say?"

The Greek junior's eyes glittered.

"I have to say nothing," he said. "I struck Nipper—yes. I am glad. He deserved more, the dog!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "You wretched boy! You admit your sin as though it were a virtue! If you were not new to this school—and, indeed, new to the ways of England—I would expel you this very night. But you are strange here, and I will be as lenient as possible. To-morrow morning, before lessons, you will be flogged before the whole school. To-night you will sleep in the punishment-room. Fenton, kindly conduct Alexis to the punishment-room."

"Certainly, sir," said Fenton readily. "Come on, Alexis!"

At first the new boy refused, but he soon found out that refusing was worse than useless. And he was taken away, struggling and kicking. The Head breathed a sigh of relief as the door closed.

"The wretched boy!" he exclaimed. "You may rest assured, Nipper, that Alexis will be fully punished for his brutal treatment of you. He attacked you while you were helpless—and I am reminded that these other boys deserve severe punishment for their part in the disgraceful affair."

"It—it was only a joke, sir," muttered Fullwood.

The Head looked grim.

"Jokes of that sort, Fullwood, must be paid for," he said. "You three boys will receive a caning, and I shall administer it now."

"Ye-es, sir!" said Fullwood.

And while the Nuts were going through it—let off comparatively lightly—I was taken by Morrow to a bath-room, and great efforts were made to remove the glue and the paint.

We succeeded, in a measure—but it would require several more washes before I was quite rid of the stuff. My back was terribly sore, and it was dressed and bandaged.

I went straight to bed. It was nearly time, in any case, and I didn't feel like putting my clothes on again just then. But I refused to go into the "sanny," and I received much sympathy from the Remove when it came up to bed.

"Never mind, old son," said Pitt. "We've got rid of Alexis for one night, and we shall have the extreme pleasure of seeing him flogged in the morning. How does your back feel?"



"Sore," I replied shortly.

"It's my opinion," remarked Handforth, "that we ought to give Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell a first-class ragging. They're mainly responsible——"

"Oh, don't be funny!" snapped Fullwood.

"Yes, dry up, Handy," I said. "It wasn't Fullwood's fault that Alexis crept back and took advantage of the situation. I don't love Fullwood like a long-lost brother, but he's done nothing particularly rotten this time."

"Just as you like," said Handforth. "But I thought it would be rather decent to have some fun in the dormy to-night. What about Alexis? I suppose you'll wipe him up as soon as you're well?"

I shook my head.

"He's going to be punished by the powers that are," I said. "I can't fight the cad after he's had a licking from the Head. That's why I didn't want the truth to be known. I was anxious to have the pleasure of slogging him myself. But it's imposs., so we'll say no more. Dry up! I want to get to sleep."

It was surprising how the fellows obeyed. The buzz of conversation stopped almost at once. And very soon afterwards I dropped off to sleep—and slept like a top until the rising-bell went.

I sat up in bed, and gave a gasp.

"Phew!" I muttered. "It's worse than I thought it would be!"

But after moving about a bit I grew accustomed to the ache, and I commenced dressing.

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Handforth, blinking at me. "Here's Nipper getting up before anybody else—with his back like that, too!"

"Don't keep jawing about my back," I said tartly. "I'm not made of jelly. I can stand a bruise or two, Handy. I'm worrying about my hair—it feels awful. The pillow stuck to me for a minute!"

Several fellows grinned, and, in the end, I was glad to escape from the dormitory. I didn't want to be bothered with inquiries regarding the state of my health every minute.

There was a good deal of discussion that morning, and not a little interest. For it was something unusual to have a fellow flogged in front of the whole school. The juniors seemed to look forward to it as a kind of entertainment got up for their benefit, and I must admit that I looked forward to that "entertainment," too. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see Titus Alexis squirming and screaming under the lash of the Head's birch.

When the time came, he did squirm—and he did scream.

The Head only addressed a few words to the school—for everybody knew about the flogging, and everybody knew why it was to be administered. Alexis was brought in

by Fenton, and he stood upon the platform defiantly.

