No. 286.—HOW THE BANNINGTON CINEMA WAS BARRED TO THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S!

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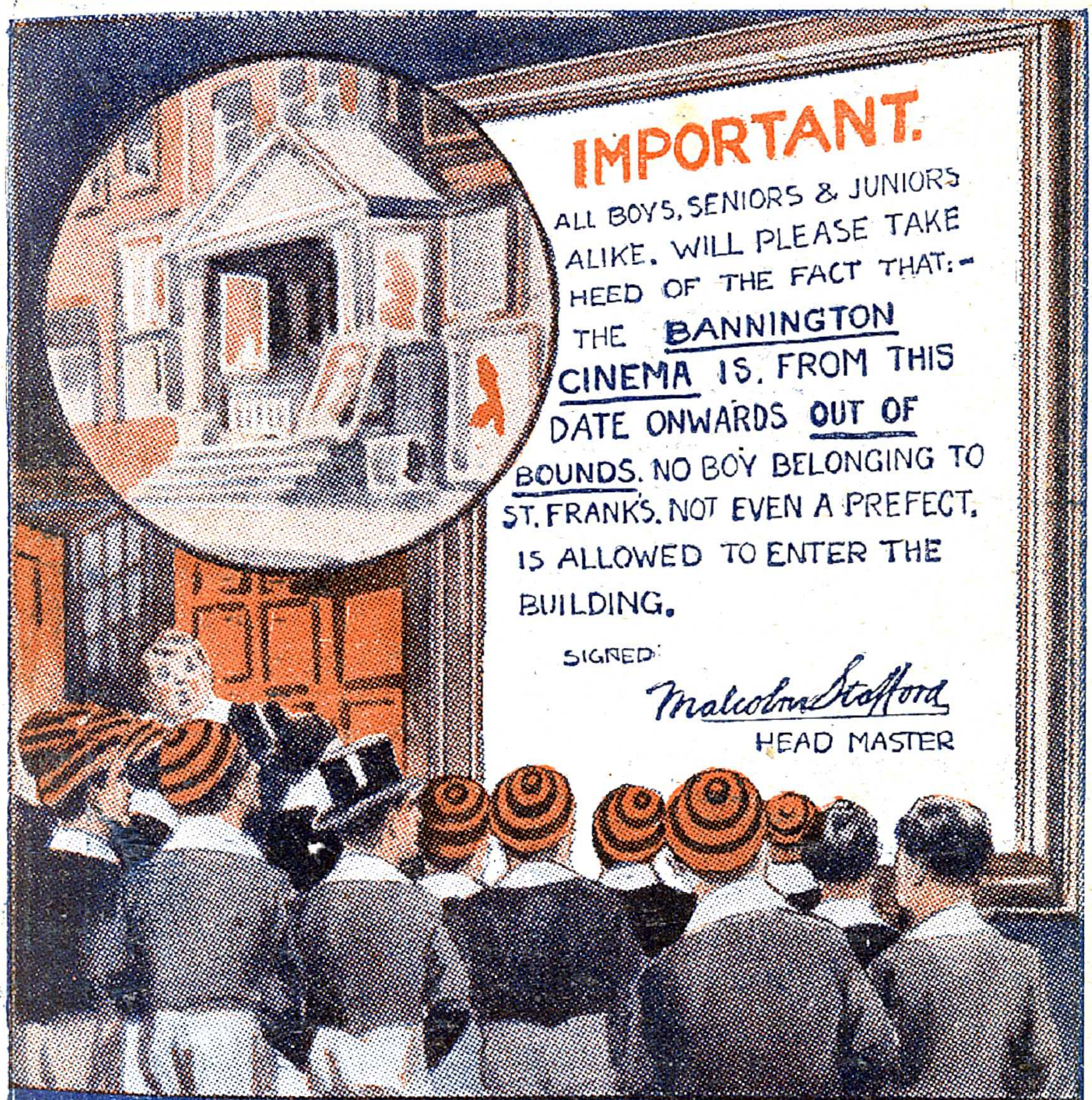

BARRED BY THE HEAD!

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "Handforth's Great Triumph," "Fatty Little's Hunger-Strike," "The Jew of St. Frank's," and many other stirring Tales.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THREE GOLDEN BALLS!

"HA, ha, ha!"

Solomon Levi, of the Remove, came to a halt.

He had just entered the Remove passage in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was morning, and the Jewish boy had only just got down from the dormitory. It was his first morning at St. Frank's, and he was looking fresh and cheerful. He came to a halt in some surprise as that yell of laughter came to his ears.

For, somehow, the laughter was directed against him.

He had turned into the study passage quite carelessly, but it was clear that a number of juniors had been waiting for him. Levi looked down the passage, and saw Fullwood and Co., of Study A. These three precious juniors were grinning all over their faces. A bit lower down, Merrell and Marriott and Armstrong and Griffiths, and several other fellows, were chuckling hugely. Evidently there was some kind of joke going, but Levi could not see it for the moment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's the joke?" asked Handforth, coming up behind Levi, and staring down the passage.

"I don't quite know!" said the Jewish boy. "These chaps appear to be hugely amused over something, though. There's nothing wrong with my appearance, is there?"

"You look all right!" said Handforth, eyeing him critically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell nearly went into hysterics.

"Silly asses!" grunted Church. "I can't see why they're cackling——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Solomon Levi suddenly.

He stood perfectly still, and Handforth and Co. noticed that the Jewish boy's face had gone slightly paler. And there was a gleam in his eye—a gleam which clearly denoted that he was angry with them. But he stood there, still perfectly calm, and he said nothing.

"What's the matter, Levi?" asked Handforth. "I'm jiggered if I can see——"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed McClure.

"What's the matter——"

"Look!" said McClure, pointing. "That's what the asses are cackling at! The cads! I call this a bit too bad!"

McClure was pointing to the space over the doorway of the end study. And Handforth and Church and several other juniors who had come up behind, saw at once what the joke was.

Solomon Levi shared the end study with Dick Goodwin, and there, fixed over the study door, was a well-known sign. In short, there were three golden balls, and underneath this sign was an

oblong piece of cardboard, with the words daubed upon it in black ink—"Solomon Levi, pawnbroker!"

The three balls were ordinary tennis balls, but they had been treated to a coat of gold paint. And now they hung there, glittering. It was, of course, a direct insult to Levi, and the Jewish boy was fully aware of this. He was aware also of the fact that Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were the culprits. Their very appearance proved this, for they were laughing far more hilariously than any of the other juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cads!" said Handforth hotly. "Don't you take any notice of this, Levi! It's a pity they haven't got something better to do!"

"I want to borrow two bob on my best shirt, Levi!" yelled Gulliver. "Ain't you going in to open the shop?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Knuts and their supporters went off into fresh howls.

"Begad! Is there anything the matter here?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West came strolling into the passage, and he was accompanied by Tommy Watson and myself, to say nothing of Dick Goodwin, Pitt, and several others. By this time the study passage was rather crowded.

"Look at that!" shouted Church. "That's what these rotters are cackling about—they've insulted Levi!"

"Begad!"

"Oh, I say, this is a bit stiff!" said Reginald Pitt, frowning. "Who put that sign up there?"

"Fullwood, of course!" said Church. "You might have guessed that, Pitt! Can't you see the way Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell are yelling? They're responsible for this piece of work. I reckon they ought to be bumped!"

"Rather!"

"Grab hold of the rotters!" shouted Handforth.

"Rats!" exclaimed Fullwood, scowling. "If you lay fingers on us, you idiot, we'll jolly soon have a prefect on the scene! There's no harm in a joke, I suppose?"

"Not if it's a good joke," I exclaimed, starting forward. "But this is a deliberate insult to Levi——"

"Rats!" said Bell. "There's nothing insulting about it. Doesn't his pater keep a pawnbroker's shop in Petticoat Lane?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's either a pawnbroker or a giddy moneylender," said Gulliver; "one of the two—swindling the public all the time. We thought we'd just put Levi's sign up for him—we're very thoughtful chaps, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you admit that you——"

"We don't admit anything!" snapped Fullwood. "The joke's against Levi, an' if he ain't sportsman enough to see it, he's a cad!"

A large number of juniors were grinning, of course. Even though they didn't quite agree with this form of jape, they could not help smiling at the idea of the thing.

The Jewish boy, however, was not smiling. He stood there, without saying a word. He was apparently at a loss for the moment.

He had only arrived at St. Frank's the previous day, and he had already proved himself to be a junior of sterling worth. Before his arrival, quite a number of fellows in the Remove had been against him; they had declared that they didn't want a Jew in St. Frank's, particularly in the Remove.

In the first place, they had pictured Levi as being a Jew something after the type of the comic-paper caricatures. They had expected him to speak in a peculiar way, to have thick lips, and to have a nose which could be seen a mile off. All these characteristics, however, were absent in Solomon Levi.

He was a Jew right enough—a pure-blooded, English born Jew. But he was refined—he was a young gentleman to his finger-tips; and the majority of the Remove fellows had accepted him as one of themselves, without question.

Levi had already proved his pluck, and he had created quite a good impression in the Remove.

For Fullwood and Co. to insult the new boy in this way was rather too much.

"Look here, you chaps!" I said grimly. "We're going to deal with these cads—now!"

"Hear, hear!" said Handforth, rolling up his sleeves.

"We're not going to stand any kind of nonsense of this sort!" I went on. "A jape is a jape; but this is an insult!"

"Rather!"

"A frightful insult, dear old boy!"

"It is not as though it was meant in good part," I went on. "If Pitt had done this, or somebody like him, it wouldn't have mattered so much; but it was done deliberately by those cads, with an insulting motive. Therefore, they're going to pay!"

"Heavily!" said Handforth grimly.

"Look here!" shouted Fullwood. "We're not going to stand any of this ——"

"I hope you don't mind, Nipper, but may I settle this matter myself?" inquired Solomon Levi quietly.

"Eh?" I said. "I don't see very well how you can settle this alone, Levi."

The Jewish boy nodded.

"If you will leave it to me, I think I can deal with the affair quite easily," he said. "I know very well that this is an insult to me—and my race. But, if Fullwood thinks that every Jew is a pawnbroker, he has made a mistake. There is nothing degrading or humiliating in being a pawnbroker—it is just as much a business as anything else. But that's not the point. Fullwood has done this simply in order to emphasise the fact that I am a Jew—and that I am only one Jew among hundreds of Gentiles. In short, he wants to make me feel uncomfortable—and he hasn't succeeded."

"Good!" I said. "Well, what's your plan?"

The Jewish boy was absolutely cool.

"I will soon show you what it is," he said. "Fullwood, I'll trouble you to remove your coat!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood started.

"You—you fool!" he snapped. "If you think I'm going to fight you——"

"I'll trouble you to remove your coat!" repeated Levi grimly. "The same applies to you, Bell—and to you, Gulliver! You three fellows have got to remove your coats—at once!"

Fullwood and Co. stared.

"Goin' to fight the three of us at once?" sneered Fullwood.

"I'm not saying what I'm going to do," replied Levi. "But I do say you've got to remove your coats—that's all!"

"Buck up!" said Handforth. "If you don't remove them, my sons, we'll do it for you!"

"Rather!" chorused a dozen other juniors.

Fullwood and Co. were not feeling quite so happy now. It was a good sign, however, in one way. If Levi believed that he could beat the three of them single-handed—well, he would find that he had made a mistake. Fullwood and Co. were pretty strong, and they were easily capable of dealing with Levi, if he was foolish enough to fight the three of them.

"Look here!" growled Fullwood. "I'm not goin' to soil my hands by touchin' this beastly Jew——"

"You'd better stop that, Fullwood!" I said sharply. "Levi is quite capable of looking after himself; but we're not going to stand here and listen to your insults about him. Take your coat off—and be quick about it!"

"Oh, all right!" snapped Fullwood savagely.

He knew very well that he had no alternative, and so, a moment later, he had removed his jacket, and it was being held by Merrell. Merrell also held the jackets of Gulliver and Bell. The three Knuts of Study A were now in their shirt-sleeves.

"Well?" sneered Fullwood. "When are you goin' to start? We're ready for you, you cad!"

Solomon Levi smiled.

"Oh, I'm not going to fight you!" he said smoothly. "That isn't my intention at all."

"Afraid to, I suppose?" jeered Bell.

"No, I'm not afraid to—as you'll probably find out one day," said Levi. "It takes a good long time for me to lose my temper, but if I do lose it with any of you fellows, you'll know all about it, believe me!"

"Then what's the game, Ikey?" asked Handforth, who was looking disappointed. "What's the idea of making these fatheads take their coats off, if you ain't going to fight them? I call it a fraud!"

Solomon Levi smiled.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Handforth, but I don't think it would be exactly the thing to engage in a scrap in the passage here. We might get some prefects down upon us, and that would mean trouble."

"That's quite right, Levi," I said. "But why have you made these chaps take their coats off?"

"I'll tell you, very shortly. Hand those coats to me, please."

Bell shook his head.

"Not likely!" he replied. "I'm not handing these coats over——"

Quite suddenly, however, he changed his mind, and he literally flung the jackets at Solomon Levi. Bell had seen, out of the corner of his eye, Handforth and two or three other juniors bearing down upon him—and Bell had decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

Levi took the coats, and hung them over his arm. Then he smiled, and walked down the passage until he reached the door of his study.

