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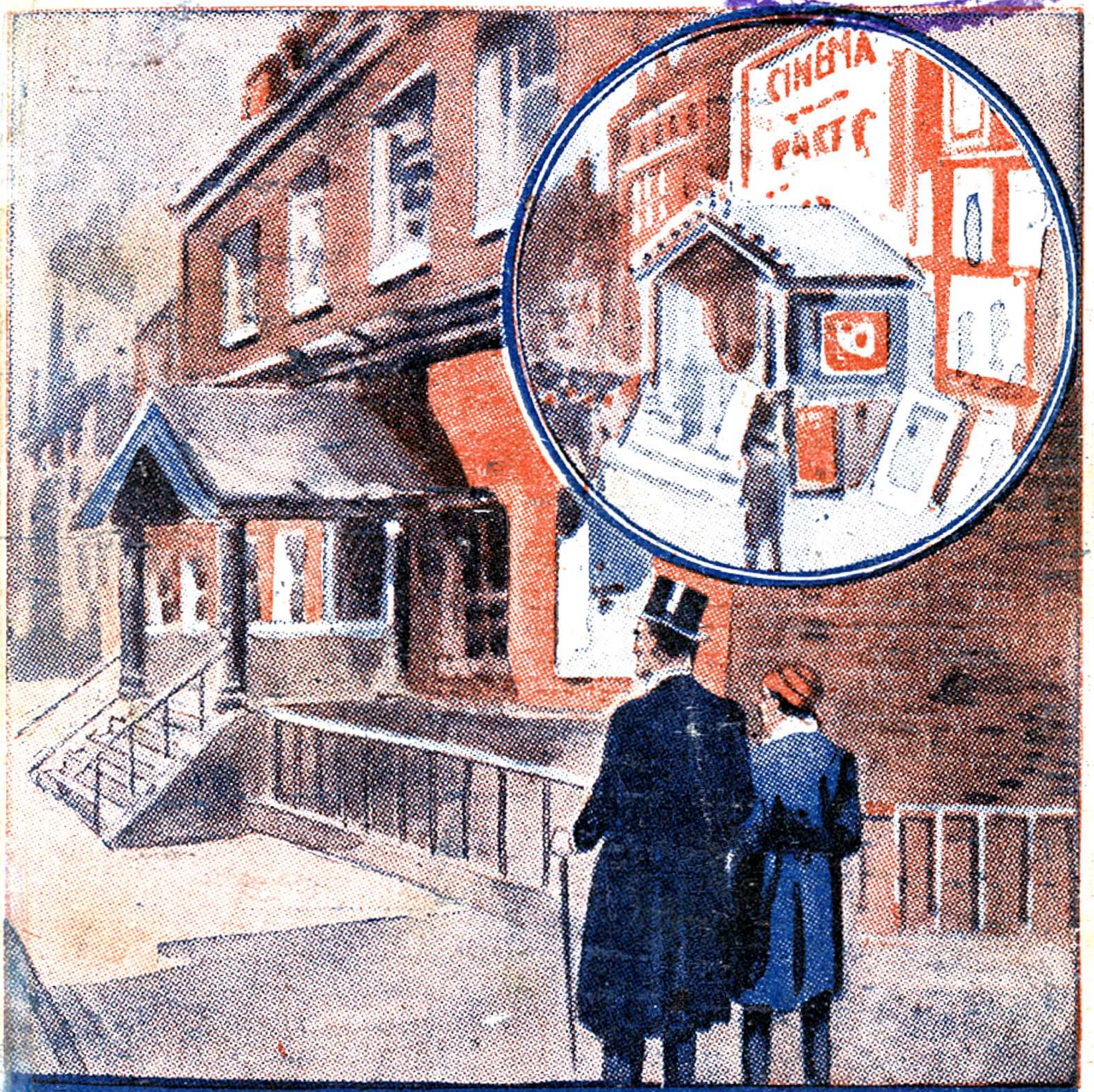

THE SCHOOLBOY CINEMA OWNERS!

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Jew of St. Frank's," "Barred by the Head," "Something Like an Idea," and many other stirring Tales.

December 11, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGER WITHIN THE GATES.

THE stranger stood just outside the big gateway of St. Frank's. He peered inquisitively into the Triangle, through his big round spectacles. He appeared to be undecided, hesitating whether he should enter or whether he should remain out in the lane.

At last, however, he plucked up courage, and walked gingerly forward.

The stranger was a smallish man, with bowed shoulders and feet which pointed to divergent points of the compass. He was quite a queer looking specimen, taking him altogether.

Although his clothing was shabby, it was well brushed, and the material was good. But the fit was simply atrocious. The man was wearing a pair of baggy trousers, a long frock coat, and a bowler hat. The bowler hat was placed on the back of his head, and rammed right home over his ears.

The stranger's hair was black—greasy black, and rather long. His nose was perfectly apparent; that is to say, it was impossible to gaze upon the stranger without being aware of the fact that he possessed a nose which stamped him definitely as a member of a certain race.

His chin was adorned with a stubbly black beard, and this joined up with his moustache. And the man held his head forward in a peering, inquisitive kind of way as he walked into the Triangle, with his hands clasped behind his back. He seemed quite out of place in these peaceful surroundings. He would have been far more appropriate—he would have fitted far better into the scene—if he had been walking down Whitechapel Road, or Petticoat Lane. Certainly, he did not fit in with things at St. Frank's.

It was a half holiday, and fairly early in the afternoon. The Triangle, at the moment, did not contain many boys. The day was fine and clear, and fairly mild, considering the time of the year. There was nothing special on that afternoon—no big football match, for example—and the majority of the juniors were knocking about the school somewhere.