His dark face was rather paler than usual, and his eyes were gleaming with a fire of hatred. As soon as he got on to the platform he faced the Head.

"Am I to be hit?" he asked fiercely.

"You will be silent, Alexis——"

"No! I shall not be silent," interrupted Alexis. "You have brought me here to hit me—to flog me. I will not be flogged! I came to this school to learn—to be educated! I did not come here to be knocked about by brutal schoolmasters!"

"Oh!"

There was a general murmur from the crowds.

"That'll mean ten extra slashes!" murmured Handforth, with satisfaction.

"You will be silent, Alexis!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford sternly. "Upon my soul! Do you imagine that you can dictate to me as you please? I see that it is necessary to teach you much before——"

"If you strike me, I will not be answerable for what occurs!" shouted Alexis. "I'll not stand it! I have done nothing—nothing at all! I hit Nipper because he deserved to be hit, and if his back is sore and bleeding I shall be glad!"

A storm of booing and hissing broke out, but it was instantly quelled.

And then the flogging commenced. It was one of the most extraordinary scenes which had ever been witnessed in the old hall at St. Frank's. Titus Alexis refused to be flogged, and he struggled like a demon.

Before the Head could get busy with the birch, it was necessary for Warren, the school porter, to be called in. He, with the assistance of several prefects, held Alexis down.

Slash!

The birch descended with a will.

"Ow!" howled Alexis wildly. "I will kill you for this! I will have my revenge if you do not cease at once!"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The birch rose and fell with monotonous regularity. The Head took absolutely no notice of the Greek junior's howls and screams and threats. The fellow created one of the most disgraceful scenes the school had ever witnessed.

One might have supposed that he was being done to death. He was certainly the biggest coward that the Remove had had in its ranks for many a day. Even Long, the sneak of the Form, was courageous in comparison. Long might have squealed a bit, but he wouldn't have howled the place down.

It was over at last, and by that time Alexis was too exhausted by his struggles and by vocal outbursts, that he had very little to say. But what he did say was uttered in a tone of bitter hatred which almost made me feel uneasy.

"I will remember!" he exclaimed pantingly. "I will make you pay for this one day—and soon!"

It was a distinct threat, but the Head



could afford to ignore it. Alexis was allowed to go, and it was universally decided in the Remove that he was to be completely barred in future. He was sent to Coventry, in fact, by practically the entire school. No decent fellow would have anything to do with him. He was too much of a cad for even Tullwood and Co. to associate with.

De Valerie and the Duke of Somerton held an important discussion before lessons that morning, and the decision was arrived at. Without wasting time, they went straight to Nelson Lee's study, and requested that Alexis should be removed from Study M.

Nelson Lee, realising the reasonable nature of the request, agreed to it. And Titus Alexis was placed in a tiny room at the end of the Remove passage. It was a study which was seldom used, for it was hardly ever required. Alexis had it now—and he was welcome to it.

"Thank goodness!" said De Valerie, when the last of the new boy's things had been

removed from Study M. "The air seems sweeter in here now. I wonder how long it'll be before we see the last of that squirming cad?"

The duke rubbed his chin.

"I don't think it'll be so very long, old chap," he replied. "He can't last, you know. It'll be the sack next time. You've only got to look at his eyes to see that he means mischief."

Somerton was undoubtedly correct.

Titus Alexis did mean mischief. And now his venomous hatred was directed against Dr. Stafford himself—against the whole school, to be more exact. Alexis was an outcast, owing to his own actions, and it seemed highly probable that he would waste no time in giving some evidence of his hatred.

What would he do? There were many conjectures on that point. But none of the fellows even remotely guessed at the terrible form of revenge which Titus Alexis had decided to adopt!

THE END.