He looked up for a moment, contemplated the three golden balls, and then passed into the study. He closed the door behind him.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly.

"What on earth can his game be?" exclaimed Pitt. "Why has he taken those coats in there?"

"Oh, I suppose he's goin' to pick the pockets!" snapped Fullwood. "That's just about his mark—— Yarooooh! Ow! You—you——"

"And the next time you'll get another punch!" snapped De Valerie, who had been near Fullwood. "It seems to me, you cad, that you can't speak without uttering an insulting remark."

"Leave him to me!" said Handforth. "If he says another word of that nature, I'll simply wipe the floor up with him. But I'd like to know why Levi has gone into that study with those jackets! It's a bit of a mystery to me!"

As a matter of fact, it was a mystery to everybody. They could not possibly understand why the Jewish boy had taken those three jackets into the end study. What was he doing with them? Why had he forced Fullwood and Co. to take their coats off?

Levi was not long in returning.

He appeared minus the jackets; but he had three little slips of cardboard in his hand.

"Since this affair has been started, we may as well carry it on!" he said smoothly. "Let me see—I'm a pawnbroker, aren't I? Well, Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell have pledged their coats with this firm—and here are the tickets!"

"What?"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"The—the tickets?" gasped Fullwood.

"Exactly!" said Levi. "If you examine it, you will find it in perfect order."

Levi handed one ticket to Fullwood, one to Bell, and one to Gulliver. The three juniors gazed at those tickets rather dazedly. They did not quite appreciate the fact that their own joke had been turned against themselves.

But the other fellows appreciated it all right, and they yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fully has popped his jacket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But they can't be proper tickets!" grinned Pitt. "Levi hasn't advanced any money, and these rotters will be able to redeem their pledges for nothing. That stands to reason."

Fullwood was looking furious.

"You—you silly fool!" he snarled. "If you think I'm going to keep this ticket, you've made a mistake! I want my jacket back, and if I don't get it within two minutes I'll complain to the Housemaster——"

"Yah!"

"You can get your jacket back when you please," said Solomon Levi calmly. "But in order to redeem the pledges you must follow out the instructions on the tickets."

"Instructions!" said Handforth. "What instructions?"

He reached forward, and succeeded in taking the ticket out of Fullwood's hand. Ralph Leslie protested, but it was useless, and Handforth proceeded to read aloud the words which Levi had written on the ticket.

"Listen to this, you chaps!" shouted Handforth. "Oh, my hat, listen! 'One Eton jacket. This garment may be redeemed upon tendering a full and complete apology for insults delivered. No apology — no coat. — Solomon Levi.' What do you think of that—eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Fullwood, redeem your giddy coat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fullwood and Co. scowled ferociously.

"Rats!" shouted Gulliver. "If you think we're goin' to apologise, you've made a mistake! You beastly Jew——"

"If you want your jackets back, you must carry out the instructions on the pawn-ticket!" said Levi calmly. "You won't get your property otherwise."

"Good! Stick to that, Levi!" I said approvingly.

"I mean to," declared the Jewish boy.

"We'll see about that!" raved Fullwood. "Unless we have those jackets back within two minutes, you cad, we'll go straight to the Housemaster and report the whole thing."

Levi smiled.

"All right, then—go!" he said. "I don't think Mr. Lee will uphold your part of the affair, anyhow, and, believe me, you'll be compelled to apologise just the same!"

"Rather!"

"Besides, we're not going to allow the cad to get away!" put in Handforth. "Form up, you chaps! We'll hem them in until they apologise. I call this jolly rich. Levi is cute, and he is making the punishment fit the crime!"

"Yes, rather!"

Fullwood and Co. were in a trap of their own making, and they knew it. There was no way out of it—except by apologising to Solomon Levi. And to apologise to the Jewish boy in front of all these other boys was practically unthinkable. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell felt rather faint at the thought of it.

And just then, as though to bring matters to a head, the breakfast bell clanged out. Some of the juniors hurried off at once—headed by Fatty Little. Fatty, of course, would not remain behind under any conditions. Once the breakfast bell rang he simply made a bee line for the dining-hall, and earthquakes would not have stopped him.

But the majority of the fellows remained in the remove passage to see the end of this little incident. For it was quite certain that the end must come swiftly now.

"Buck up, Fullwood," said Pitt. "We've got to go into breakfast, and you must have your jacket. You'd better do the apologising stunt!"

"Sure!" said Farman, the American junior. "Come across with the goods, Fullwood. I guess Levi has put one over you this time, all right!"

Fullwood scowled.

"I won't apologise," he snarled. "I'm goin' to have my jacket back, but I won't apologise!"

"All right—no jacket!" said Levi carelessly. "It's up to you, my sons, and I'm not worrying. You can redeem your pledges when you like, it won't cost you a cent."

Bell looked round rather desperately.

"I—I say," he stammered, very red in the face. "We—we didn't mean to insult you, Levi. I'm sorry, and I apologise. Can—can I have my jacket back?"

"Certainly!" said Levi promptly. "That's good enough for me."

He turned, went into his study, and appeared a second later with Bell's jacket. He held it out.

"Take it, please," he said briskly.

Bell handed the ticket over, and received his jacket in exchange. He slipped it on at once, and then fairly fled down the passage. Gulliver stared after him, swallowed hard, and then turned to the Jewish boy.

"I—I want my jacket, too!" he said thickly. "I—I apologise—for—insulting you, Levi!"

Fifteen seconds later Gulliver had his jacket, too, and Fullwood felt it was absolutely useless for him to stick out any longer.

And so, with an effort that nearly choked him, he managed to utter the apology. It was a terrible humiliation for him, and he was simply boiling with fury. But Levi was satisfied, and Fullwood had his jacket returned.

The Nuts of the Ancient House strode away with a brow as black as thunder.

And Solomon Levi smiled, took down those three golden balls, and tore up the returned pawntickets.

"Now we'll go into breakfast!" he said smoothly.

Everybody was chuckling over that little incident, for Solomon Levi had made the punishment very fitting. And Fullwood and Co, instead of feeling extremely pleased with themselves, felt so small that they were positively afraid to look any of the other fellows in the eye

Obviously, it was a difficult matter to "put one over" on Solomon Levi!

CHAPTER II.

THE UPROAR IN THE CINEMA.

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST yawned.

"Of course, dear old boys, if you insist. I shall give way," he exclaimed resignedly. "But personally, I think it is a frightful waste of time—I do, really!"

"Perhaps so," I agreed. "But Tommy is particularly anxious to go, so we might just as well all be together, Montie. We have got permission from Fenton to be out after locking up, so it'll be all serene!"

Tommy Watson nodded.

"Of course," he said. "Dash it all, we haven't been to the pictures for weeks. And I think they've got something special on in Bannington to-day, a film called 'The Luck of the Brave,' or something like that. Anyhow, it's a special thing—something really first class."

"Then it'll be a bit of a change for the Bannington Cinema," I remarked. "It's not often we see a good show there, Tommy. Mr. Webb, who runs the place, is several kinds of a rotter, I believe, and he doesn't care what sort of films he gets as long as he fills his place. But I suppose he gets a decent show sometimes, so we'll chance it."

"Anythin' you like, dear old fellows," said Sir Montie. "I'm perfectly agreeable."

It had been Tommy Watson's idea, and Sir Montie and I agreed without any fuss. Tommy particularly wanted us to go with him to the Bannington Cinema that evening, for Tommy declared that a film of very special interest was being exhibited.

Tommy only based his declaration upon the fact that he had seen one or two attractive posters. As I pointed out, the film itself would probably turn out to be a rubbishy one, but there was really no telling until we saw the thing.

"Well, we'd better be moving," I said, rising to my feet. "We've finished tea, and we can do our prep. when we get back."

And so, a few minutes later, we left Study C and made our way to the cloak room, just off the lobby. And while we were getting into our overcoats and caps Dick Goodwin and Solomon Levi appeared. They, too, commenced to prepare themselves for a journey.

"Going far?" asked Goodwin, as he saw us adjusting our mufflers.

"To Bannington," I replied. "And you?"

"Oh, we're going to Bannington, too," said the Lancashire boy. "We thought about visiting the cinema——"

"Well, that's strange," said Watson. "That's where we're going. We might as well go together!"

"Good idea!" said Levi. "Goodwin just wants to show me the place. I'm rather strange at present, you know. I'm always fond of a good picture, so we might as well take the chance. And it'll be a lot better if you fellows come with us."

"It will that!" said Goodwin.

Very shortly afterwards we started off, and we took the journey to Bannington in a leisurely manner. Just before we arrived we heard a somewhat loud voice in our rear. Turning, we beheld Edward Oswald Handforth on his bicycle—with Church and McClure just in the rear.

It was obvious that the chums of Study D had been riding rather hard.

"Thought we'd catch you up," said Handforth triumphantly. "Lazy bounders! We didn't start until ten minutes after you left! We're coming to the pictures with you!"

"Begad, that will be frightfully ripping, dear old boy!" murmured Sir Montie. "We always enjoy havin' a quiet time, begad!"

I grinned. It was not very probable that we should have a quiet time if Handforth and Co. came into the cinema with us.

Handforth was always noisy—he couldn't help it. But we didn't mind at all in this case. It was just as well that a party of us should go together.

Solomon Levi paused for a moment or two, looking at the posters. The exterior of the Bannington Cinema was not exactly prepossessing. At one time of the day the place had been quite nice looking, but now it was grimy, dirty, and neglected.

Everything was done in a slip-shod manner. The programme board was all anyhow, and there were electric lights missing from many of the holders. It seemed, indeed, that the place needed proper management.

And it was easy enough to understand why this state of affairs existed. Mr. Webb, the proprietor, was safe. That is to say, he had no fear of his patrons neglecting him for another place of amusement of a similar type, for this cinema was the only one in Bannington.

The town was quite large enough to support a picture theatre double or treble the size. But, somehow, nobody had been businesslike enough to open a

place in opposition to Mr. Webbs' cinema.

Thus the man had everything to himself, and he could run his place as he liked without fear of losing any patrons. He was always pretty well packed—every day—so he didn't care.

Levi walked to the little pay office and pushed a ten shilling note through the grill.

"Give me eight one and threepenny seats, please" he said. "All in one row, if you can."

"Can't be done!" said the cashier. "We're nearly full up. You can have three in one row, two behind, and three a bit further along. You can have eight two shilling seats, if you like——"

"No thanks," said Levi. "We'll make do with the others."

"Jolly decent of Levi," murmured Watson. "He's standing treat for the lot of us."

Levi got the tickets, and then turned to us.

"You fellows can settle up with me later," he remarked. "One and three. No need to trouble now."

Watson grinned.

"I thought it was rather wonderful," he chuckled. "There's nothing doing in the treating line!"

"Well, we've got no right to expect it," I said. "This wasn't Levi's treat, anyhow."

"But he's got pots of money," said Tommy. "He could easily afford——"

"That's not the question," I said. "I don't suppose Montie would have asked for any money if he had bought all the tickets. But Montie isn't a Jew. Jews are jolly keen on all money matters—they're famous for it. But Jews are famous for being lavish, too. If Levi ever holds a spread in his study you can bet your boots he'll do it well; better than any other chap in the Remove. He'll spend money like water in order to please his guests. That's just the Jewish way."

We passed into the cinema and were shown to our seats by a somewhat untidy-looking attendant. The cinema was not bad inside: that is, there was plenty of room, and the seats were fairly comfortable, although many of them were in a ramshackle condition.

Mr. Webb evidently did not believe in keeping his property in tip-top order. Anything would do, there was no opposition.

Handforth and Co. sat just in front of Tommy and Montie and I, while Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin were several seats to our left.

An American comedy was showing at the moment, and we only saw the latter half of it. This was amusing enough, and we were quite entertained.

After this the big picture of the evening commenced, "The Luck of the Brave." There was nothing on this film to show where it originated, it was obviously a Continental picture of somekind.

"Now we're going to see something good," remarked Tommy. "This picture ought to be A.1."

But Tommy Watson was sadly mistaken.

We sat looking at the picture with mild interest for some time. Then, when the first reel was over, and we were well into the second reel, we became bored. The story was complicated, it was full of loose ends, and the acting was extremely poor. In addition, it seemed to be a kind of concentrated "penny dreadful" in picture form.

"Dear boy, I don't like to disagree with you, murmured Sir Montie. "But I think this film is frightfully rotten. I do really."

Tommy Watson grunted.

"Well, it's not up to much so far. I'll admit!" he said. "Perhaps it'll be better later on."

"Begad, I hope so."

But that hope was not destined to be fulfilled. The picture, indeed, grew worse and worse. The whole tone of it was bad, to my way of thinking. I'm not particularly squeamish, and I generally take the good with the bad, without grumbling. But this time I couldn't quite manage it.

The film deteriorated tremendously. It was soon a disgusting exhibition of extremely unpleasant subjects—suicide, murder, and all manner of other revolting business.

And the moral tone of the picture was of the lowest grade. Crimes were glorified, and virtue was treated in a contemptuous, mocking manner. And before very long I became quite disgusted. I fidgeted in my chair, and didn't care to look at the screen. I was, in fact, feeling quite anxious to leave the place. A film of this kind only made me impatient and angry. Such

pictures could only have been produced to supply the wants of a very low class of humanity.

"I'm fed up with it," I muttered. "It's a beastly insult to our intelligence, and the whole tone of the picture is vile. I'm clearing out, you chaps."