A number of boys, of course, had gone out for the afternoon—either walking or cycling. But there still remained quite a large number of fellows on the premises.

Gulliver and Bell, of the Remove, were lounging on the steps of the Ancient House. They were chatting together, and near by stood Reginald Pitt, De Valerie, and Jack Grey.

"I wish Fully would buck up and come out!" said Gulliver rather impatiently. "He's taken hours to write that beastly letter of his—and we arranged to run into Bannington this afternoon."

"Oh, he won't be long!" said Bell.

But the Nuts of the Remove were rather impatient. They did not believe in waiting for their leader—Ralph Leslie Fullwood—in this manner.

"If he doesn't come out soon, we'll go in an' fetch him!" said Gulliver. "He told us—— By gad!"

He paused abruptly, and stared at the curious looking stranger, who was advancing aimlessly across the Triangle. At the same moment, attracted by Gulliver's exclamation, De Valerie and Pitt and Grey saw the newcomer.

"Hallo!" said Reginald Pitt. "Look what the tide's turned up!"

They regarded the stranger curiously.

"Oh, I expect he's a chap on the look-out for old clothes, or something of that kind," suggested De Valerie. "Either that, or he'll come asking us if we want to buy a vatch!"

Pitt and Grey chuckled.

"Oh, he's an Israelite right enough!" grinned Pitt. "Anybody could see that a mile off. Not quite the same stamp as Solly Levi, eh? It's hardly possible to tell that Levi is a Jew, but this chap —— Why, he shouts it out to everybody!"

Gulliver and Bell, apparently impelled by curiosity, moved forward in the direction of the stranger, and finally stood in front of him. They looked at the man with strong disapproval.

"I say, you've come to the wrong entrance, my man!" said Gulliver. "If you want to interview any of the servants, you'll find the door round at the back—round the other gateway."

The Hebrew gentleman blinked at Gulliver through his spectacles.

"Oy—yoy! Go avay vid you!" he exclaimed, bringing his hands from behind his back, and using them as semaphors. "I vant to see no servants, my poy! vot vant I wid servants, hey?"

"I—I thought you were selling somethin'," said Gulliver.

"Oy, vat foolishness!" exclaimed the stranger. "I vos selling nodings, my young friend. Dis is St. Frank's, I tink so, ain't it? Yes, no?"

"I tink it vos!" grinned Bell. "No, yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gulliver.

"You make fun mit me, ain't you?" said the newcomer, frowning. "I vos old enough to be your faders! Ain't it? Ain't you got no disrespect for your elders?" went on the Hebrew severely. "I vos come here for to see mine young friend—I vant to see Solly—he vos here, I tink, ain't it?"

"Solly!" exclaimed Gulliver, with a start.

"Ha—hum! Mine little Solly!" said the Jew. "He vos here, mit himself and all de oders."

"Do you mean Solomon Levi?" yelled Bell.

"Vos dere two Solly's, den?" asked the stranger. "Believe me, mine poy, I ain't standing no foolishnesses. Solly vas here, and I have come to see how he vos getting on. You understand, is it?"

By this time Reginald Pitt and Grey and De Valerie had heard some of the conversation, and they strolled over to the spot, rather curious. A few other juniors were coming up, too, all attracted by the sight of the curious looking stranger. They gathered round in a crowd.

"Anything we can do for you, sir?" inquired Pitt politely.

"I vos speaking mit mineself already!" said the visitor. "I vant to see Solly, ain't it? You tink it vas a joke, eh? Ain't it dat Solly Levi live here? Dis vos St. Frank's, mit all de poys, eh? Solly vos here!"

"Oh! You mean Levi!" said Pitt. "Yes. Levi is at St. Frank's—but I don't think he is in the school at the present moment. I think he went out, soon after dinner."

"Ach! Vot a pity!" exclaimed the stranger. "Dat vos madness. And I come all de vay from Brick Lane, Whitechapel, to see my poy, Solly! It vos too bad, ain't it?"

"Oh, I don't suppose Levi will be long!" put in De Valerie. "But—ahem—are you—— Well, is Levi a friend of yours, sir?"

The visitor laughed and waggled his hands about.

"Vot funniness you talk!" he exclaimed. "Vos Solly Levi mine friend? Oy—yoy! Ain't I known him since he vos only high as your knee? If he vos here, tell him dat Mr. Aaron Isaacstein vos here, vaiting to see him—vaiting to talk mit him."

The juniors stared, and they were certainly extremely astonished. Mr. Aaron Isaacstein did not appear to be the kind of person who would be one of Solomon Levi's friends. Levi himself was a young gentleman to his finger tips—well educated, and well spoken.

Indeed, it would have been extremely difficult to tell that he was Jewish at all—to judge by his speech or his appearance. But this man shouted his nationality a mile off.

"Oh, by gad!" grinned Gulliver. "So you're one of Levi's friends?"

"You betcher my life I vos!" said Mr. Isaacstein. "I come all de vay from Vitechapel, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Ikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vot vos you laughing mit yourselves about?" demanded the newcomer, in mild reproach. "It vos rudenesses to laugh at your elders. I vant to see Solly——"

"You can't see Levi just now, sir," put in Pitt. "Levi isn't on the premises. He's gone out."

"Ah! Dat vos a great pity!" said Mr. Isaacstein. "But never mind. We vill have a look round, ain't it? And perhaps Solly vill come in later on—I vos in no hurry to go back. And I have brought Solly much news from Vitechapel."

"From where?" yelled Gulliver.

"From Vitechapel——"

"But Levi didn't live in Whitechapel before he came to St. Frank's!" put in Owen Major.

"Vat you say?" said Mr. Isaacstein. "Solly ain't living in Vitechapel! Ah, you talk silly, mine young friend, believe me. Ain't it dat Solly and I vos in de habit of walking down Petticoat Lane, buying tings from de stalls?"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Great Scott!"