## TO MY READERS.

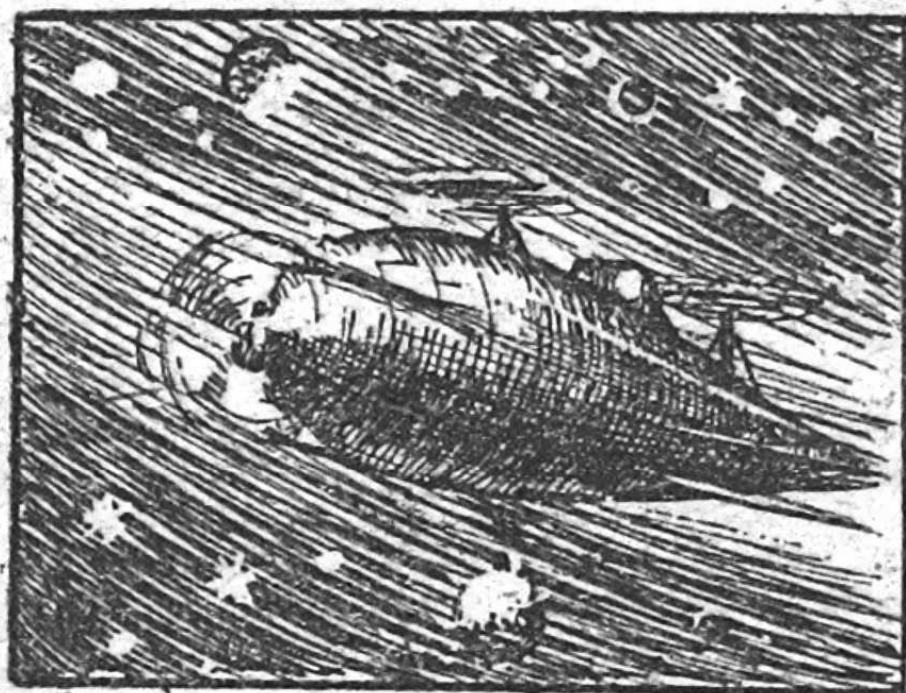
There is no question that Alexis, the new Greek boy, deserved the swishing by the Head before the whole school for the brutal and cowardly beating he gave Nipper. Being new to St. Frank's and unaccustomed to British ways, he has been treated with extreme leniency, and it was hoped that the punishment would be a lesson for him to mend his ways. But Alexis, not being a British lad, could not see that he had done anything particularly wrong to merit the wiggling. Consequently he harboured in his mind a hatred against the Head and the whole school for sending him to Coventry; a hatred which, had the Head suspected at the time, would have resulted in the removal of this undesirable alien there and then. "THE GREAT FIRE AT ST. FRANK'S," the greatest calamity that ever befel the old school, which will be told in next week's number of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, may possibly be traced in its origin to the terrible malice seething in the Greek boy's breast.

In the new serial, "In Trackless Space," will begin next week a fascinating description of the wonderful journey to the moon. Old Mother Earth is left behind, becoming globular in shape, the great continents of Europe, Africa and Asia stand out in bold outline, looking like maps in relief. You must read it, or you will miss something really good.

THE EDITOR.



**GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST STARTED.**



## IN TRACKLESS SPACE.

*A Thrilling Account of a Wonderful Voyage to the Moon, Venus, and Mars, and of a Flying Machine known as the "Solar Monarch," the Most Marvellous Invention of the Age.*

**By ROBT. W. COMRADE.**

Author of "The Stowaway's Quest," "Scorned by the School," etc.

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

**ROBERT GRESHAM**, an inventor, is captured by cannibals in Central Africa. As a last hope he contrives to write a message telling of his approaching doom, which he inserts in a leathern water bottle and drops into a river. It is carried down stream for ten miles, and picked up by an exploration party consisting of **FRANK HILLSWORTH**, his chum, **MACDONALD GUTHRIE**, both sons of millionaires, their old college friend, **PROFESSOR MONTAGUE PALGRAVE**, a renowned scientist, and **ABBIE**, a burly negro. They succeed in rescuing the inventor, who has been badly tortured. During convalescence he tells them of his wonderful invention—a flying machine that will travel through space.