"Dear old boy, I'm delighted to hear you say so," murmured Sir Montie. "The picture is shockin', it is, really! And when I observe that there are many children in this place I feel indignant. Such pictures ought not to be exhibited to decent people!"

"Hear, hear!" said Watson. "We'll clear out. I'm fed up!"

They were just about to rise in their seats when I stopped them.

"Hold on!" I whispered. "What's the matter with Handy?"

We kept our seats, and listened, looking at the same time, in the direction of Handforth and Church and McClure, who were just in front of us, in the next row. Handforth, as usual, was by no means quiet.

"You chaps can stop here if you like. I'm going!" he exclaimed loudly. "I'm disgusted. This picture is absolutely frightful. It ought to be banned!"

"S-hush, you ass!" breathed Church.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to s-hush! I've got a right to my opinions——"

"Order!" said one of the attendants, coming down the gangway.

"Hush! Hush!" said some of the other patrons.

"A film like this ought to be banned!" went on Handforth, utterly disregarding the whispered warnings. "If I had my way, the people who produced this film would be boiled in oil! I'm a decent chap, thank goodness, and I can't look at stuff of this kind without feeling disgusted and fed up. It's a swindle! They give the picture a good title, then show us yards and yards of murder, suicide, and a glorification of crime!"

"Hush!"

"Do be quiet, Handy!" breathed McClure.

Handforth was just about to say something else, when a man suddenly stood up. He was well dressed, and he was about middle age, and he had been sitting several rows lower down than we were. He stood up in his place, turned round, and faced the entire audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouted loudly, "I'm extremely glad to hear that some boys in this audience have taken exception to the film which is now being shown——"

"Hush!"

"Sit down!"

"Order! Order!"

"I only want to say a few words!" went on the gentleman. "I publicly protest against the exhibition of such harmful, disgraceful pictures as these. The whole tone of the film is demoralising, and I call upon all decent people in this audience to stand up and support me in this protest. It will serve as an indication to the management that we in Bannington do not intend to have these wretched films foisted upon us ——"

"Sit down! Sit down!"

"Turn him out!"

"No, no!" shouted somebody at the back. "I agree with you, my dear sir. This film is disgusting. It ought to be banned!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We support you, sir!"

"Sit down! Turn him out!"

"Order! Order!"

There was quite an uproar, and shouts came from every part of the cinema. But I was extremely pleased that this man had stood up, and that he had voiced the very opinion which we held. Naturally, we supported him vociferously. And Handforth, in particular, shouted at the top of his voice, agreeing with everything the stranger said.

There was a slight commotion at the rear of the cinema, and, glancing round, I saw Mr. Webb, the proprietor. He was looking furious, and he had two powerful looking attendants with him.

"Turn that man out!" he snapped furiously. "Get hold of him, and pitch him right outside!"

"Yes, sir," said the attendants.

"I trust that this action on my part has not been misunderstood!" went on the stranger down in the front. "I merely wish to draw the attention of everybody in this cinema to the fact that such films as this are not wanted. We will not tolerate them——"

"This way, sir, please!" said one of the attendants sharply.

"I will come when I have finished!" said the gentleman. "I am sorry to give you any trouble, for I realise that you

are not to blame, but the proprietor of this picture theatre must learn——"

"You've got to come out, sir!" declared the attendant curtly.

"The proprietor of this establishment has got to remember that he serves the public!" went on the stranger. "It is for him to consider the public, and not to pander to the tastes of the lowest grades of humanity——"

He broke off, for the two attendants had come along the row, and were grasping him. Without waiting for him to put up any resistance, the men pushed and pulled together, and the unfortunate demonstrator was hurled violently into the gangway. He went over with a crash, but managed to get to his feet again, white with anger.

"If you dare to touch me again, you brutes, I'll report this matter to the police!" he shouted. "I have every right to protest if I wish to——"

"No more of this!" shouted one of the attendants. "This way, you!"

They grabbed the man fiercely, and, treating him as though he were a criminal, they commenced bustling him up the aisle. But Handforth and Co. were now on the scene.

"Let that chap go!" roared Handforth. "If you don't release that gentleman at once, you rotters, I'll punch your noses! I agree with every word he has said, and I think that the proprietor of this place is a disgusting rotter!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Dick Goodwin.

The Lancashire boy and Levi were soon on the scene, too. And, needless to say, Tregellis West and Tommy Watson and I were there a second afterwards. We had been unable to get on the spot with the others because we had some difficulty in getting past the people in our row.

By now the whole cinema was in a state of uproar. The picture had been stopped, and the lights were switched up. The two attendants in the gangway were attempting to force the stranger up towards the exit.

But Handforth was taking a hand now.

The leader of Study D did not waste any time in argument. For he brought his famous left into play at once, and one of the attendants received Handforth's fist upon his nose, and there was considerable force behind that fist, too.

"Yaroo!" howled the man, toppling over backwards.

"That's for treating this gentleman as though he were a hooligan!" shouted Handforth. "You've got to remember that we all pay to come into this place—we all pay to see a beastly, rotten film like this! It's about time somebody made a public protest!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, young man!"

There were many shouts from all parts of the cinema, and quite a number of women upheld the action which we had taken. But others, of course, were shouting angrily, and condemning us in strong terms.

The uproar was rather terrific.

In the gangway a fight was in progress. Handforth and the attendants were going it as hard as they could. The men, of course, were only doing their duty, but they were ruffians. I had no sympathy for them whatever. They used bad language, too. And, in the middle of it, Mr. Webb, the proprietor, came rushing down the gangway, white with fury.

"If you don't get out of this place within one minute I'll call the police!" he shouted thickly. "Out you go—all the lot of you!"

"All right! Keep your hair on!" I said grimly. "We're going, Mr. Webb. We've got too much self-respect to stay in this place. We're thoroughly disgusted with what we've seen!"

"You confounded young whelp——"

"And it won't improve matters if you insult me!" I went on. "We're leaving your cinema, and I don't suppose we shall come into it again. You ought to be prosecuted for exhibiting such a film as this!"

"You—you!"

"Come on, you chaps; don't sacrifice your dignity!" I said. "That's enough, Handforth; we'll clear out. It won't do any good to create a further disturbance. We've shown what our feelings are, anyhow."

And, soon afterwards, we managed to get out of the cinema. During our way up towards the exit we were greeted with hoots, hisses and jeers—from a certain section of the audience. On the other hand, we received several rounds of applause, and a good deal of cheering. The audience was divided, but the greater majority of the people did now

have the courage to stand up and support us openly.

And when he stood outside we were hot, flustered, and indignant. Our visit to the Bannington Cinema had not been very successful.

But it was destined to lead to tremendous results.

CHAPTER III.

QUITE A SENSATION.

SOLOMON LEVI chuckled.

"Well, we had a bit of excitement!" he remarked. "And that film was certainly rotten!"

"Rotten!" repeated Handforth. "It was a disgrace to any audience. A film of that sort ought to be burnt up! We've often seen dud films in this place, but this one fairly takes the biscuit! I'm not going in that horrible place again!"

"Dear old boy, I quite agree with you," said Sir Montie. "I also agree with the gentleman who stood up and made such a spirited protest. He was a brick, begad! I should like to have a word with him——"

"You can't, old man," I interrupted. "The gentleman has gone. He walked off as soon as he got outside. The best thing we can do is to get to St. Frank's as soon as possible."

"Yes, rather!"

Just as we were about to leave, we turned, and looked at the front of the cinema. And at that moment Mr. Webb appeared, hot and flustered, and with his eyes glittering with rage. He shook a fist at us in a menacing manner.

"I shall remember you!" he exclaimed savagely. "You may think yourselves very lucky that I don't have the law on you for creating a disturbance in my establishment! But I shall remember your faces, and you'll never be admitted into this place again!"

"You—you rotter!" roared Handforth. "I'll——"

"Hold on!" gasped Church. "There's no sense in having a scrap here, Handy——"

Handforth, however, was evidently determined to continue the argument with Mr. Webb. We, on the other hand, were just as determined that Handforth should not. As a result, the hot-headed leader of Study D was whirled away down the road helpless in the midst of us. He protested vigorously, but it was useless. And, finally, we came to a halt several hundred yards away.

"You—you silly asses!" gasped Handforth breathlessly.

"It's all right, my son," I said. "We've brought you out of danger."

"Danger!" bellowed Handforth. "Do you think that chap could hurt me?"

"I don't mean danger of that sort," I replied. "But if you attacked Webb, he would probably whistle for the police, or something unpleasant like that. Then you might be given in charge, and that would be awful. You've got to remember St. Frank's, Handy. You mustn't bring disgrace on the fair name of the school!"

Handforth calmed down a bit.

"Well, perhaps you're right in that direction," he admitted. "The rotter ain't worth troubling about, anyhow."

And, at last, we were on our way back to St. Frank's. We discussed the affair in detail, as we peddled along on our bicycles. And, at length, we arrived at St. Frank's—much earlier than we had intended.

Handforth, of course, did not keep the story to himself. This was hardly to be expected. As soon as he got into the Ancient House lobby he commenced telling a group of juniors all about the affair at the Bannington Cinema. Consequently, within an hour, the story was all over the school.

Everybody was talking about the disturbance which had occurred in the picture theatre. And, naturally, everybody was curious to know what this bad film was. All the decent fellows took our word that the film was a rotten one, and that it was not worth seeing. But on the other hand, plenty of other fellows decided that it would be worth a visit to the Bannington Cinema, just to satisfy their own curiosity.

Fullwood and Co. were particularly interested.

"I expect the film is a jolly good one," said Fullwood. "If these snobs say it's rotten, that's a recommendation. They're squeamish. They don't like to see anything sporty or good. I vote we go along and have a look at this picture, you chaps."

"Rather!" said Bell. "But there ain't time to-night."

"No; we'll go to-morrow!" said Fullwood. "That's my idea."

"Good enough!" said Gulliver. "We'll go!"

There were other fellows who came to the same decision—Merrell, Marriott, Teddy Long, and other fellows of the same calibre. Quite a few seniors, too, considered that it was their duty to go and have a look at the picture—just to satisfy themselves that it would not do any harm to the juniors.

By the time bedtime came, the whole of St. Frank's had talked about the affair at the Bannington Cinema. And we really thought that the matter had ended there, and that there would be no further trouble. In this belief, however, we were mistaken.

For in the morning we had a surprise.

The local newspaper, which appeared twice weekly, was delivered that morning. Several of the masters took the local "rag," and it was also delivered to a few of the seniors. "The Bannington Gazette" was not much of a newspaper—in fact, it was a pretty rotten publication on the whole, and our opinion of the paper went down considerably after we had seen a report which appeared in this particular issue.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I had gone straight into our study after coming downstairs. We had one or two letters that morning, and we had been reading them at leisure. Then, some little time before the breakfast bell was due to ring, the door opened, and Reginald Pitt put his head in.

"Seen the local rag?" he inquired.

"No," I said. "But I heard some of the fellows saying that there's a report in it."

"A report!" grinned Pitt. "My only hat! You ought to see it! You'll have a fit!"

"Why?" I asked.

"You'd better have a look at the report," said Pitt. "Anyhow, you fellows are referred to as disgraceful young hooligans, and a few other choice names of the same description. The report in the newspaper doesn't tally with the yarn you told last night—not a little bit!"

I looked up.

"What do you mean?" I asked quietly. "Do you think——"

"Keep your hair on," grinned Pitt. "We know that your yarn was true, Nipper. But you'll be tremendously wild when you see that report. It must be a fabrication from the very start. Anyhow, you fellows are made to appear in a very bad light."

"Begad," said Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez, and gazing at Pitt. "This is frightful, dear old boy. Have you got the paper on you?"

"No," said Pitt. "But there's one in the common-room, being passed round among the chaps. Teddy Long got hold of it somehow—pinched it from one of the senior studies, I believe. There's a bit of a commotion going on."

"Rot!" I said briskly. "We'll come down and have a look at that paper."

But in the passage we ran into Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin. They, too, had heard a rumour that the newspaper report was not exactly complimentary. And, together, we went down into the common-room.

We found Handforth and Co. already there, and Handforth was shouting at the top of his voice.

"Of all the nerve!" he roared. "This report is lies, all lies! I never read such a rotten publication in all my life!"

"Rats!" said Gulliver. "Newspapers don't tell lies!"

"Peace, children," I said. "Let me have a look at this famous report. There's no sense in getting excited about it. Let me have that newspaper, Handy."

Handforth looked up.

"Haven't you seen it?" he asked.

"No!"

"Then you'd better read what it says about us!" said Handforth. "By George, I'm going to punch the editor of this rag in the eye!"

I took the newspaper from Handforth, and found it was folded back already. And there, in the very centre of the middle page, was the report. It had been given great prominence, and the headline was in large type. It ran in this way:

"DISGRACEFUL SCENE IN A CINEMA!

"An unfortunate scene occurred last night during the performance at the Bannington Cinema. It was, in fact, quite disgraceful, and we regret to announce that several boys belonging to St. Frank's College were mixed up in this scene of rowdyism.

"In an interview with Mr. Webb, the proprietor of the cinema, our representative elicited the real facts of the case. It appears that a misguided gentleman in the audience rose to his feet and offered a ridiculous protest concerning the film which was then being shown. In spite of many requests to keep order this gentleman continued his disturbance. Finally he was approached by two attendants, and these men very properly attempted to remove the disturber.