"Petticoat Lane!" yelled Gulliver. "There you are—I knew it! I knew jolly well that Levi was a common East End bounder!"

"Oy—yoy!" said the Hebrew, frowning. "You talk dat vay against mine Solly? It vos such a disgrace to valk down Petticoat, is it? You should live so sure! Mine Solly vos a young gentleman, and he vill be of de great delight to see me. It is a great pity dat Solly ain't here now. But never mind, poys—Solly von't be long. I tink. You vill show me round vhile I vait, ain't it?"

"Certainly, Mr. Isaacstein," said Pitt obligingly. "We'll take you into the Ancient House to begin with, and show you Levi's study. You might be interested."

"You betcher I shall be interested," said Mr. Isaacstein. "But vot is dis place you speak of?"

"The study?" said Pitt. "Oh, it's where Solly does his work, you know, after school hours. He shares his study with Dick Goodwin."

"Ah, now I am understanding," said the new arrival. "It vos someting new to Solly—after vot he vos used to."

"What was he used to?" inquired Bell curiously.

"Ain't it dat you know?" asked Mr. Isaacstein in surprise. "Ain't Solly told you everyting vere he vos born, and vere he lived before he came here?"

"Levi hasn't said much!" exclaimed Pitt. "But we are under the impression that he lived in the West End somewhere—Maida Vale, I believe. His father is a tremendously big pot—a millionaire—or something——"

"Oy—yoy—yoy! Ain't dat just like Solly!" exclaimed Mr. Isaacstein delightedly. "His fader vos a millionaire, ain't it? And dey live in Maida Vale? 'e vos a young demon, ain't it? Ach, vat's de good talking? You poys have been in Petticoat Lane, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've never had that pleasure, Mr. Isaacstein," grinned Hart.

"Maybe you mistake me, is it?" said the visitor. "Petticoat Lane vos Middlesex Street, and Ventvort Street, just off Vitechapel Road. You know him?"

"Know whom?" asked Bell.

"I vos talking about Petticoat Lane," said Mr. Isaacstein. "Me and Solly don't go down dere no more, buying cucumbers, and eating dem as ve valk along. Ach! Dey vos grand. Solly's fader vos not de same man since de poy vent avay. He do no business at all, he's so aggravated. Ach, it vos terrible. The aggravation take all old Isaac's strength avay wid him. He can't no longer push de barrow, ain't it?"

"What!"

"The—the barrow?" asked Hart. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Do—do you mean to say that Levi's pater pushes a barrow down Petticoat Lane?" yelled Handforth, who had joined the group.

"Ain't it dat you vos talking loud?" inquired Mr. Isaacstein mildly. "And dere vos noding wrong in pushing a barrow—yes, no? Ach, and de business dat man do? Oy—yoy! You never saw such business in your life."

Mr. Isaacstein proceeded to hug him-

self, and he hunched up his shoulders expressively.

"De money dat man make vos vonderful!" he went on. "And no expenses to keep up, mark you, mine poys. Just de barrow, and all de rolls of cloth. He vos a svindler! Did you ever see such a svindler in all your life?"

"Swindler!" said Pitt. "I say, that's a bit rough on Levi's pater, isn't it?"

Mr. Isaacstein looked surprised.

"Do you blame him?" he said. "A man who can svindle de Jews vos clever, ain't it? Ve respect a man like dat—you betcher my life! Vonce I bought a suit of clodes off old Isaac! And vot a suit it vos! It cost me eight guineas, and de first time I got it vet I vos like a jelly in de basin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Ikey!"

"I—I say!" whispered McClure. "I can't believe all this, you know. We all thought Levi was a decent chap—that his pater was rich, and——"

"Oh, rot!" said Gulliver. "I knew what he was all along. And now we've got the truth."

"Rather!" grinned Bell.

"The rotter won't be able to spoof us up any more!" went on Gulliver. "We know him for what he is now—and I'll jolly well let the whole school know about it."

"I fancy the school will know without you blurting it out!" said Pitt. "I don't suppose Levi will welcome this visit of Mr. Isaacstein."

"Hey, vot you say?" inquired the visitor sharply. "Solly von't velcome me? You vos talking foolishnesses, mine poy. Solly and me vos like fader and son, ain't it? He vill be so pleased to see me dat he vill go off mit his head! Solly and me ain't been parted for so long since old Isaac's come out of prison!"

"Out of where?" yelled Owen major.

"Oy—yoy! I let it out now!" said Mr. Isaacstein regretfully. "But vot matter? Old Isaac not ashamed—it vos a good stroke of business—ain't it? And vot a fire it vos!"

"Fire?"

"You betcher!" said Mr. Isaacstein. "Dat vos in Mile End Road, tree years ago. Old Isaac had a shop den. And de shop vos burnt down. Oy, vot a fire, and vot insurance!"

The visitor from Whitechapel hunched up his shoulders expressively.

"Ten thousand pounds, and dere vos not a shilling's vorth of stuff in de whole place!" he went on. Old Isaac got de money, but he vos unlucky. Dey suspect tings, and Isaac vos arrested. But he vos cute, too—and he took de money!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what about Solly?" inquired Hubbard. "Does he know all about this, Mr. Isaacstein?"

"Vot is it dat Solly don't know?" inquired the visitor. "Ain't Solly as cute as half-a-dozen? Solly vos de cutest kid in de land, believe me! I remember ven he ran about vid bare feet."

"Bare feet!" shouted Handforth.

"Vell, and vos dere anyting wrong in dat?" asked Mr. Isaacstein. "Vot vos de matter mit Solly's feet? Dey vos good feet, and dey vos his own. And how could de poy vear boots ven his fader vouldn't buy any? Old Isaac vos mean—dat vos vy he is rich. But vot a man! Vot a clever svindler!"