(Now read on.)

### The Solar Monarch.

**FRANK** and **Mac** started back, utterly incredulous. They glanced at one another meaningly, and then at the man on the bed. He smiled at them frankly.

"I think I can guess what is passing in your minds," he said. "Indeed, I knew that you would be hard to convince. Probably you are thinking that the tortures I went through have had the effect of turning my brain. Such thoughts, however, are entirely erroneous. My mind is as clear as it ever was. Ever since I was twenty—and I am now forty-eight—I have been at work on my invention—that is, close on thirty years of steady research and study. Some months ago I discovered the last remaining item necessary for the completion of my airship, and now it only remains to be constructed."

His audience were plainly unconvinced. They did not doubt for a moment that he was suffering from strange hallucinations due to his privations. For all that, however, he looked sane enough, and was speaking seriously. Professor Palgrave bent forward.

"May I inquire," he asked, "as to the reason of your visit to Central Africa, if you were devoting all your time to the completion of your invention?"

"Certainly," responded Gresham readily. "There is one ingredient—which I shall explain later—for the manufacture of a certain

fluid which is only procurable in this part of the world, and I was on an expedition to possess myself of some of this ingredient. Indeed, I had already in my hands a goodly quantity when I was captured by cannibals."

"But," said the professor thoughtfully, "as you have told all this, would it be too much to ask you to explain the construction of the vessel—how it is possible to leave the earth's atmosphere, I mean?"

"I will explain to you, in a brief manner, my method," said Gresham. **Mac** and **Frank** drew a little closer to the bed, listening eagerly. "It is this way," commenced the inventor. "I was aware that the only way in which to reach the planets was to discover a substance or liquid which cut off from the ship all the earth's attraction."

"Exactly," murmured the scientist.

"I have discovered that substance!" cried Gresham triumphantly.

Professor Palgrave started.

"Go on," he said impatiently.

"My method is this. At each end of my ship will be a large tank, and in these tanks will be a liquid, the contents of which I alone know. This fluid in itself would have no effect as regards the attraction of the earth is concerned. When, however, a certain metal—which I have also discovered—is brought into contact with this liquid, the phenomenon will take place. Say, for instance, this glass is the tank," continued Gresham, illustrating his meaning, "and my finger is the rod of metal to which I refer. Now, if I plunge my finger right into the glass—so—all the earth's attraction will have left the ship, and the attraction from Mars or Venus, or whichever it is, will immediately draw it towards that planet. If, however, I put my finger in only half-way, accordingly only half the earth's attraction is removed, and in consequence—so I work it out—the ship will only travel at half the rate. The metal tanks will have no ill effect upon the working of the arrangement."

There was a short silence, then Professor Palgrave spoke. But somehow his voice seemed different. Its joviality seemed to have disappeared, and only the eager, cold tones of the scientist remained. His former incredulity was fast vanishing.



"If this metal and liquid have really been invented, and found to be efficient," he said, "then, of course, anything is possible as regards reaching the planets. I should like to know, though, how you are going to stop your projectile when it reaches another world. Being attracted so powerfully, it would assuredly destroy itself by being dashed to atoms when it reaches its destination."

"As I said before, I have guarded against such a possibility," said Gresham, "by placing one of the tanks at either end of the ship, so that when we are nearing Mars, for instance, I can cut off the planet's attraction. On doing so, being attracted neither one way nor the other, the vessel would gradually come to a standstill in space. From thence onwards—supposing we are near to Mars—we could proceed at almost any rate we desired, and gradually drop on to the planet's surface."

"I think I understand," the professor said, his eyes gleaming in an unwonted manner. "But, I take it, once on another globe, the projectile would be useless?"

"On the contrary, it will be of as much use on the planets themselves as it is for reaching them. The metal with which it will be constructed is very many times lighter than aluminium—being little more than a tenth of the weight and is also made to withstand the intense cold prevailing in outer space. My ship will be built entirely of this. I shall have the most perfect type of petrol motors fitted—motors as reliable as steam-engines—together with two suspensory-screws and a propeller, so that once on a planet, and in the atmosphere, we shall be enabled to fly about in the same manner as an ordinary aeroplane—only in perfect safety."