"However, at this point a number of St. Frank's boys joined in the scene. From what occurred one would imagine them to be a set of young hooligans from the slum district, rather than highly educated boys from a school like St. Frank's. They deliberately attacked the attendants, meanwhile shouting at the top of their voices, and there was quite an uproar. It was not brought to a conclusion until Mr. Webb himself appeared. He ordered the disturbers out of the theatre. Fortunately, for all concerned, the boys obeyed this order at once, probably realising that they had acted in a ruffianly manner. It is to be hoped that such things as this will not occur again, and we trust that these schoolboys will be much ashamed of themselves.

"Further, we hope the Headmaster of St. Frank's will make it his duty to inquire into this matter, and to punish those junior schoolboys very severely for their ungentlemanly conduct. If it were within our power to inflict punishment, we should certainly make good use of the birch.

"Mr. Webb has generously decided not to proceed further. He has come to the conclusion that it will do no good to prosecute these offenders, and he has therefore allowed the matter to drop. In this decision we heartily agree. For it would serve no good purpose to bring such a disgraceful scene into greater prominence."

By the time we had finished reading that notice we were all looking hot and indignant. It was little wonder that Handforth was angry, and that his eyes were blazing.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "Of all the lies! The editor of this paper ought to be horsewhipped for shoving in a string of fibs like that!"

"Mr. Webb is responsible!" I said grimly. "A fat headed young reporter interviewed him, I suppose, and Webb spoofed the chap up to the neck. The rotter saw an opportunity to give his picture theatre a free advertisement. That's all it amounts to. And he has insulted us in the process, although he had sense enough not to give any names."

"But what are we going to do about it?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"I fancy the Head will do something," I replied. "You can leave it to Dr. Stafford. The Head won't allow a notice of this kind to pass without taking some action. I dare say he had a bit of a shock when he read this notice this morning."

Shortly afterwards the breakfast-bell rang. And when we went into the dining-hall we noticed that a good few members of the Fifth and Sixth regarded us curiously and with disapproval. That report in the "Bannington Gazette" had probably been read by almost every fellow in the school by this time.

Sure enough, directly after breakfast was over the whole school was called together in the big hall—including the College House boys. It was evident that the Headmaster intended threshing this matter out at once, without any delay.

Dr. Stafford was looking very grave as he stepped forward upon the raised platform, and faced the school. In his hand he held a copy of the local newspaper, and his expression was serious and severe.

"Boys, I have a matter of grave seriousness to discuss," he began. "I dare say the majority of you are aware of the fact that a notice appeared this morning in the 'Bannington Gazette.' This report concerns an alleged scene of disorder which occurred in the Bannington Cinema last evening. It is stated that several junior boys of St. Frank's were implicated in this affair, and it is my intention to thrash this matter out."

"We want you to, sir!" shouted Handforth.

"Order, order!"

"I knew nothing whatever of this occurrence until I read the report in the paper this morning," went on the Head. "Needless to say, it came as a great shock to me. I was pained and alarmed to learn that a party of my boys could

be so degraded as to behave in the manner described——"

"But that report is a lie, sir!" said Handforth warmly.

"Silence!"

"You'll get chucked out in a minute, you ass!" said Church, giving Handforth a nudge.

"Well, the Head believes——"

Handforth broke off as he observed two prefects moving towards him. He thought it far better to remain quiet.

"According to this newspaper report, the scene in the Bannington Cinema was one of the most degrading character," went on the Headmaster. "It appears that a disturbance occurred, and that, during that disturbance, several junior members of this school behaved in a manner most unbecoming and most ruffianly. That, I repeat, is according to the report. But I wish to find out the exact truth of this matter, and therefore I shall call upon the boys who were mixed up in this affair to step forward!"

As though by clockwork, eight juniors left the ranks of the Remove. They were Handforth, Church, McClure, Dick Goodwin, Solomon Levi, Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and myself. Not one of us hesitated a second. We stood forward eagerly. As a matter of fact, we were most anxious to do so, so that this matter should be properly cleared up.

The Headmaster was rather astonished. He also looked rather pleased.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This is most gratifying!"

As a matter of fact, the Head had anticipated that no body would step forward in response to his call. He had believed that the culprits would refuse to show themselves. It was therefore very pleasing to Dr. Stafford to find that we had responded so promptly to his commands.

"This is really remarkable!" said the Head, adjusting his pince-nez, and regarding us with mild astonishment. "In fact, I may say that it is extraordinary. You are hardly the type of boys I should suspect of being implicated in such a matter as this. Nipper, you are the captain of the Remove, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were mixed up in this affair at Bannington?"

"I was, sir," I replied. "We all were, in fact."

"Were there any other boys present?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, Nipper, I will put my questions to you," said the Headmaster. "You are the Form captain, and it is only right that you should reply to my query. In the first place, do you admit that this scene in the Bannington Cinema was disgraceful?"

"No, sir," I replied firmly. "What we did was perfectly justified."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "It's a pity we didn't make a bigger row!"

"We're not ashamed of what took place, anyhow, sir," put in Levi.

"You declare that your action was justified, Nipper?" said the Head. "Do you think it is justifiable to act like young hooligans——"

"We didn't act like young hooligans, sir," I broke in warmly. "That's only what this newspaper reporter says. I have no objection to telling you exactly what occurred, sir, from the first to the last. Then you will be able to judge whether we acted rightly or wrongly."

The Head nodded.

"That is exactly what I require, Nipper," he said. "I know that you are a truthful boy, and that you will tell me precisely what occurred without misrepresenting the facts. You will kindly explain."

"Yes, sir," I said. "We went into the Bannington Cinema in order to see the performance. We thought it would be quite a decent show, but after we had been there about twenty minutes or half an hour we discovered that the biggest picture of the evening, a film called 'The Luck of the Brave,' was a most undesirable film."

"Indeed!" said the Head, elevating his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir," I exclaimed. "I was so disgusted by the picture that I decided to leave the cinema. My companions were of the same opinion. This film ought not to be shown in any public place in the United Kingdom. It is a disgrace to any intelligent audience. Crime is bolstered up, and the criminals are made into heroes. Not only that, but the whole film abounds with un-

pleasant and disgusting situations. We don't pretend to be namby-pamby, but we were thoroughly disgusted with this picture, and our feelings were rather high. We were angry with the management for presenting such a film to the general public. There is no excuse for such pictures, particularly when there are hundreds of splendid pictures to be had every week."

"Well, Nipper," said the Head quietly. "Please proceed."

"That's what I am doing, sir," I exclaimed. "We were just about to leave when a gentleman in front of us stood up, and addressed the audience. In quiet, dignified tones he declared that the showing of such a film as that one was demoralising. He requested the audience to join him in his protest, and to support him. But he had not proceeded far before two ruffianly attendants came to him and attempted to eject him. They did it in a manner which was neither dignified nor gentle.

"Seeing that the poor gentleman was being very brutally handled, we could do nothing but go to his rescue. We did so, and managed to set him free from his attackers."

"That isn't quite right, sir," broke in Handforth. "I don't mind admitting that I said a few words, too. I addressed the audience, and I told everybody what I thought of the management for putting on such a rotten film. There's only one cinema in Bannington, and it's a disgrace that we should be subjected to such treatment. Why can't we have good films to see—why can't this Mr. Webb provide the town with the right kind of stuff?"

I went into several details concerning the affair, and the Headmaster listened with great interest. The whole school listened, in fact, and everybody knew that my version of the affair was the true one. Not anybody doubted my word—except, perhaps, such fellows as Fullwood and Co. And their opinion did not matter a rap. When I had finished the Head nodded with approval.

"I am obliged to you, Nipper, for your straight talk," he said. "It is not my intention to deal further with this matter now. It will be left in abeyance for the time being. It is quite possible, however, that I shall refer to the matter at some later period. Boys, you may dismiss."

The fellows were rather disappointed and unsatisfied. They had been expecting the Head to take some action then and there. But, apparently, it was Dr. Stafford's intention to inquire further into this matter before he made any statement.

What would be the end of this affair? It was impossible for us to make any guess at the astounding developments which were soon to take place!

CHAPTER IV.

BARRED BY THE HEAD.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD helped himself to a cup of tea.

"Oh, we'll go—of course," he remarked languidly. "Personally, don't believe a word of what Nipper said. This film is a decent one, I'll bet—a regular ripper, and we're going to have a look at it for ourselves!"

"That's the idea," said Bell.

"And we'd better buzz off pretty soon," added Gulliver. "We haven't got permission to be out after calling over, so we shall have to buzz."

The Nuts of Study A were taking tea. Lessons were over for the day, and Fullwood and Co. were discussing their proposed run into Bannington. They had decided to visit the cinema, and to have a look at the offending picture for themselves.

And they were not the only ones.

Long and Marriott and Armstrong had decided to go. Griffith and several others were already setting out. And not only the Remove had been infected by the fever, but a good many members of the Fifth and Sixth had suddenly become imbued with the desire to go to the pictures.

Without the slightest doubt, that paragraph in the local paper had been a splendid advertisement for Mr. Webb's cinema.

And if it acted in this way at St. Frank's it was quite certain that it had acted in a similar fashion in Bannington itself. It was highly probable that the

cinema would be packed to suffocation that evening, mainly by curious people who wanted to have a look at the questionable film for themselves. It is a sad and curious fact that if a film or a play or a book is banned—or severely criticised—the public simply flock to see it or to buy it, as the case may be.

As a general rule the Triangle at St. Frank's was quite deserted about half-past five. The fellows were partaking of tea at that time, and it was seldom that there were many fellows to be seen on the Triangle after six.

But on this occasion, quite a stream of juniors came out of both houses between five-thirty and five-forty-five.

Nearly everybody went to the bicycle shed, and nearly everybody went straight and took the road to Bannington. Needless to say, all these fellows —seniors and juniors—were bound for the Bannington Cinema.

Nelson Lee, who had been invited to tea with the Headmaster, glanced out of the window occasionally, and the famous schoolmaster detective did not fail to observe the unusual number of fellows setting out on their bicycles.

"It is exactly as I thought, Dr. Stafford," remarked Nelson Lee. "That report in the paper has had the effect of arousing curiosity. Quite a number of boys are setting out on their bicycles. It is safe for us to assume that they are bound for the cinema."

The Head nodded.

"Well, we shall be starting for Bannington ourselves very shortly, Mr. Lee," he said. "I intend to have a look at this picture with my own eyes. If it is as Nipper has declared, if it is a most undesirable film, I shall take strong action. We cannot prevent these boys from going now until we know for a fact that this film is bad; it would be unfair to place a ban upon it. But we shall know the truth very shortly.

Nelson Lee and the Head journeyed to Bannington in Dr. Stafford's motor-car. They were set down some little distance from the cinema, and then walked the rest of the way. The picture-theatre was not situated in the High Street, but just down a small side-turning. It was, in fact rather tucked away; and if it had not been for the fact that this was the only cinema in Bannington, it would not have received much support. But it was in a unique position—it was the only picture-house in the whole district, therefore it was generally full up.

When Nelson Lee and the Head arrived they found a long queue of people waiting to go in the cheaper seats. There were, however, a number of two-shilling seats left, and Nelson Lee bought two of these.

He and Dr. Stafford passed inside, and they were shown to their seats. The cinema was rather stuffy, for it was packed full, and a topical film was just coming to a conclusion.

Very soon after the two masters had taken their seats, the lights went up. This was very good, for Nelson Lee and the Head were able to see that quite a number of St. Frank's boys were in the place. The majority of them were in the one-and-threepenny seats, but Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were lounging easily in the two-shilling seats, quite near to the spot where Nelson Lee and the Head were sitting. Fullwood and Co. were unaware of the presence of the two masters.

"Bally rot!" remarked Fullwood. "There's nothing wrong with this picture show. It's quite a decent one, as far as I can see——"

"Why, the picture hasn't come on yet, you ass!" said Bell. "It was only this picture those chaps grumbled about —nothing else."

"Oh, I expect it will be all right," said Fullwood. "Those good little Georgies ain't any judge! I'll tell you whether the picture is good or bad—I know a lot about these sort of things!"

It was noticed that there was a kind of feeling of tenseness in the audience. Most of the people had come here this evening particularly to see the film which had caused such comment in the morning paper. It was a kind of morbid curiosity which had brought them.

Of course, the same cannot be applied to Nelson Lee and the Head. They had not come because they were anxious to see this undesirable film. It was a matter of duty with the Head—he was determined to find out whether this film was indeed unfit to be seen by his pupils.

And it was not long before the Head came to a positive decision. Before the picture was half-way through, Dr. Stafford was in a state of indignation and agitation. He was indignant that

such a film should be exhibited, and he was agitated because he knew that a good many of his boys were witnessing it.

"Good gracious, Mr. Lee, I am disgusted!" he exclaimed. "Nipper was quite right, and I approve of the boy's attitude. This film is disgraceful!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It is, Dr. Stafford," he said. "I've seen more than one bad film, but this really beats them all. It is demoralising in the extreme, and it is bound to have a very harmful effect upon boys, particularly boys who are not strong-willed."

"I think it would be as well for us to go now," suggested Nelson Lee. "Personally, I have seen quite enough to satisfy me."

"I agree with you, Mr. Lee," said the Head softly. "I should like to bring all these boys away with me, if possible."