The juniors had been listening with much amusement to Mr. Isaacstein's talk. But, at the same time, they were rather startled and amazed. For they had been hearing things about Solomon Levi which took their breath away.

Could it possibly be true? Was it possible that Levi's father pushed a barrow up and down Middlesex Street, Whitechapel? But why should the boys doubt the word of this old man? He was a friend of Levi's father, and he would have no reason for coming to St. Frank's, and telling false stories. Mr. Isaacstein had been speaking quite innocently—he apparently did not know that he was giving the whole game away.

"Go on, Mr. Isaacstein!" said Marriot. "We're tremendously interested, you know. We'd like to hear some more about Levi and his pater."

"Levi and his vich?"

"His pater—his father, you know."

"Ah, I understand mit you!" said Mr. Isaacstein. "His fader! Old Isaac vos a good man, ain't it?"

"He doesn't seem to be good, according to what you've told us!" remarked Bell.

"Vy, I have said noding against de old man——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, nothing!" grinned Gulliver. "You've only shown him up as bein' a swindler and a scoundrel!"

"A svindler, yes—but not a scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Isaacstein quickly. "A svindler vos a clever man—I tought I vos clever, but I am not. Once I had a chance to make a tousand pounds. A man came to me vith diamonds, and I could have bought dem for one hundred pounds. But I vos suspicious, and I sent de man avay. Den I learn dat de diamonds vos vort over a tousand pounds!"

"They were stolen, I suppose?" asked Hart.

"Vell, and vot does dat matter?" inquired Mr. Isaacstein. "Dey vos cute, and I vot a big fool not to buy dem. It just vonted pluck—and I vos nervous. But old Isaac—he vos not nervous. He buy anyting like dat. He make big money at dat game."

"It seems that Mr. Isaac Levi is several kinds of a rogue!" remarked Pitt, turning to the other fellows. "According to this gentleman, Levi's pater is an exceedingly bright specimen of humanity. I don't believe all this—I can't. It's a bit too thick. We can't be expected to swallow all this at once, you know."

"Well, hardly," said Singleton. "The amusing thing about it, by Jove, is that this Mr. Isaacstein seems to think that everything is all serene. He doesn't realise that he's queering Levi's pitch at St. Frank's."

It was just at about this time that Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and myself strolled into the Triangle from the direction of the playing fields. We had been kicking a football about before goal, and we were now coming indoors to have a bit of a rest. And we noticed the big crowd which had collected round Mr. Isaacstein.

"Hallo!" said Watson. "What's the excitement over there?"

"We'll go and see!" I said. "But I don't suppose it'll be much."

We arrived at the crowd, pushed our way in, and then caught sight of Mr. Aaron Isaacstein. We looked at him keenly, and listened to what he was saying.

"But I vant to see Solly—mine own little poy!" said the visitor. "Ain't Solly come back, yet? I vos in no great hurry, but vot vos de use of my coming ven I don't see Solly? I have a message from his fader—old Isaac is sending some jewellery down, and Solly is to sell it to de oder poys. Oy—yoy! And vot a profit he vill make!"

"Not from us!" chuckled Pitt. "A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well I'm blessed!" I exclaimed, under my breath.

I turned away with a gleam in my eye. And I pulled Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson out of the crowd. Pitt came with us, too, and De Valerio was also there. And, a second later Handforth joined us. The other juniors did not notice that we were holding a little discussion.

"Listen, you chaps!" I exclaimed. "I've got something to tell you!"

CHAPTER II.

RAGGING THE RAGGER.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Oh, begad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tregellis-West and Watson and the other juniors simply yelled. They couldn't help themselves. I had been speaking to them for about two minutes, and now they were grinning all over their faces, and they positively could not contain themselves.

"Don't forget!" I said. "Do exactly as I have told you. I rather fancy Mr. Isaacstein will be sorry he came—after we have started well on the job."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke over there?" inquired Augustus Hart, turning and looking at us.

"Oh, nothing much," I replied calmly. "Don't forget that curiosity killed the cat, Gussy."

Hart grinned.

"I don't want to hear your silly old joke!" he said. "Mr. Isaacstein is three times as funny, anyhow!"

We strolled over to the spot, and I went straight up to Mr. Isaacstein and gave him a resounding slap on the back.

"So you've come to have a look round, have you?" I exclaimed genially. "That's all right, Mr. Isaacstein—we shall be only too pleased to oblige!"

The visitor frowned.

"You vos a rude poy," he exclaimed. "I not like you, ain't it? Go avay mid you—go avay and play! You vos a rude and nasty poy!"

"Now you know it, Nipper!" grinned Pitt.

"Oh, one must learn the truth sometimes!" I said cheerfully. "But there's no need to get ratty, Mr. Isaacstein. If you want to have a look round the school, we shall be only too willing to show you everything. By the way, perhaps you'd care for a wash?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A vosh!" exclaimed Mr. Isaacstein. "You vos insulting me!"

"Not at all!" I said. "Merely judging by appearances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I vant to deal vid you noding!" said Mr. Isaacstein sharply. "Go avay--and learn how to behave yourselves!"

"There's only one of me!" I said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So, you tink it vos funny to make jokes because I not speak de English properly, eh?" said Mr. Isaacstein. "Dat vos a mean trick. It vos not playing de game!"

"He's quite right, Nipper!" put in Hart. "Don't insult the old chap!"

"All right, old chap—I'm not a cad of that sort," I said. "By the way, Mr. Isaacstein, did I understand you to say that you've come from Whitechapel?"

"I not vant to speak vid you!" said the visitor curtly.