"But it is possible that the atmosphere on Mars is not so dense as the atmosphere on earth," put in Frank at this point.

"That matters little," declared the inventor. "For my vessel will be so light that I am convinced that it would fly with practically no atmosphere—"

"Then why haven't ye made one take fly on earth?" queried Mac, his usually calm features now aglow with excitement.

"Mostly for want of money," Gresham answered, leaning back weakly, for the conversation had been trying, "and partly because, in view of the bigger flight, it is insignificant; but I have tested models, and have found they work to perfection. I am weak, however, and while I am recuperating I should like you to journey to a certain spot which I shall tell you of and procure some of the substance I require for the manufacture of my liquid. I know where there is plenty of it, and by the time you return I shall be well on the road to recovery. Then we can journey to good old England, and in conjunction build the vessel, and—if you wish it—accompany me to the planets."

"What," cried Frank, "do you mean us to go as well?"

"Why not?" asked Gresham. "It will be a very small return for the great service which you have rendered me. And, I warn you, the risk will be far from nil. It is possible the persons who go will never return to earth. Besides, your parents—"

"They will not object," cried Frank. "We are both over twenty-one—men—and can do as we like, while the professor has nobody to think about whatever. By Jove, what a grand adventure it would be! Eh, Mac? And who wouldn't give his right hand for the opportunity of flying through space, and the prospect of a sojourn among the solar planets? Hurry up and get well, Mr. Gresham, for I assure you I'm as eager as anybody to commence the journey!"

It is not my intention to weary the reader by relating how Professor Palgrave, together with Frank Hillsworth and his chum, MacDonald Guthrie, journeyed to the district where the sick inventor, Gresham, declared a certain substance to exist. Suffice it to state that they succeeded in discovering a quantity of the stuff, and that when they returned it was to find the man they had rescued from the hands of the Sayepi almost well. I have already mentioned that he possessed an iron constitution; in addition, I will say that he was tall and slim, with slightly stooping shoulders; his hair was partially grey, and he wore a trimly pointed beard. His eyes were brown—tender-looking eyes—and his regard and affection for Frank and Mac were genuine.

Having stored the strange ingredient—some three hundredweight—in wooden cases, Gresham announced his intention of starting for British shores immediately. He said that he had money enough to build his ship now, and a little over—the savings of twenty years. Frank and Mac, however, offered him all the cash he could wish for. If they were to take part in the daring and exciting expedition, they declared, it was only just and right that they should stand their share of the expenses. Poor Palgrave happened to be an impecunious science-master at their old school, so could boast of no great wealth.

Since the advent of Gresham into their midst he had been in many respects a changed man. On the yacht he had been genial, merry, and ever ready to joke, and seemed to have not a care in the world. Now, however, he was wont to have fits of depression, and sometimes would remain silent for hours on end, a strange light gleaming in his eyes meanwhile. Frank and Mac put it down to the excitement which had suddenly come into his rather humdrum life. The professor was an ardent astronomer, and he made a study of the heavens for years; it would naturally cause him to lose a certain amount of self-control—the prospect of visiting his beloved stars and planets. And, moreover, as these fits were rare and far between, they were passed almost unnoticed.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)