"I am afraid that is out of the question," said Nelson Lee. "We cannot get up and order these boys to leave the cinema—that would only create another disturbance, and we wish to avoid that, sir. It would be better, I think, to let these boys remain, and we can deal with the matter later."

"Yes, I think you are right, Mr. Lee. I certainly think it will be better for us to leave the place quietly and unobtrusively," said Dr. Stafford, rising in his chair. "But I should like you to have a word with the proprietor, if you will?"

"Certainly!" said Nelson Lee. "I was just thinking of the same thing myself."

When they got outside into the illuminated lobby, they stood chatting for a moment or two; then Nelson Lee went to the box-office, and presented his card, with the request that he should be allowed to have a few words with Mr. Webb.

It was not long before the proprietor appeared.

He was a very unprepossessing looking individual. He was fairly large, and his face was bloated, proving quite conclusively that he had a fondness for strong liquor. His eyes were puffy, and there was an aggressive look about his face.

"Well?" he demanded. "What do you want? I see that you are from St. Frank's——"

"It is not my intention to waste many words with you, Mr. Webb," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I observe that you are inclined to be hostile—and that is hardly necessary. I have a request to make."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Webb unpleasantly.

"I want you to refuse to admit any St. Frank's boys in future," said Nelson Lee. "If they come to your pay-box, I want you to understand that they are not to be admitted——"

"The infernal impudence!" exclaimed Webb roughly. "I will do nothing of the sort!"

"It is not my intention to be impudent," said Nelson Lee keeping his temper with difficulty. "I am merely making a request, Mr. Webb, and I trust that you will respect it."

"Then you will trust in vain!" snapped the proprietor. "If any St. Frank's boy comes to this cinema, and wishes to pay for admittance, he will be admitted—understand that! I will let anybody I choose into this establishment, and I will not stand any interference from such confounded busybodies as yourself! You had better leave these premises quickly, or I'll have you thrown off!"

Nelson Lee bit his lip.

"It was foolish of me to make such a mistake," he said quietly. "I assumed that I was addressing a gentleman. You have clearly shown me, Mr. Webb, that such is not the case!"

Nelson Lee turned and walked out of the cinema, joining Dr. Stafford in the street. And Mr. Webb was left writhing with rage and mortification. Nelson Lee's words had been cutting enough, but his tone had been fifty times more cutting.

"The man is a ruffian!" said Nelson Lee curtly. "I had a good mind to knock him down, Dr. Stafford, but I did not wish to cause any disturbance."

"He refused your request, I presume?"

"He did!" replied Lee. "He told me to mind my own infernal business, and he also stated that he would admit anybody who liked to come to the box-office with money."

"Very well," said the Head grimly,

1. The Jewish boy stood regarding the insulting sign without saying a word.

2. Mr. Webb was shot out of the trap into the water like a stone from a catapult.

"we will see about this, Mr. Lee. I am determined, in any case, that no St. Frank's boys shall visit this establishment again. The place is positively harmful! If one picture of that type is shown, it stands to reason that other pictures of a similar type will also be exhibited. I shall put my foot down heavily."

Meanwhile, Fullwood and Co. were enjoying the pictures—they told themselves that they were enjoying it, at all events.

"What rot!" said Fullwood. "There's nothing wrong with this show—it's a jolly good film, in fact! What do you chaps think?"

"First-rate!" said Gulliver. "I reckon this burglar chap in the film is a good sort. Of course, he murdered two people; but he was justified—that's how I look at it."

"Same here!" said Bell. "The chap may be a murderer, but he couldn't help killing those two people—they were in his way. It's only an eye for an eye business—there's nothing harmful in that."

It was obvious that Fullwood and Co. were prejudiced in favour of the film. Inwardly, perhaps, they were rather disgusted with it, but they would never admit such a thing. A great many of the other fellows who were in the cinema were not quite so obstinate. Several seniors, in fact, left the premises before the film had come to an end, for they, too, felt the same as I had felt about the picture.

Quite a number of juniors arrived at St. Frank's together, having cycled home from Bannington in a clump. When they reached the lobby of the Ancient House, they found a considerable number of juniors gathered round the notice board, talking together excitedly.

"What's the row?" asked Armstrong.

"Oh, a notice; the Head's just had it put up!" said Owen major. "Hallo! Have you just got back from Bannington?"

"Yes."

"Did you see that film?"

"Rather!"

"Well, what's your opinion?"

"Well, it's pretty rotten!" said Armstrong. "I don't agree with it at all; but there's no sense in making a big fuss about it like Nipper did. It may be a bad type of film, but there's nothing absolutely wicked about it."

"Yes, there is," put in Doyle, who had also been. "It's a rotten picture—it's a dirty, beastly thing!"

"Well, it's not likely that you'll see any more there!" said Owen major grimly. "You'd better read that notice!"

Several juniors crowded round, and they were eager to read the words which appeared above the Head's name. They were, after all, rather startling.

For this is how the notice ran:

"IMPORTANT.

"All boys—seniors and juniors alike—will please take heed of the fact that the Bannington Cinema is, from this date onwards, out of bounds. No boy belonging to St. Frank's—not even a prefect—is allowed to enter this building.

"(Signed) MALCOLM STAFFORD,
"Headmaster."

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Armstrong, in dismay. "Great Scott!"

"Out of bounds!"

"Barred—barred by the Head!"

"My only hat!"

The fellows stared at one another in something like consternation.

"Oh, but this is rotten!" shouted Augustus Hart. "I'm as much against rotten films as anybody, but that doesn't mean to say the cinema ought to be put beyond the pale. It's not fair to any of us. I don't believe in it!"

"Neither do I!" said Hubbard. "It's—it's despotic! What right has the Head to put the local cinema out of bounds? It's the only picture-place there is—the only one we can go to! And just because they show a rotten film for once we're barred from it altogether!"

"Oh, rotten!"

"We won't stand it—not likely!"

"I'm afraid we shall have to stand it!" said Reginald Pitt. "And, after all, the Head is justified——"

"What?"

"The Head is justified——"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Piffle!"

"Just as you like!" said Pitt, shrugging his shoulders. "But, personally, I

consider that the Head is justified. The Bannington Cinema has had a bit of a beastly name for several months past. This isn't the first dud film by any means."

"Yes, but that doesn't make any difference!" protested the other juniors. "It's a jolly serious thing to put a ban on the picture-theatre like that——"

"Eh? What's that?"

Fullwood asked that question as he came into the lobby from the Triangle. He was accompanied by Gulliver and Bell. They had just got back from Bannington.

"The cinema is barred!" said Hubbard warmly.

"By gad!"

"Seniors and prefects included!"

"Well, I'm dashed!"

"What rot!" said Fullwood, scowling. "If the Head thinks I'm going to take any notice of that, he's made a bloomer! I'll go to the cinema just when I like——"

"I should advise you to be sensible, my lad!" exclaimed Morrow, of the Sixth, in a grim voice. "So you'll go to the Bannington Cinema when you like, eh?"

"I—I—I mean——" stammered Fullwood.

"You mean that you were only bluffing!" said Morrow. "Let me tell you this, my son. If you're seen coming out of that cinema, or if the Headmaster has any report concerning any fellow having entered the place, there will be ructions. And I can tell you straight off that the punishment will consist of the birch!"

"What?"

"The birch!" repeated the prefect. "A public flogging, to be exact!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"A public flogging for going into a picture-theatre?" protested Griffiths. "What absolute rot!"

"It doesn't matter to you whether it's rot, or whether it's anything else," said Morrow. "The Head has given these orders, and they must be carried out. If the Head decides that the Bannington Cinema is out of bounds—well, it's out of bounds. There's an end to it."

The school was rather excited, and quite a number of fellows entirely disagreed with the Head's ban. They considered that it was unjust and uncalled for.

On the other hand, there was quite a number of fellows who upheld Dr. Stafford's decision. In consequence, there were continual arguments, and quite a number of rows. One would hardly have imagined that such a small matter could have caused such great commotion.

In Study C, we were discussing the matter before getting ahead with our prep.

"It's a bit drastic, certainly," said Tommy Watson thoughtfully. "At the same time, I think I agree with what the Head's done."

"Rather!" I said. "After all, we don't go to the beastly place much, and I'm jolly certain I wouldn't go again after what happened last night. It's a pity all the townspeople of Bannington don't boycott the place—that would bring the genial Mr. Webb to his senses."

"Rather, dear old boy!" agreed Sir Montie, nodding. "He needs bringin' to his senses, begad! I'm very much afraid that Mr. Webb is a frightful bounder. I'm quite certain, in any case, that his manners are atrocious!"

I nodded.

"I don't forget that little incident which happened on the Bannington Road the other day." I remarked slowly. "You remember—when Levi saved that old chap from being run over by Webb's car?"

"Yes, we remember it, of course," said Watson. "Webb was just about drunk then."

"He was," I agreed. "And but for Levi's prompt action, that old man would have been run down and killed. And there was something queer about that old chap."

"Queer?"

"Yes," I said. "He had a white beard, white hair, and he wore smoked goggles. But I believe it was all a disguise—a fake!"

"Really, dear old boy!" protested Montie.

"Anyhow, I mean to keep my eyes on Mr. Webb," I went on. "I don't think he's acting on the level, and if I could only succeed in bowling him over, it would be a good thing for Bannington."

At the same time, Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin were chatting in their own study.

"I'm not a bit surprised," said Goodwin. "Ay, and I'm not sorry, either. That picture theatre is a rotten hole, it is that!"

The Jewish boy nodded.

"It wouldn't be such a bad sort of show if it was well looked after," he said. "But the management seems to be all wrong, to my mind. The place is kept untidy, and dirty, and it seems as though it hadn't been ventilated for three or four months. Of course, all this is explained by the fact that there is no opposition. If only there was another cinema in Bannington Mr. Webb would have to look to his laurels. He'd feel a big draught, believe me!"

"I suppose he would," said Dick.

"Suppose! I know it!" said Solomon Levi. "Why, I don't believe there's another town of the size of Bannington in England, with only one cinema. It's absolutely unheard of. I can't understand why this chap Webb has had the field to himself for so long. It's about time somebody else came and opened in opposition. Webb would be wiped completely out."

"Is that so?" asked Dick Goodwin.

"You bet your sweet life he would!" said Levi. "Wiped right out, believe me! It's a good proposition, Dick, and we ought to think about it."

"We?" repeated Dick, staring.

"Certainly!" said the Jewish boy, nodding. "It's a rare stunt. In any case, we're barred from Webb's place now. We can't go anywhere. There's no place of amusement in the whole district——"

"Except the theatre," put in Goodwin.

"Well, we can't go to the theatre—except to matinees," said Levi. "And the show at the theatre—the matinee show—generally happens on a Saturday afternoon, when we've got football on or something of that sort. But we can easily pop into a picture theatre for a couple of hours any evening, and still manage to get back in time for calling over."

And, during the remainder of the evening, Solomon Levi was looking very thoughtful indeed. There was a keen light in his eyes, too—a light which indicated that his mind was very active.

What idea had Levi got in his head?

CHAPTER V.

SOLOMON LEVI'S GREAT IDEA.

"QUEER looking old place!" said Levi interestedly.

"Yes; it's stood like that for years—empty and deserted," said Dick Goodwin.

"Years?" said the Jewish boy. "And houses scarce as they are!"

Reginald Pitt laughed.

"Yes, I believe there is a house shortage in Bannington," he remarked. "At the same time, this old place won't let. They can't sell it, and they can't do anything with it at all. It simply lies there empty, deserted, and forlorn. Did you ever see such a dismal-looking old show in all your life?"

The three Remove juniors were standing right in the middle of the High Street in Bannington. Not actually in the middle of the road, of course, but midway between the lower end and the upper end. It was a keen November afternoon — a half-holiday — and the juniors had come into the town in order to make a few purchases. Levi and Goodwin had met Reginald Pitt on his bike only a few minutes earlier, and they had decided to cycle back together.

The object of their interest was a huge old house which stood well back from the High Street—practically forgotten by the townspeople.

The thoroughfare was a busy one, and the opposite side of the road was lined with big shops and stores. Further down, on the other side of the road, were other shops. But this old house stood, there, right in the centre of this busy district, an object of forlorn indifference.

The old house stood in its own grounds—quite large grounds, and the front door was well back from the road. The garden was dilapidated, and looked more like a wilderness than anything else.

The railings in front of the house were rusty and broken and bent. There were two boards up—so old that the lettering upon them was nearly obliterated. However, it was still possible to distinguish the legend that the house was to be either let or sold. And it was no ordinary house, either. It was, in point of fact, a great mansion—a huge, square,

solidly built residence which cared nothing for time or weather.

And there it stood—empty and deserted.

"I can't understand it," said Solomon Levi. "Why is it that nobody has taken the place—or bought it? Just think of the commercial possibilities! Why, that could be turned into a great block of flats, or a set of offices—anything, in fact. It's simply going to waste, standing there. How long has it been empty?"

"Oh, nearly twenty years, I believe," said Pitt.

"But why?"

"It's haunted, you ass!"

"Eh?"

"The house is haunted!" said Pitt, grinning. "At least, that's what everybody believes. All the people in Bannington are quite certain that this old place is haunted, anyhow. And, although it has been put up for sale dozens of times, nobody has even bid twopence for it."

"When does the ghost walk?" asked Levi.

"Goodness knows!" replied Pitt. "As a matter of fact, I don't suppose the place has got a ghost at all; but you know what superstitions are. The place has got a bad reputation, and nobody wants it. So it remains a white elephant on the owner's hands. If you'd care to buy it, I dare say you could pick it up for a song!"