"But it's true, isn't it?" said Pitt. "You've come from Whitechapel?"

"Yes, it vos true—I come from Vitechapel!" said Mr. Isaacstein. "But vy you ask? Ain't I told you already?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "But we were just going to ask you a few questions, that's all. When you were down Petticoat Lane, last, did you see anything of a man named Fullwood?"

Mr. Isaacstein started.

"Fullwood—I mean, Fullvood!" he repeated quickly.

"Yes," said Pitt. "Isn't the name familiar?"

"Look here, what's this silly game?" demanded Gulliver gruffly. "What's the good of askin' Mr. Isaacstein if he knows anything about Fully. Don't be a silly ass, Pitt!"

"My dear chap, you don't appear in this scene," said Pitt smoothly. "Fade away!"

"But look here——"

"Shunt!" I broke in. "Your interruptions are not desirable, Gulliver."

Gulliver glared.

"But I'm not going to stand here and listen to this rot!" he exclaimed warmly. "Fullwood's indoors, writing a letter, and——"

"Vy vaste any time over de foolish boys?" asked Mr. Isaacstein, shrugging his shoulders. "Dey vos not old enough to know better mit demselves. Ah, I care noding."

"But we were just asking you some questions, Mr. Isaacstein?" put in Watson. "About this Fullwood. Have you seen his name over any of the shops in Petticoat Lane?"

"You silly ass——" began Bell.

"We've got a chap here named Fullwood," went on Watson. "He's an awful cad, and perhaps you've seen his pater in Petticoat Lane?"

"You vos talking voolishness."

"Well, he's not the only one, Mr. Isaacstein," I said. "It's rather queer if you haven't seen Fullwood where you come from. I should hardly think it would have been possible for you to miss him!"

"Begad, no!" chuckled Sir Montie.

"And doesn't Fullwood's pater keep a fried fish shop in Petticoat Lane?" asked Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, Fullwood's told everybody that his pater is a rich merchant, or something," said Pitt. "But you'll probably know better, Mr. Isaacstein. You surely must know that Fullwood's pater keeps a fried fish shop——"

"You vos a mad young fool!" snapped Mr. Isaacstein gruffly. "I vos to talk no longer mit you. You insult me, and I am annoyed. Go avay, or I'll report you to one of the masters!"

"But we haven't insulted you, Mr. Isaacstein," said Pitt mildly. "We are only talking about Fullwood's pater. As you're in Petticoat Lane so much, I should hardly think that you could miss that fried fish shop."

"You—you idiot!" roared Gulliver. "You know as well as I do that Fullwood's pater doesn't keep a fried fish shop in Whitechapel!"

"How do we know?" I asked. "We've never seen his pater's place, and we've never seen Levi's place, either. You seem to take it for granted that Levi's pater pushes a barrow in Petticoat Lane, just because Mr. Isaacstein says so. If that's true, there's no reason why the story about Fullwood's fried fish shop shouldn't be true!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I go mit mineself," said Mr. Isaacstein gruffly. "I no longer stay here to receive the insults. Oy—yoy! Never before in my life vos I so insulted! It vos more dan I can bare!"

And Mr. Isaacstein pushed his way through several of the juniors, and made as though to go towards the gateway.

"Hold on!" said Pitt, anxiously. "Don't leave us yet, sir!"

He grasped Mr. Isaacstein's arm, and Handforth and Tommy Watson grasped the other arm. The visitor was brought to a standstill with a jerk.

"Let go mit me!" he shouted, in alarm. "What you doing, you foolish poys? How dare you stop me in dis vay——"

"We were just thinking about that wash, Mr. Isaacstein," said Pitt blandly. "There's a lovely bathroom upstairs, and I'm quite sure you would enjoy a jolly fine bath. It won't take us long to give you a dip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must be mad!" shouted Mr. Isaacstein, in greater alarm. "You stupid, wretched poys! I vos clean—I need no bath! It vos all madnesses to talk about——"

"Well, you can hardly call it madness to suggest a bath!" I put in. "You need one, Mr. Isaacstein. I'm quite sure that your face needs a wash. It must be awfully uncomfortable in its present condition!"

"Go ahead!" said Handforth. "Collar him!"

Mr. Isaacstein was seized firmly, and the next moment he was being rushed across the Triangle.

"Here, I say!" gasped Owen major. "This is a bit thick, you know! If the Head knows anything about this there'll be terrible trouble. It's a bit too much of a good thing to rag a visitor——"

"Keep your hair on!" said Tommy Watson. "There's no harm done yet!"

Mr. Isaacstein, in spite of his protest, was rushed up the steps of the Ancient House, into the lobby, and then up the stairs. But Gulliver and Bell had managed to get to the bathroom first, and they stood just against the doorway, with expressions of alarm on their faces.

"Here stop this!" shouted Gulliver.

"Rats!"

"Clear out of the way, you ass!"

"We're not goin' to see this gentleman treated in such a way!" exclaimed Bell. "It's an outrage—you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourselves! Why can't you let Mr. Isaacstein go?"

"He needs a wash!" exclaimed Pitt calmly.

"You—you idiot!" exclaimed Gulliver. "It's not your duty to give a visitor a wash, I suppose?"

"And it's not your duty to protect him," I said grimly. "Stand out of the way, Gulliver—unless you want to get wiped up. Now then, you chaps, altogether!"

"Vait!" exclaimed Mr. Isaacstein urgently. "Vait! Vot you tink it vos, is it? A game, or someting? I vont be vashed by you—and if you vos rude, I vill punish you mit yourselves."

"Do, Mr. Isaacstein," I said. "But we mean to give you that bath!"