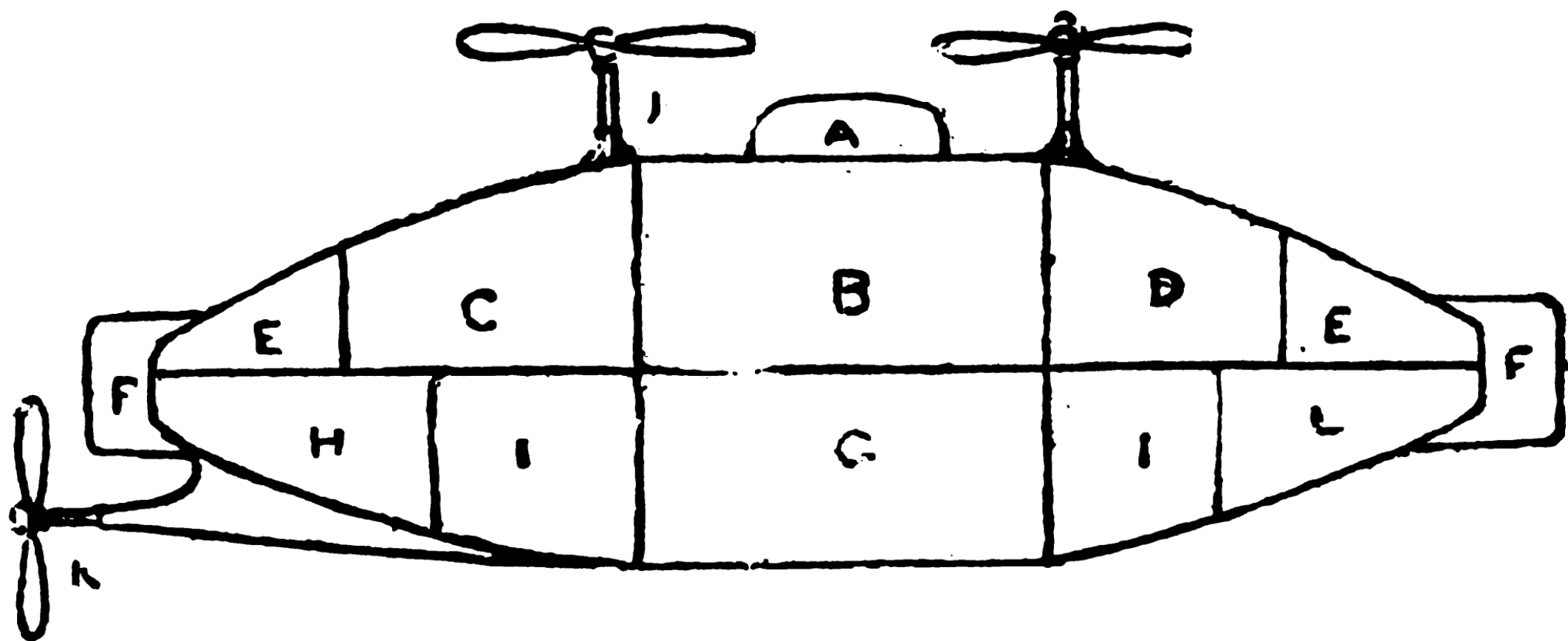
And it came about that, a week after their return from the interior, they embarked aboard Frank's little yacht and made all haste for the coast. Once there, they sold their vessel and awaited for the next homeward-bound liner. One arrived soon, and they took passages to England. On the voyage Robert Gresham picked up wonderfully, and, by the time Southampton Water was reached, was practically in his usual robust state of health. Fortunately, there were no scars upon his face to show what a terrible state he had been in only eight short weeks previously.

Again remarking that it is not my wish to tire the reader by stating exactly what the adventurers did when they arrived in England, I will merely say that they took an army of skilled workmen down to a desolate stretch of country—marshland—in Essex, and in a fortnight's time the construction of the ship had commenced.

One night, a week after the operations had

will be the one and only means of exit. To continue. B, as you observe, is a large apartment immediately below the conning-tower. That will be the main saloon and dining-room. I shall have a billiard-table affixed, so that we shall have something to amuse ourselves with in the evenings. C, on the left, will be the servant's quarters. I do not think we could better Abbie's cooking, so I should suggest him, especially as he understands petrol-motors. D, to the right, will be the sleeping cabins. The little apartments which you see at the extreme ends, near the tanks (E) are the machine-rooms, as I shall call them—fore and aft—and will contain all the complex apparatus necessary. I myself shall always attend to these. Directly beneath B will be the engine-room, G. This room will contain powerful motors for use when in a planet's atmosphere.