Levi's eyes gleamed.

"For a song—eh?" he said. "I believe you're right, Pitt. If this place is haunted, and nobody will buy it, then it stands to reason that the owner will let it go for next to nothing. By glory! I've got an idea—a first-class idea, believe me!"

"Going to buy it?" grinned Pitt.

"Yes!"

Pitt and Goodwin stared.

"Oh, draw it mild!" chuckled Pitt. "That place would cost thousands at the least——"

"Not necessarily," said Levi. "If it's a white elephant on the owner's hands, it will probably be in the market for six or seven hundred quid. That would be cheap—dirt cheap. And I've got a fine idea!"

"My dear chap, if you're trying to be funny——"

"I'm not!" said the Jewish boy seriously. "I'm absolutely keen on this. What's the matter with buying this property, and opening up a cinema—right here, in the middle of the High Street?"

"Eh—a cinema?" exclaimed Goodwin.

"Yes!"

"But, my dear boy, it's impossible!" protested Pitt.

"Nothing is impossible!" said Levi grimly. "Just think of that rotten place down the side turning—Webb's cinema. What is it? Nothing more nor less than a hole? If any other cinema opened in Bannington, it would simply swamp Webb's place completely. And where could you find a better site than this?"

Pitt and Goodwin looked at the old haunted house again.

"Well, of course, it's a good position," said Pitt. "In fact, I suppose it's the best position in Bannington. Right here, in the middle of the High Street, it would attract everybody. But such a thing as that couldn't be done, Levi. It's all rot to think about it."

"Don't you believe it!" said the Jewish boy. "I've got this idea, and I'm going to push it along. A cinema of our own! Think of it! A cinema run by the Remove!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's the idea!" went on Levi enthusiastically. "We should own this place—all of us! Why, we should be able to have shows here, concerts, amateur theatricals, and all sorts of things, and, every day of the week, it would be open to the public as a cinema! Anyhow, I'm going to see what I can do!"

Pitt looked rather astonished.

"See what you can do?" he repeated. "But how? What on earth are you getting at, Levi? Where do you think you'll be able to find something like a thousad quid?"

"My dad would finance me!" said Levi calmly.

"Your dad!" repeated Dick. "But, my dear chap, he wouldn't supply money ad lib! And you mustn't think this cinema idea is only going to cost about a thousand quid. Even after the place has been bought, there will be tremendous alterations necessary, and——"

"You needn't go into these details,"

interrupted Levi. "I know exactly what is required, and I know, also, that the job cannot possibly be done without a lot of capital. Ten thousand quid wouldn't go anywhere. We should require at least twenty thousand, if not more."

"By gum!" said Dick Goodwin.

Reginald Pitt laughed.

"Well, that settles it!" he remarked. "I don't think we can manage to find twenty thousand quid, Levi. So we might as well dismiss the matter once and for all. And even your pater wouldn't spring a sum like that. Still, at the same time, it's a good proposition—I don't mind admitting it. If a picture palace were put up here, in the middle of the High Street, it would be a terrific success."

"It would!" agreed Levi. "Or, to be more exact—it will!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing—except that this cinema is going to be a reality, and not a myth!" replied the Jewish boy smoothly. "But for the moment we'll dismiss it."

They walked slowly down the High Street, wheeling their bicycles., Reginald Pitt and Dick Goodwin did not think much more about what Levi had been saying. They were intent upon making their purchases.

Solomon Levi, on the other hand, was looking very thoughtful. His keen eyes were keener than ever, and they had a light of eager anticipation in them.

And it was just then that Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I appeared. We had come into Bannington on our bicycles, and we spotted the other three juniors some little distance up the road. At the same moment we took notice of something else.

A trap was being driven sharply along the High Street, and I instantly recognised the man who was in the vehicle. I don't suppose I should have taken any notice of the trap at all, but for one fact. This fact was obvious—the driver was using his whip in a most vicious manner.

"By jingo!" I said angrily. "Look at the brute! He's whipping the horse simply for nothing. Why, it's Webb!"

"Begad! I believe you are right, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "Mr. Webb, of the cinema! The frightful ruffian!"

It was quite obvious to us that Mr. Webb was an exceedingly ill-tempered man. He had displayed fury to us, and now he was wreaking his rage upon a helpless animal. It was absolutely unnecessary for him to whip the horse there—right in the High Street. And then, as we watched, we saw something else.

Dick Goodwin and Solomon Levi and Reginald Pitt were strolling along, wheeling their bicycles. The trap went rattling towards them, and Mr. Webb recognised those three juniors at once.

He knew that they were three of the boys who had created a hostile disturbance at his cinema. And Webb, with a sudden glitter in his eyes, raised his whip on high.

Slash!

The whip descended — ostensibly directed to the horse. But the long lash curled round and caught Goodwin and Pitt a stinging cut. Goodwin was struck across the shoulders, and the end of the whip lashed into Reginald Pitt's face. He staggered back with a cry, fallingo ver his bicycle, and going down in a heap.

"Oh!" shouted Pitt. "Yaroooh! What—what——"

Solomon Levi stared after the trap angrily.

And Mr. Webb, glancing round, revealed the fact that he was grinning maliciously. He urged his horse on to greater speed, and disappeared up the High Street, and into the traffic.

And at that moment we arrived on the scene.

"The brute! The rotten rascal!" shouted Pitt, rising to his feet. "He did it deliberately!"

"I know he did!" said Levi. "My word! You've got a nasty slash on your cheek, Pitt!"

We looked at Pitt with concern. A great red weal was showing on his cheek, and Reginald touched the spot tenderly. His face was flushed, and his eyes were filled with anger.

"Really, dear old boys, it was an outrage!" declared Sir Montie. "I think that we ought to do somethin'—I do really!"

"We shall do something!" I declared. "If Mr. Webb thinks he can act in that way, he's made a mistake. Come on, you chaps!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Tommy Watson breathlessly.

"We're going to chase Mr. Webb on our bikes," I replied. "We're going to make him apologise for acting in such a way."

"And supposing he won't apologise?"

"Then we'll—well, wait and see!" I said darkly.

Dick Goodwin's eyes were gleaming, too.

"The rotter caught me a nasty slash!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet there's a mark across my shoulder. By gum! We'll teach him a lesson—we will that!"

"And I'm not going to be satisfied with any apology!" said Pitt fiercely. "I'll take that beastly whip, and I'll give Webb a slash—I'll give him a taste of his own medicine!"

Levi nodded.

"Well, we'd better be making a move!" he said briskly. "That chap was going pretty fast, and unless we're sharp, we sha'n't overtake him!"

A moment later we were on our bicycles, and we scorched up the High Street at a speed which caused people to turn round and stare at us. There was not much fear us taking the wrong direction, for the road led straight, and there were so side turnings—except unimportant thoroughfares which Webb certainly would not have taken. And, presently, we found ourselves on the outskirts of the town—on the Helmford Road.

Never for a moment did we slacken our speed. And, at length, right in the distance, we saw Mr. Webb's trap bowling along at a more sedate speed now. The man evidently had not the slightest idea that we should take any action in the matter. He had viciously used his whip on the three juniors, but he had not suspected that they would chase him.

We were in grim earnest, however, and before very long, we were rapidly overtaking the trap. Webb became aware of this fact, for he glanced round, and then he whipped his horse up furiously.

"Put your backs into it!" gasped Watson. "We shall never catch him otherwise!"

"Yes, we shall, my sons!" I said. "There's a bit of a hill just ahead—a descent. Webb won't dare to let his horse take that hill at full tilt—and we can scorch down it at about thirty miles an hour. We'll soon overtake the rotter now!"

And I was right.

On the level, Webb had made his horse gallop, but as soon as it commenced descending the hill he brought it down to a trot, for it would have been extremely dangerous to allow the horse to gallop downhill. We, on the other hand, had simply let ourselves go, and, by the time the bottom of the hill had been reached—or nearly the bottom—we were alongside Mr. Webb's vehicle.

"You'd better pull up, Mr. Webb!" I shouted. "We want a word with you!"

"Confound you!" snarled Webb. "If you dare to interfere with me——"

"We want to know what you mean by slashing at——"

I came to a halt, for Mr. Webb had raised his whip threateningly; then he brought it down and round with a terrific swing.

Crack—crack!

The whip cracked twice in quick succession, and the end of it curled round my body with a vicious swing. Automatically I applied my brakes. I was now becoming extremely angry. Webb was acting in a manner which simply could not be tolerated. Again he raised his whip.

Crack!

It was a tremendously loud report this time—for a whip can make a sound like the firing of a gun. And the result was hardly what Mr. Webb had anticipated.

His horse, already rather nervous by reason of his fierce driving, reared up madly; then, taking the bit between its teeth, it simply raced down the remainder of the hill at a tremendous gallop. Mr. Webb was flung back in his seat, and he clung there, clutching at the reins with all his strength—desperately.

The horse had bolted.

CHAPTER VI.

A LESSON FOR A RASCAL.

"BEGAD!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Well, it serves him right!" said Watson. "He's only himself to blame for it! The horse took fright because he cracked his whip too much!"

This was the perfect truth. Webb had frightened his own horse, and he could only blame himself for what was now taking place. And the animal had certainly bolted—it had bolted in such a manner that it was absolutely impossible for the driver to bring it under control. It was tearing along the road, with Webb clutching at the reins and doing everything in his power to control the animal.

But Webb could do nothing. He was swept along at breakneck speed, and his only hope lay in the fact that a fairly steep hill was in front. By the time the animal had got halfway up this hill it would probably have exhausted itself, and then it would come to a halt, quivering and perspiring, and quite docile.

But this was not destined to happen.

At the bottom of the hill there was a bridge, spanning a shallow stream, and beside this bridge lay a little dip, with a track leading down towards it. It was customary for drivers to lead their horses down to the water to drink at this spot. It was even possible to drive straight across the river and join the road a little further on, for the water was by no means deep.

We were still cycling on, for we were determined to overtake Mr. Webb as soon as his trap came to a standstill. And then we should demand an explanation, and, if it was not forthcoming, we should deal with the man in our own particular way. But fate, it seemed, had determined to take quite a hand in the game.

Reginald Pitt suddenly uttered a shout.

"Look!" he yelled. "The horse has left the road!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"He's gone down that track towards the river!" shouted Tommy Watson. "Why, Webb will be pitched in——"

"Oh, good!" said Levi, grinning. "That's the stuff!"

There was not the slightest doubt that the juniors were correct. The horse, instead of keeping to the road and going over the bridge proper, branched off and was now speeding down the rough track towards the water. It would be practically impossible for the animal to pull the trap right across the ford, and so join the road further on. The events of the next few seconds promised to be interesting.

They were interesting!

The trap charged down the decline towards the river, and now Webb was on his feet, shouting desperately, and in a tremendous state of fright. Just for a moment I thought that he was going to jump.

But he did not do this.

He clung there, to the seat, scared out of his wits, and the horse, charging into the water, came to a sudden and abrupt halt almost in the middle of the stream. The effect was disastrous—for Mr. Webb.

He was simply shot out of the trap like a stone from a catapult. He rose in the air, described an arc right over the horse's back, and then fell head first into the shallow water, several feet away from the animal.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price that for a ducking?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was simply impossible for us to do anything but laugh. It was one of the funniest things I had ever seen, and it rather pleased us to laugh at Mr. Webb's misfortune. If anybody had deserved a ducking, he had deserved one. And he had received it, solely owing to his own viciousness, for he had frightened his own horse by his whip; therefore, he had nobody else to blame for this mishap but himself.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We pushed our bicycles against a hedge, and then hurried down towards the scene. But I called a halt at once.

"Two of you had better rush round to the other side—across the bridge!" I exclaimed. "The horse is moving again, and it'll probably get out all right. We shall have to cover it, and keep it quiet."

"Good!" said Watson. "Come on!"

He and Pitt hurried round, and after a moment, we followed him. It was better, perhaps, to be on the other side of the water, and it was just as well that we should all be together.

The horse was thoroughly subdued by what had happened, and when it walked out it was as meek as a lamb. It was quite unhurt by its experience, and was perfectly docile. We simply led it up the track, and then let it graze in the

grass. Then we turned our attention to the unfortunate Mr. Webb.

This ruffian was now scrambling out of the water. He was floundering about helplessly in the mud, and he had churned up the water to such an extent that it looked like a duck pond. Webb was swearing furiously, and as he came out of the water he shook his fist at us, and staggered drunkenly.

He was literally foaming with rage—foaming with mud, to be exact—and he looked such an extraordinary spectacle that we could only stand there and howl.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wretched cinema proprietor was a sight for sore eyes. Caked with mud from head to foot, he looked like nothing on earth. His face was grimy, and his hair was matted together in an awful manner. And he came out towards us, gabbling incoherently.

But at last he came to a halt, and shook both his fists at us.

"You—you young hounds!" he snarled thickly.

"It's no good raving at us, Mr. Webb!" I said. "You frightened the horse yourself, and you're to blame for what took place——"

"Hang you!" rapped out the man. "It was your doing, and I shall have the law on you for it! I shall prosecute you——"

"Oh, cut out that stuff!" I interrupted curtly. "You may possibly find that Pitt will have the law on you for assault. You deliberately slashed him in the High Street of Bannington, and there are plenty of witnesses who can prove it. If Pitt chooses to take such a course, he can bring the matter into court!"