"Oy, yoy! I vos never treated so in mine life!" exclaimed the visitor. "I vill give you money if you vill let me go. I vill give you ten shillings each ——"

"Nothing doing!" said Pitt. "Keep your money and accept the bath. You ought to be jolly grateful to us for giving it to you. There's nothing like a bath for clearing the complexion!"

Handforth and Grey and one or two others yelled. But the rest of the juniors could not quite see the point of the joke.

"Look here, you chaps, this is altogether too bad," protested Owen major. "It ain't fair to treat Mr. Isaacstein in this way. I'm not a particular chap as a rule, but I don't believe in this——"

"You will believe in it before long!" I said. "Just wait and see!"

Mr. Isaacstein struggled fiercely to release himself.

"By gad!" he shouted wildly. "I von't stand—— Vot you tink you vos doing, hey?" he added, hurriedly. "I vill not stand dis treatment—it vos an outrage——"

"That's all right, Mr. Isaacstein!" I interrupted. "We're only anxious concerning your state of health. Now then, you fellows—altogether!"

"Right!" shouted Handforth. "Grab him!"

Mr. Isaacstein was already grabbed, and then, without any warning, he was rushed straight forward across the corridor and into the door of the bathroom. Gulliver and Bell did their best to stop

the rush, but they only succeeded in getting themselves jammed against the doorposts.

And Mr. Isaacstein was pushed through into the bathroom. Church and McCluro were already there, and they were evidently very busy. For the bath was half full of warm, steaming water.

"All serene!" grinned McClure. "Shove him in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ach, you vos mad——"

"One, two, three!" roared Handforth.

Mr. Isaacstein was whirled up from his feet, then, taking no notice of his shirt and vest, he was swung into the air, and then, as he hovered right over the bath, he was allowed to drop.

Splash!

Mr. Isaacstein went in full length, with all his clothes on. He floundered about in the bath desperately for a moment or two, and then sat up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How do you like your annual, Mr. Isaacstein?" grinned Jack Grey.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cads!" shouted Gulliver hotly. "You ought to know better than to treat a visitor——"

"Oh, my only hat!" roared Handforth. "Look! He's peeling!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crowded into the doorway, gazing at Mr. Isaacstein, who was still floundering in the bath.

An extraordinary change was coming over the visitor. To begin with, his hair had floated off, and was now tossing about in the water in the middle of the bath. His big nose had a most bloaty appearance, and it seemed to be coming to pieces. His whole face was streaked with peculiar colour, and his whiskers were hanging down in a most curious fashion. Handforth had not been far wrong when he declared that Mr. Isaacstein was peeling.

"Great Scott!" shouted Owen major, at last. "He's—he's disguised!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

Mr. Isaacstein scrambled to his feet, and his eyes were glittering with rage.

"You cads!" he howled. "By gad, I'll make you pay for this!"

"He doesn't sound much like Mr. Isaacstein now, does he?" I grinned. "Look closer, you chaps, and perhaps you will recognise this perfect stranger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Owen major and Armstrong and several others pushed forward, and they stared hard at the floundering individual in the bath.

"You'll be able to see better in half a minute," said Handforth. "We'll give him a better wash."

Edward Oswald pushed Mr. Isaacstein back into the bath without ceremony. Then he seized a flannel and wiped it over the unfortunate man's face in a most determined manner.

"Ow! You—you fool!" yelled the unfortunate. "If you touch me again ——"

"Oh, my only hat!" roared Hart. "It's—it's Fullwood!"

"Great Scott!"

"Fullwood!"

The truth was out at last!

"Exactly—Fullwood!" I grinned. "Why, I recognised him the first moment I saw him. He may have diddled you fellows, but he didn't diddle me! That's why I pulled his leg about his pater having a fried fish shop in Petticoat Lane. He was spinning all sorts of rotten yarns about Levi, so I thought I'd give him a taste of his own medicine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you awful spoofer!"

"You rotter!"

"It was a dirty, caddish trick!" shouted Hart warmly. "Why, if it hadn't been for Nipper, he might have got out of the school, and dozens of fellows would have believed all that rot about Levi. It would have taken a tremendous lot to convince them that it wasn't true. Fullwood did this in a caddish spirit, not merely for fun."

"Yes, and Gulliver and Bell tried to help him!" shouted Handforth. "I vote we pitch them in the bath, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you touch us!" roared Gulliver, in alarm. "You—you rotters!"

"Keep your hair on; we won't touch you!" I said contemptuously. "Fullwood was the ragger, and he's being punished in a very fitting way. I think we'd better leave it at that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the idea!" said Pitt.

"He tried to spoof us, and he failed!" said Tommy Watson. "It's a jolly good thing that Nipper has got such sharp eyes. I'm blessed if I could have seen through that disguise! Fullwood may be a cad, but he certainly got him-

self up all right. And he did the talking well, too."

The juniors streamed down the passage, yelling with laughter, and Fullwood pulled himself out of the bath, dripping profusely. He was not feeling exceedingly happy. Up to a certain point his game had been an entire success. But then disaster had befallen him, and now, instead of making Solomon Levi look foolish, Fullwood had only succeeded in making himself the laughing stock of the Ancient House.

As a joker he was not much of a success!

CHAPTER III.

MR. LEVI APPROVES.

THE big car rolled into the Triangle, glided gracefully over towards the Ancient House, and came to a stop just in front of the steps. There was quite a good number of juniors in the Triangle at the moment, and they gathered round at once. The car was a magnificent one, and the chauffeur was in very smart livery.

The door opened and two people emerged. One of them was Solomon Levi of the Remove; the other was a tall, well-built man of about forty-five. He was clean-shaven, dressed with exquisite taste, and there was an air of extreme neatness about him.

"Here we are, dad!" said Levi cheerfully. "This is St. Frank's."