"From this room, you will notice, the two suspensory-shafts, J, project; and below, the propeller, K. These, of course, are remov-



OUTLINE OF THE PROJECTILE.

commenced, the inventor, with Frank and Mac on either hand, and the professor opposite, described to them how the ship would look when completed. In front of him was a rough plan—merely an outline—and I reproduce it beneath, to give the reader a general idea of the arrangement of the ship:—

"I have just sketched this," Gresham was saying, "to give you a rough idea of my ship, which, by the way, I have decided to christen the Solar Monarch. In the first place, it will be some seventy feet in length—that is, without counting the two tanks. There will be a large conning-tower, A, through which can be seen all the stars and other interesting spectacles."

"But surely," protested Frank, "you will be unable to put glass windows in the thing?"

"I shall certainly do so," Gresham returned. "It will be six inches thick and of extremely tough manufacture. There will be windows also in the saloon and engine-room—two in each. The conning-tower, I may say

able, and will only be affixed when required. Eh? The two won't be enough to lift the ship? My dear professor, I have not the least fear as to that."

"But, Mr. Gresham," interrupted Mac interestedly, "how will the ship be supplied with air during the voyage. We shall all be suffocated in a few—"

"My dear Mac, I have thought of that important point. In the engine-room will be a machine of my own invention. I may say it occupied me for a matter of five whole years in making and perfecting—for supplying the ship with air. It will require little or no attention, and cannot get out of order. The apartments—I—at either side of the engine-room are both store-rooms, wherein will be packed all kinds of provisions. We shall take enough to last five persons about four months. This also applies to H, which will be filled with water. Used sparingly, it will last quite a couple or more months. Apart from that, though, I have no doubt that we shall

(Continued on page iv. of cover.)



be able to procure water from the planets themselves."

"Doubtless—doubtless," murmured the scientist. "It is practically certain that water exists on Mars."

"Opposite to the water-tanks you will L. This is to be filled with petrol for use with the motors. I think that is everything, with the exception of the two tanks, F, which are at either end."

"And when do you think we shall make a start?" inquired Frank Hillsworth eagerly.

"I can't specify a certain time; but, anyhow, as soon as we possibly can," replied Gresham, "and that will be, I should say, towards the end of May—a month from now. We shall have to work like Trojans to get the ship completed by then, but I've no doubt that we shall do it if we try."

And so, for the next few weeks, Frank, Gresham, and Mac worked from dawn till sundown, and gradually the giant in the great shed began to take shape. Of course the work on which the chums were employed was mainly in connection with the fixing of the machinery in the two small apartments near the tanks. As it was a perfect secret, the ordinary mechanics, who attended to the building, were not allowed to enter or even see the rooms.