"Bah! You young dogs——"

"But I'm not going to do that, Mr. Webb!" interrupted Pitt. "I'm not going to take any particular action, because I think you have been fittingly punished already. The way you went head first into that water was simply beautiful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, it wouldn't be a bad idea to do it over again!" suggested Pitt calmly. "If we had a motion-picture camera on the spot, we could take a film of you, and it would provide a splendid entertainment for your patrons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Webb simply foamed with rage.

"You confounded young brat!" he snarled. "Do not imagine that this affair has ended here. I shall report everything to your Headmaster, and I shall not be satisfied until you're expelled from the school, every one of you!"

"You'd better take our advice, and say nothing!" I suggested grimly. "I shouldn't advise you, in any case, to approach Dr. Stafford. He doesn't think a great deal of you, Mr. Webb, and he will readily believe our story when we tell it—the truth. Better let the affair drop as it stands—I think we're fairly satisfied."

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, I think we ought to give him a touch with the whip!" suggested Watson. "He doesn't know what it's like, or he wouldn't treat his horse so brutally. The best way to make a savage driver more careful is to give him a taste of his own whip!"

"Hear, hear!" said Levi. "I suggest that we reverse the position."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, why not put Mr. Webb between the shafts, and then touch him up now and again with his whip?" suggested the Jewish boy. "That will just about do the trick, I imagine. Believe me, it would be as good as twenty ordinary lessons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you dare to touch me——" began Webb apprehensively.

"There's not much question of daring," I said. "We are perfectly justified in dealing with you roughly, Mr. Webb. You deserve everything that we shall give you—and then you'll be let off lightly!"

The man quivered with rage. He was standing there on the grass, and a great pool of muddy water had formed itself round him.

"This will be the death of me!" he shouted thickly. "By Heaven! I shall catch pneumonia after this—I shall catch my death of cold——"

"Begad! We can't allow that, dear old boys," said Sir Montie. "I think we had better do somethin'!"

"Do something?"

"Exactly!" said Sir Montie. "Levi's

idea is the best—that's a stunnin' idea—it is, really!"

"Thanks!" said the Jewish boy. "You see, we can't possibly let Mr. Webb get into his trap. It would mean pneumonia—double pneumonia, perhaps—if he sat in that trap, and drove back to Bannington. He'd be chilled to the marrow before he got half the distance, and, with those wet clothes on, it would be all up with him. What Mr. Webb needs is exercise!"

"Yes, that's the idea!"

"You infernal young brute——"

"Exercise!" I exclaimed briskly. "And you will certainly obtain a great deal of exercise if we carry out Levi's scheme. It's a good idea, Mr. Webb. We're awfully considerate fellows, and we couldn't possibly think of allowing you to catch pneumonia. It's a beastly rotten complaint, pneumonia—people die of it, you know. And all you need is to keep going—keep active. As long as you keep your blood in circulation, and your temperature normal, you'll be as right as rain. But it's fatal to stand still; it's just as fatal to sit in a trap when you're soaked through!"

"Therefore, we've got to look after you!" said Tommy Watson, falling in with the idea. "We've got to take care of you, Mr. Webb."

"You'll be grateful to us afterwards!" said the Jewish boy. "When you get to Bannington, warm and full of health, you'll be jolly pleased that you met us. In any case, we couldn't possibly allow you to ride back in that trap—it would be suicide. You'd just take to your bed when you got home, and you'd pine away and die. We want to avoid all that."

"And there's only one way of doing it," grinned Pitt. "Shall we get the trap ready, Nipper?"

"Yes; as quickly as you can!" I replied. "We'll look after this gentleman!"

Webb shook so much with rage that the mud fell off him in lumps.

"Go away!" he shouted fiercely. "Go away—leave me alone! If you don't go away at once, I'll half kill you! By thunder! I'll make you pay for this before long—I'll make you suffer, you infernal young brats! I've had enough trouble with you lately, without this affair!"

"You're likely to have a little bit more trouble before long, Mr. Webb!" I said smoothly. "You'll probably regard it as trouble; but we shall simply do it for the sake of your health. It's necessary, you know; we can't allow you to catch a cold."

Webb tried to speak, but couldn't; his fury was too great, and he only succeeded in making thick, inarticulate sounds. Then, finding his voice again, he proceeded to describe us as the most awful persons, in extremely lurid language; this language, in fact, was so highly coloured that we decided that something had to be done. It was rather a difficult matter to touch Mr. Webb—at least, to handle him vigorously, for it was quite likely that he would transfer a great deal of his mud to us.

Therefore, we gave him warning.

"If you use any more of that bad language, Mr. Webb, we shall be obliged to take action," I said grimly. "There's a nice long stick lying there on the grass, and if you swear at us any more, we shall take that stick and push you back into the water!"

"You—you——"

Mr. Webb totally disregarded our warning, and proceeded to describe us all over again, but in language far more lurid than before. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie rushed away, obtained the long pole, and they came back with it. I grasped part of it, and together we moved forward.

"Now!" I exclaimed. "All together!"

We butted the end of the pole into Mr. Webb's chest. He clumsily attempted to escape; but there was nothing doing. The next moment he toppled over backwards, and sat down with a terrific squelch in the shallow water at the edge of the pool.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the next time you use foul language, we'll duck you under completely!" I said grimly.

"I'll make you pay for this!" snarled Webb, realising that it would be better to obey our instructions. "Later on, you will wish with all your heart that you never interfered with me. I've never been so outraged in all my life before! By Heaven! There will be something to pay for this!"

Just then Pitt came along.

"Ready!" he said briskly. "You can bring the gee-gee along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then, Mr. Webb," I said, "the trap is waiting for you! You're going between the shafts!"

Webb started.

"If you—if you dare to—to——"

"Oh, we'd dare anything," I said. "We're awfully wicked persons, you know. We're quite wicked enough to teach you a lesson, Mr. Webb, at all events. But this isn't really a lesson—it's only a kindly act. We don't want you to catch pneumonia, and so we are going to give you healthy exercise!"

"This way, please," said Pitt briskly.

After all, there was a certain amount of truth in what we had said. Left to himself, Mr. Webb would certainly not take the trouble to exercise himself much. He would probably have driven back into Bannington as rapidly as possible—thus laying himself open to a severe chill, which might easily have resulted in pneumonia. For the air was keen that day; and a brisk ride would do Webb no good at all in his present wet condition. Therefore, by making him take exercise, we were really doing him an excellent turn.

But Mr. Webb could not appreciate this fact.

In spite of our reluctance to do so, we found it necessary to handle our victim. He certainly would not tie himself between the shafts, and so Levi and Pitt and I grasped hold of Mr. Webb, and seized his arms.

He struggled fiercely at first, but soon found it was an unwise proceeding. Tommy Watson gave us a hand, and between the four of us we did not have much difficulty.

Mr. Webb was led between the shafts of the trap. Once there, in that position, stout pieces of rope were cast over his wrists, and the other ends of the rope were tied to the shaft.

This was done in such a way that Mr. Webb's wrists would not be chafed at all. He would be able to grasp the trap, and would then go easily, without any strain upon his arms. At the same time, it was utterly impossible for him to escape from the trap. He was tied to it—securely.

"Now then, Mr. Webb!" I said briskly. "You've got to trot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gee up, old hoss!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I won't move an inch!" snarled Webb. "If you dare to touch me I will have the police on you. I have suffered this indignity because I am not in a position to retaliate. But I must tell you candidly that——"

"Really, Mr. Webb, it's no good you going on like that!" I interrupted. "You don't seem to realise that you're getting cold, and that if you get a chill it might turn to pneumonia. You said so yourself! So the best thing you can do is to get a move on—and keep your blood in circulation!"

"I positively refuse——"

"Gee up!" exclaimed Pitt grimly. "We've had enough of this!"

Pitt had the whip in his hand, and he cracked it ominously. Mr. Webb was an extraordinary sight, bound there between the shafts. Mud was still caked over him, and his face was hardly discernable through its coating. But he could see right enough, and he was very apprehensive regarding that whip.

"If you dare to touch me——"

"I'll give you ten seconds," said Pitt. "If you don't get a move on by then——"

He finished his sentence expressively by a crack of the whip.

"I tell you I will not suffer this indignity!" shouted Webb. "I will not——"

"Five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten!" exclaimed Pitt grimly. "All right, Mr. Webb, I gave you warning, now you've got to take your medicine!"

Crack!

The whip whistled through the air, and the end of it caught Mr. Webb round the legs. He gave one wild howl, and leapt about a yard into the air, pulling the shafts with him.

"Yarooh!" he howled. "Yow—ow!"

He was not hurt much, for Pitt only used the whip lightly. But it was quite sufficient for Mr. Webb. He gritted his teeth fiercely, and then pulled at the shafts. And away he went, rattling down the road, with the trap behind him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad, this is frightfully wicked of us, dear old boys, but I'm feeling happy!" said Sir Montie beaming. "Webb deserves what he is gettin', and so I have no sympathy in my heart!"

We had our bicycles, and quickly followed the trap. The horse, of course.

had been tethered behind, and was now trotting along in quite a docile manner. It was probably rather surprised to find the position reversed—to find that its master was between the shafts. At all events, the animal appeared to be quite contented in the arrangement.

Pitt and I cycled on in advance—one on either side of Mr. Webb. And, when he showed signs of slacking we touched him up a bit. Of course, we didn't make him go fast—only at a slow trot. And, at the worst part of the hill, two of the juniors gave a hand behind the trap. But it was gruelling work for Mr. Webb, who was not in condition. At the same time, it warmed him up, and made it practically impossible for him to catch any chill owing to his ducking.

Strictly speaking, he ought to have thanked us for what we were doing, for, without doubt, our services were of great good to him. At the same time, he was in a humiliating position, and he felt it.

The very thought of driving into Bannington in that state made Mr. Webb shudder. But there was no help for it, there was no escape for him.

And, at last, the outskirts of the town were reached. It was not long before a crowd of boys were trailing behind us, yelling and laughing and shrieking with glee. And not only boys, but men and women were following the trap.

The affair was causing quite a sensation, and the good townspeople of Bannington stared at us with positive astonishment. To see Mr. Webb in this condition was rather staggering. And a great many citizens were rather pleased.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody was laughing. It was really impossible to do anything else. For the situation was extremely funny. To see this muddy object tied between the shafts, pulling his own trap, was rather ludicrous.

And by this time Mr. Webb was too tired to persist much. He was indifferent to the shouts and yells which sounded on all sides. All he wanted was to get the matter finished, so that he could escape from the crowd, and change into dry things.

Afterwards—well, murder was altogether too good for us. Mr. Webb was planning all sorts of horrible and ghastly punishments which would be meted out by degrees.

We didn't precisely know where we were bound for, or what we should do. But, as it happened, the matter was settled for us in a manner which we had not anticipated.

We were just entering the High Street when a small motor-car came along. It halted at the sight of the long procession which was coming down the street, for, by this time, scores and scores of people were following the trap. I glanced up, and saw to my dismay, that the occupant of the car was Nelson Lee!

The guv'nor jumped out of the car, and stood in the middle of the road.

"Boys," he said sternly, "stop at once! What is the meaning of this? Who—who is this person——"

"I'll have the law on these young scoundrels for this!" panted Webb thickly. "By thunder! I'll have them thrown into prison——"

"It's Mr. Webb, sir," I exclaimed. "We're just giving him some exercise!"

"What!"

"Some exercise, sir," I said calmly. "Explain yourself, my lad."

"Well, you see, sir, Mr. Webb was unfortunate enough to go head first into a river," I said. "We knew that it would be most unwise for him to ride back to Bannington in his trap, so we thought it would be a good thing to put him between the shafts. He is warm all over now, and he won't catch a chill!"

Nelson Lee looked at me suspiciously.

"I asked you for the truth, Nipper—not for a humorous remark," he said severely.

However, it was not long before we told the guv'nor exactly what had occurred. Nelson Lee's eyes were gleaming, and I felt sure that he upheld us in what we had done.

"You may leave this matter to me, boys," he said grimly. "I will see that Mr. Webb is released and he gets home safely. You must return to St. Frank's at once."

"Yes, sir," I said meekly.

"You will return to St. Frank's, and you will each write me five hundred lines!" continued Nelson Lee.

"Oh!"

"But—but——"

"Silence!" rapped out Lee. "Furthermore, you will be confined to gates for three days. Now be off, before I inflict a more severe punishment!"

"Yes, sir!"

As a matter of fact, we were extremely pleased to get off so lightly. We had expected to receive nothing less than a flogging.

One look at Dick's face told Leo that Webb had acted in a brutal, cowardly fashion.

Needless to say, we hurried off towards St. Frank's at top speed.

"Well, it was jolly well worth it!" grinned Pitt. "We paid him back in his own coin."

"And serve him right!" said Solomon Levi. "The man's a brute—and we've not finished with him."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm quite certain that we shall have several ups and down with Mr. Webb before long!" said the Jewish boy. "Believe me, Nipper, we are in for some exciting times."

"Why are you so certain?"

"Because—well, because of my thoughts!" said Levi calmly. "I've got pretty big plans in my mind—and those plans are connected with Bannington Cinema. Therefore it stands to reason that we shall have some further dealings with Mr. Webb in the very near future!"