"Ah, a very fine place, by all appearances!" said Mr. Isaac Levi, removing a cigar from between his teeth and looking round the Triangle. "I am not surprised that you are well content here, my boy. And these, no doubt, are some of your schoolfellows?"

"Yes, dad," said Levi. "Handforth, Pitt, De Valerie, and a good many others. I say, you chaps, this is my father."

"Pleased to meet you, sir!" said Reginald Pitt, raising his cap politely.

"Welcome to St. Frank's, sir!" said De Valerie.

"Thank you very much, my boys!" said Mr. Levi, smiling. "I am quite delighted to be here, I can assure you."

"Ah, here's Goodwin!" said Levi junior. "I say, Dick, here's my father. You'll be pleased to meet Goodwin, dad. He's the chap who shares my study with me—or, to be more exact, I share his study."

Dick Goodwin came forward and shook hands with Mr. Levi.

"Ay, I'm pleased to meet you, sir," he said warmly. "I am that! Solly has told me all sorts of things about you, sir."

"Indeed!" smiled Mr. Levi. "I hope they were good things?"

"Ay, of course, sir!" said Dick Goodwin.

"Well, that's all right!" chuckled Mr. Levi. "I suppose we shall get indoors now, Solly? I think you intend taking me straight to your study—eh?"

"That's the idea, dad!" said Levi. "This way!"

They passed into the Ancient House, and the juniors outside were left in a rather surprised condition. They stared after Levi and his father, and they wondered.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Owen major. "I should never have thought it, you know!"

"Never have thought what?"

"Why, Mr. Levi doesn't look like a Jew at all!" said Owen major. "He doesn't speak like one, either. He's a perfect gentleman—as much a gentleman as my own pater is!"

Reginald Pitt grinned.

"Did you think that every Jew spoke like Mr. Isaacstein?" he asked.

"Oh, that was a caricature!" said Owen major. "But I did think that nearly all Jews spoke a bit funny."

"That's only the foreign Jews, you ass!" said Pitt. "An English Jew is practically as much an Englishman as any other good citizen. I expect, Mr. Levi was educated at Eton or Oxford, or something of that sort. He lives in the West End, and he keeps a big house and lots of servants."

"But—but he doesn't look like a Jew," said Armstrong.

"Oh, yes, he does!" said Pitt. "I could tell it in a moment; but he's quite a good-looking man, and very refined. It's just the same with nearly everybody. They see these comic pictures of Jews in the papers, and all sorts of caricatures, and they think that every Jew is the same. But that's all rot! You might just as well say that politicians look exactly like the cartoons of them in the daily papers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I pity them if that's the case!" grinned Armstrong.

"Well, it's just the same with Mr. Levi," said Pitt. "You pictured him as one of these caricatures, instead of a real man. He seems a jolly decent sort to me."

"Rather!"

Mr. Isaac Levi had certainly created a good impression at St. Frank's. Not even Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell could say anything against the visitor. They had been quite ready with sneering remarks, but they knew well enough that it would be useless voicing them.

Meanwhile, Mr. Levi was escorted to the study by his son and Dick Goodwin. When they arrived the door was closed, and Mr. Levi sat down in one of the easy-chairs before the fire.

"Ah, this is very nice!" he exclaimed, looking round. "Quite a cosy little room, my boys. Not too comfortable, but, at the same time, very cheerful. You don't need much comfort here, of course."

"Oh, we get on fine, pater!" said Solomon. "Most of the chaps are ripping fellows, and I'm as happy as a sandboy at St. Frank's!"

"That's the style!" said Mr. Levi.

"You'll stop to tea, won't you?" asked the Jewish boy.

"Well, that all depends, Solly," said Mr. Levi. "I think you have some business to talk about, haven't you?"

"Yes, dad."

"Well, you better start straight at once," said Mr. Levi. "I must get back to London to-night. I have some very important matters to attend to this week, and I have only stolen a few hours to run down to you because the matter appeared to be of great urgency, according to your letter. And I know you too well, Solly, to bring me down here on a wild-goose chase."

"Thanks, dad!" said Levi. "You see, the fact is I want you to buy some property in Bannington, the local town, two or three miles away."

"Oh, so that's it! You want me to buy some property?"

"That's the idea, dad," went on Levi. "It's a splendid site for a picture theatre. It's absolutely the finest place one could imagine! There is only one cinema in Bannington now, and that's absolutely a hole, and the owner of it is a scoundrel. My idea is to build a new place, and to defeat this chap altogether. Then we shall be able to——"

"Let me understand this thing clearly," interrupted Mr. Levi. "Tell me all the facts from the beginning, Solly."

Levi did so.

He went into all the details. He described how the Bannington Cinema had been placed out of bounds by the Headmaster, because Mr. Stanley Webb had been showing some very undesirable films.

Levi also told his father how Webb had treated many of the St. Frank's boys. Then, of course, Levi described all the details concerning the option on the property in the Bannington High Street. There was an old haunted house right in the centre of the High Street, a splendid site for a picture theatre. Levi had seen this at once, and he had lost no time in approaching the owner of the property, a certain Mrs. Cobitt, who lived just outside the town. Levi had obtained an option from this lady, and it was in his father's name. If Mr. Isaac Levi chose, he could buy this property for the sum of two thousand pounds, and the option did not expire until the last day of the year.

Levi told exactly how Mr. Webb had plotted in conjunction with an American rascal, Hooker J. Ryan, and how these two men had attempted to steal the option, so that they could purchase the property for themselves.

Mr. Isaac Levi listened with great interest, and he realised at once that the property was evidently of great value, or there would not be all this excitement about it. He was, indeed, very impressed by his son's story.