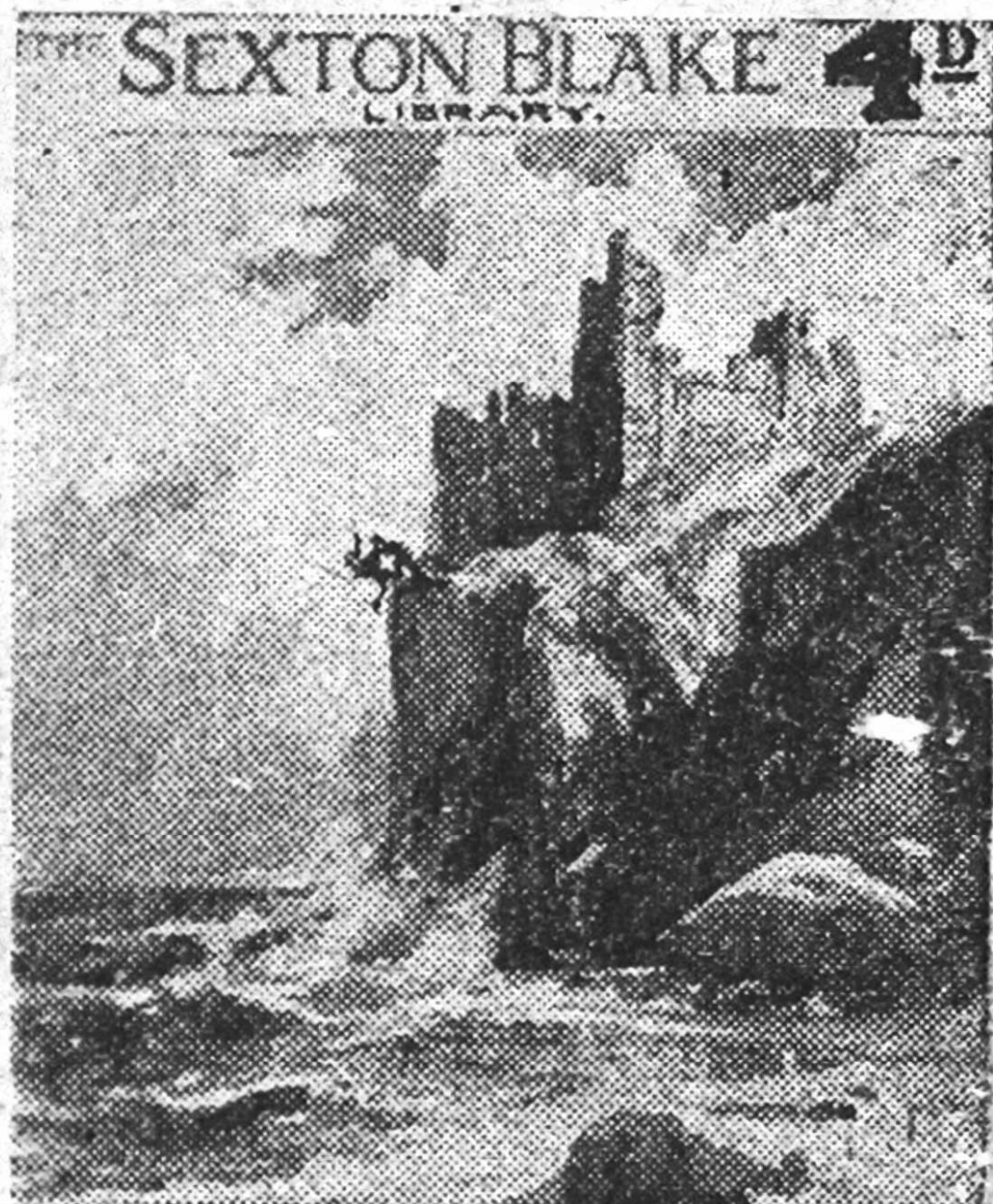
Not that they cared much, however. They one and all looked upon Robert Gresham as a crank, and thought he was throwing his money away. But as they were paid high wages they didn't care. They were certainly surprised at the amazingly light metal with which The Solar Monarch was being constructed, and not one of them could give it a name. It was altogether different from any other they had ever seen. For one thing, it was immensely strong and tough—as tough as steel. In colour it was almost like that of gold, shining yellowish and bright. The plates which the workmen were using were three inches in thickness, and so hard that a hammer, brought down with full force, made no indentation. This metal was called "Gresium," and the inventor had made the sufficient quantity before starting out for Africa. This saved a great amount of time, and it only remained to construct the vessel; the materials were all ready.

At last the final rivet was driven home by Gresham himself, and the mechanics were dismissed. The Solar Monarch was complete! Everything was ready for immediate flight. The ship had been provisioned, and the petrol and water had been stored. The furniture had been arranged in all the rooms; the cooking utensils for Abbie were neatly packed away in the "galley," as he called it; the motors had been tested, and found perfect; the propeller and suspensory-screws were safely stowed away, and the

name had been painted on the ship. In fact, everything was there—nothing remained to be done except depart.

(To be continued.)

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