And, as events turned out, Solomon Levi was right!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

A DECLARATION of war may now be said to have been made between the proprietor of the Bannington Cinema and the juniors of St. Frank's, headed by Nipper and Solomon Levi.

It is unlikely that Mr. Webb will forget the humiliation he suffered before the people of Bannington at the hands of a few St. Frank's Juniors. So far, he has undoubtedly had the worst of it. But Mr. Webb is not the sort of man to smart under an injury for long—however slight. It is quite certain that he will seek an opportunity sooner or later to avenge his outraged feelings on the boys who have wounded his dignity. Of this we shall read later. But, in the meantime, the Jewish boy has hit on a scheme which, if successful, will deal the truculent cinema proprietor a blow more galling than that which he has just experienced. However, you will read all about it in next week's story: "Something Like an Idea; or, Solomon's Cinema Scheme!"

Last week I promised to give particulars of a map-making competition. To the reader who, in my opinion, sends in the best map of St. Frank's and the surrounding country, I will award a prize of 10s. Attempts should be addressed to Map Competition, "The Nelson Lee Library," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. Closing date of Competition will be December 4th.

Set to work at once, my chums, and see what you can do!

THE EDITOR.

Thrilling New Serial of Brother and Sister Detectives!

KIT & CORA

Mysterious Detectives

A TALE OF DETECTIVE ADVENTURE IN LONDON.

INTRODUCTION.

LIN FLEET, a lad of fifteen, wrongfully accused of stealing, loses his job at a motor garage. His parents being dead he lives with an unscrupulous pair known as Uncle and Aunt Pawley, the former being better acquainted with the thefts at the garage than he would care to admit. Lin meets a stranger in a grey-suit, who takes an interest in him, and the boy nicknames him "Mr. Mysterious." The stranger sends him on an errand to deliver a packet to a Mr. Crawson-Crake, who behaves like a madman and threatens to shoot the lad unless he discloses the name of his employer. Lin escapes and recounts his experiences to "Mr. Mysterious," at the latter's house in Hampstead. After some exciting adventures, with a diamond pendant entrusted to his care, Lin proves his capabilities, and is employed on a much more dangerous mission. He is to shadow Crawson-Crake on the embankment at midnight, in an interview with Cora, and give a low whistle when he sees danger. In his excitement Lin forgets to give the signal.

(Now read on)

A Chance Encounter.

IT was very late—or rather, very early—for it was past one o'clock in the morning, when Lin got back to his lodgings at the coffee-shop in Red Lion Street, after that strange affair upon the Embankment.

He was glad that Jess had given him a latchkey, and only hoped that he might have the luck to let himself in and slip up to his little top-back room unnoticed—particularly by Mr. Sam Wade. For, tired out and dejected, he was not in the mood to answer questions as to his doings; with perhaps a lecture on the evil of late hours for boys thrown in! Sam Wade was a good-hearted little man, but he made an idol of respectability and worshipped it.

"I'm a respectable man," he was fond of saying, "and I keep a respectable house. I won't have any queer goings-on in my place!"

Lin knew that already Mr. Wade did not regard him with a very favourable eye. He did not want to increase the worthy little man's suspicions, and perhaps be told to turn out and look for a lodging elsewhere. He had nowhere else to go.

He made as little noise as he could in letting himself in and mounting the first flight of stairs. But fate was against him! As he reached the first landing, a door opened and the shiny, bald head of Sam himself was thrust out. The fussy little man had evidently been keeping himself awake to listen for Lin's arrival; for he was red-eyed with frequent yawning, and his remaining fringe of hair was all roughed up, making his usually mild and chubby face look positively fierce.

To Lin's astonishment he did not say a word, but nodded grimly, withdrew his head, and shut the door.

"Going to save it up for me till to-morrow, I suppose," was Lin's rather gloomy reflection, as he mounted up to his little room, undressed, and turned into bed. "And then, most likely, he will tell me to clear out and find another lodging."

He could not help feeling a bit downhearted at that prospect.

If he had to leave there he would lose sight of Jess—and she was the only friend he had now; the only one he could turn to if he wanted a bit of advice, or a helping hand. In any case, he reflected gloomily, he would have to leave the coffee-shop if he didn't find a job before his little bit of money ran out, and he had none left to pay for his room. Even if he didn't turn him out as a doubtful character, he could hardly expect Sam Wade to let him live there without paying. And he didn't wish him to; he wanted to pay his way, not to live on anyone's charity!

Yes, he must find a job at once, or——

He thought of those slinking figures he had seen, an hour or two ago, on the Embankment; and shivered a little, as at a dark and threatening picture of what might be yet!

And then his thoughts took on a shade of bitterness.

"I might have found a job by this time," he muttered, "only that man told me I need not look for one; he had plenty of work for me! And now he turns me off without a word, and has done with me, because I failed just once!"

And the old feeling of resentment surged up within him against "Mr. Mysterious." But now it was mingled with regret. It seemed as though he had been allowed to peep into a world of strange, wonderful work, thrilling with interest; and then the door had been shut in his face!

With such troubled thoughts, he was long in getting to sleep, and then did not sleep very well. But, true to his resolve, he rose early to begin his search for a new job.

Early as it was, Jess was already up and busy. But she found time to give him a cheery word or two—which, with the steaming cup of coffee and two rounds of toast she would insist upon his having before he started out, put new heart into the discouraged and lonely boy.

And he wanted a stout heart that day, for it seemed as if his run of ill-luck was only beginning.

First, there was Sam Wade. The little man came into the kitchen at the back of the shop just as Lin was finishing his breakfast. He did not respond to Lin's "Good-morning, Mr. Wade!" but frowned, and passed on into the shop. It was meant to be a very stern frown, quite a terrible frown, in fact; but Sam's chubby face didn't lend itself to that sort of thing, and the effect was rather comical than otherwise. At another time Lin might have smiled, but it troubled and annoyed him now. He knew that his queer, mysterious conduct had aroused the darkest doubts and suspicions in the rather dull and matter-of-fact little man's brain. And he could not explain. If he attempted to describe the sort of work that had kept him out so late last night, that weird, grim scene by the river at midnight, and the part he had played in it, Sam Wade would not understand him or believe a word of it. Such things were out of his hum-drum, narrow, but highly-respectable little world!

Yet he was sorry to lose the good opinion even of Sam Wade, just now, when all the world seemed to be against him!

That feeling grew upon him as the day wore on. For he had no success in his search for work. Perhaps he set his standard a little too high, or he might have got a job as errand-boy, or a casual billet of that sort, without much difficulty; but he would not think of that yet, not until all else failed. True to his ambitions still, he wanted something better than that; a situation where he would have a chance of progress, of pushing on and making his way in the world.

And he might have succeeded—only there was one fatal bar! People liked his looks; he was bright and intelligent; he spoke well, and was not ignorant; but they wanted his "character" from his last place—and he had none to give!

He tried many places, but the result was always the same. He covered a lot of the map of London that day, and every inch of it on foot, to save dipping into his little store of money for fares. He stuck at it until business hours were over for the day; then, tired and dispirited, he gave it up and turned to tramp back to Red Lion Street.

Within a few doors of the coffee-shop a rough hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he was violently jerked to a stop.

The startled, and decidedly unpleasant thought which flashed into Lin's mind was that it might be his Uncle Pawley, or Blimber, who had been tracking him, and contrived to hunt him down already.

Determined to resist any attempt to take him back to Cowl Street, whichever it might be, he wrenched his shoulder free and wheeled round. But it was neither. A big, loutish young man, in greasy leathers, faced him as he turned about and glared at him with an expression that was by no means friendly.

Lin could not recall that he had ever seen the fellow before. But the man had evidently seen Lin, and remembered him, too, as his first words showed.

"Knew yer d'rec'ly I set eyes on yer! Bit o' luck droppin' across yer like this—what! No, you don't get away again in a 'urry, m'lad!"

And, with a vindictive look upon his coarse, half-cunning, half-brutish features, he made another grab at Lin's collar.

"Hands off!" said Lin, stepping back and clinching his fists. "What do you mean by this? Who on earth are you?"

"Who'm I?" said the motor-driver—as Lin took him to be by his dress. "You're thunderin' soon goin' to find out who I am, m'lad—and remember it, too! I'm the chawfer of that car what you monkeyed with in the Strand t'other afternoon! I saw yer run it on to the pavement, and then jump off and bunk away when the p'leeeman came up!"

"What bosh!" exclaimed Lin. "It was the little boy who set the car going. If you were near enough to see anything you must have known that. I only jumped on to stop the thing before it did mischief."

The motor-driver snorted angrily. He knew well enough that Lin was speaking the truth. But the truth did not suit his purpose.

"None of yer lies!" he snarled. "I know what I saw—and what others see, too! I've got my witnesses! I ain't goin' to be summoned by the p'leece, and maybe lose me licence, without a kick, I can tell yer! I'll 'ave it out of yer, m'lad, one way or the other!"

"Keep your hands off me!" warned Lin again angrily, as the fellow shook a big, dirty fist in his face. "If you were in

charge of the car it is all your own fault for going off and leaving the engine running, and that imp of a boy where he could get at the starting-gear. If you've got into trouble over it that's your look-out. It's nothing to do with me."

"Ho, ain't it!" snarled the chauffeur viciously. "We'll see about that, me bantam! I'm goin' to 'ave yer name and address before you and me parts, or I'll give yer a bashing that'll stop yer monkeying with motor-cars for a month or two! Now, what's yer name, and where d'yer live? Out with it! And no fooling, mind! Yer real name and proper address!"

And he thrust that dirty fist closer under Lin's nose.

The boy's strongest impulse was to drive his own fist into the fellow's face as the best line of argument, and then stand a fight, if it came to one. The motor-driver was a grown man, and a biggish adversary for a lad of fifteen. But the fellow looked clumsy and slow; Lin, light and quick, reckoned that he could balance weight with speed, if it came to blows.

Anyhow, he was not the least bit scared of the fellow. And yet he kept his hands down, and backed away. Second thoughts checked his angry impulse. He had trouble enough on his hands with out a street-fight—and so close to Sam Wade's door, too! A crowd would be sure to gather—there would be a noisy scene, with the police in it, perhaps. And he had done enough to shock Mr. Wade without that. After all, he reflected rapidly, he had nothing to be afraid of over the affair of the car; but if he refused to give his name and address it would look as if he knew he had done wrong, and was frightened of the consequences.

"You can have my name if you want it," he said, "though you haven't any right to demand it that I can see. My name is Fleet—Lin Fleet, and I'm living just here, at this coffee-shop."

He indicated Sam Wade's "Private Hotel."

"Straight? No lies, now?" said the chauffeur, producing an old envelope and a stump of pencil, and giving the latter a preparatory lick.

"I don't tell lies!" said Lin angrily. "I've told you my name and where I live, and if you're not satisfied you can go and hang yourself! I'm tired of this!"

"You ain't heard the last of it, let me tell yer," growled the chauffeur, with a dark look, as he scrawled down the name and address with laborious care—"not by a long way you ain't, m'lad!"

Lin had no clear idea of what the fellow meant, and he did not greatly care. Other matters soon crowded the incident out of his mind, and by the next morning he had entirely forgotten it in his feverish anxiety to secure a decent job before he exhausted his pocket.

Again he was up early and out all day, tramping far and wide, but with no greater success. And in the meantime a visitor called at the coffee-shop and inquired for him.

It was in the slack time of the afternoon, when the heavy work of "dinners" was over, and "teas" had not yet begun. The shop was empty, and Jess was busy rearranging the tables for the later meal, when a vision appeared which rather startled her. The customers at Sam Wade's highly respectable, but decidedly plain and homely establishment, were hardly of this sort! For it was a young lady who came in—quite a fashionable young lady! And, Jess thought, the most charming that she had ever seen—except at the "pictures."

Jess fully expected her, when she realised the homely style of the place that she had strayed into, to turn and retreat in disgust. But she did nothing of the sort. Instead, she looked round without the least trace of scorn or even wonder in her bright eyes, and seeing Jess, tripped forward with a winning smile and outstretched hand.

"You are Jess—Lin's friend Jess, aren't you?" she said, giving the other girl's work-roughened hand a warm clasp. "He lives here now, doesn't he?"

"Yes. But he is out just now," answered Jess, slightly bewildered, but already guessing that this must be the wonderful young lady Lin had spoken of—the young lady who lived in that strange house at Hampstead. "But Lin is not in now, miss," she repeated. "He is out looking for work, and I don't know when he will be back. Did you want to see him?"

"No—not now," said Cora Twyford—for Jess had guessed aright. "He need not even know that I have been here." Then she added, to herself: "It might only raise false hopes, in case Kit is hard, and will not give the poor boy another chance." To Jess she said, with another winning smile; "No; I came to see you, Jess."

"To see me, miss?" said the astonished waitress.

"Yes," said Cora; "you and I are going to be friends, Jess! We both like this poor boy. We know that he is putting up a plucky fight to get on in the world, with the odds against him. And we want to help him, don't we?"

"I'd do anything for Lin," declared Jess heartily. "He is worth it!"

"I know you would," said Cora. "But I am afraid that Lin has enemies; he might get into trouble of a sort where you could not help him alone. And so I want you to promise me, Jess, that if any such thing should happen you will let me know instantly. Here is my address, and 'phone number. Now, you will promise, won't you?"

Jess promised—little dreaming how soon she would be called upon to keep her word!

(To be continued.)

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