"Well, Solly, this scheme of yours seems to be a very neat one," he said at length. "But, of course, we can do nothing at the moment."

"Why not, pater?"

"It is very near Christmas, for one thing," replied Mr. Levi, "and I am very busy just now on another important business matter. There is no hurry, since the option does not expire until the end of the year. In any case, we could not start operations, or anything of that kind, until the beginning of January."

"But you can settle everything up before Christmas, surely, dad?" said Solomon, rather heatedly.

"Well, it all depends," said Mr. Levi. "In any case, before I can proceed

further with the matter, Solly, I must have a look at this property you speak of. I really cannot give any definite reply, and I cannot make any arrangements whatever until I have seen this site."

Levi jumped to his feet.

"Well, that will soon be settled, dad," he said briskly. "Your car's outside, and it will only take us a few minutes to get to Bannington. I can obtain the key of the place from the house agents without any trouble, and then we can look over it. What do you say?"

"An excellent suggestion, Solly," said Mr. Levi. "We will go at once."

Mr. Levi was essentially a man of business. He was very keen and alert, and it was just like him to waste no time now. There was business to be done, therefore it was foolish to sit about in this study.

Within five minutes, Levi and his father were in the car, speeding towards Bannington. Dick Goodwin was with them, too—for Levi had particularly asked him to come along.

It was not long before they arrived at Bannington. And then Levi directed the chauffeur to the house Agents—who had charge of Mrs. Cubitt's property. The key was obtained without any trouble, and then the trio drove straight up the High Street, and came to a halt in front of the old haunted house.

In the past this old place had been known as Bannington Grange. For it was, indeed, a mansion, and a great many years previously it had been occupied by a titled family. Indeed, when Bannington had been merely a village, the owner of Bannington Grange had been the lord of the manor.

Mr. Levi stood on the pavement, looking at the place critically for some few minutes. Then he glanced up and down the High Street, and across the road. He nodded to himself once or twice, as though with approval. And his son watched him rather anxiously.

"Well, Dad?" asked Levi, at length.

His father removed the cigar from his mouth.

"A splendid site, Solly!" he said, nodding. "It was keen of you to see the possibilities in this place. Yes, Solly, a Picture Palace built here would be a great success."

"But it doesn't need to be built, dad," put in Levi. "This old house is a tremendous size. It will only be necessary to knock out the interior. All the outside walls can be left standing—and that will save us a tremendous lot of expense. We can leave the shell, so to speak, and then build the cinema inside it. Then, don't you see, all that will be necessary will be to add a big covered portion which comes right to the roadway here. The box office can be just against the pavement, and the people will walk straight through into the cinema. We could have the place simply blazing with electric lights, and soft carpets on the floor, and all that sort of thing."

"I see what you mean, Solly," said Mr. Levi. "Yes I think it could be done. That would save a lot of expense, as you say. For it would be very costly business to pull this place completely down, and to build up a cinema on the site. If we convert this old house, it will be far better."

He looked up and down the street again.

"Yes, the position is first class," he went on. "There are shops on either side, there are shops opposite, and we appear to be in the very centre of the town."

"We are, sir!" put in Dick Goodwin.

"Then there is every reason to suppose that a Picture Theatre would be an immediate success," went on Mr. Levi. "But we will go inside and have a look round."

They passed through the gateway, went up the short path, and then Levi inserted his key in the lock of the front door, and they entered the building.

It was very gloomy in there, for the short winter afternoon was drawing to a close. As the trio walked along the hall, their footsteps echoed in a hollow fashion. And the whole place was gloomy in the extreme.

"They say this place is haunted, dad!" smiled Levi. "There's supposed to be a ghost here, or something of that kind. Anyhow, the country people about here wouldn't enter this place after nightfall for a hundred pounds! That's why it is going so cheaply. Mrs. Cubitt couldn't sell it for any price—and she is willing to let the whole lot go, the house, the grounds and everything—all for two thousand pounds, freehold. Why, it's simply giving it away!"

"I agree with you there, Solly!" said Mr. Levi, nodding. "Two thousand pounds for a place of this type is dirt

cheap. But I am wondering if this reputation will have a bad effect upon the cinema. If people are afraid to enter this old house, they may consider that the cinema will be haunted. These country people are rather superstitious, I believe."

Solomon Levi shook his head.

"I don't think there's anything of that, dad!" he said. "When this is converted into a cinema, with electric lights blazing everywhere, and with the pictures going, people won't think about any ghosts, or anything of that kind. It's because the place is so gloomy, and dirty and forsaken that it has got the reputation of being haunted. Besides, there was a murder committed here, I believe, twenty years ago. That's what started it all. But if we converted it into a picture theatre, all that rubbish will go."

Mr. Levi nodded.

"I dare say you are right, my boy," he said. "In any case, we will not let that deter us."

They went right over the house, from floor to cellars. It was an exceedingly well built place. The exterior walls were strong and solid—just as solid as they had been the first day they were put up. And it was a great square building—with jutting out portions. If it had been possible to remove the interior at a wave of the hand, it would have been seen that it was as large as any ordinary public hall. And, if it were possible to remove the interior entirely, it would be a comparatively simple task to convert the shell of the house into a picture theatre.

At last the tour of inspection was over, and Mr. Levi had already come to a decision.

"Yes, Solly, we will buy this place," he said. "Your proposition is an excellent one, and I will take it up. There is big money in the idea, and there is no reason why we should not take advantage of it."

"Good!" said Levi, his eyes sparkling. "I felt sure that you would agree, dad."

"But we must leave it until after Christmas," went on Mr. Levi. "There is no time to do anything now. And, as I told you before, it is imperative that I should return to London."

"But don't you think it would be better——"

"It is no good, Solly, I must return to London at once!" said Mr. Levi. "in any case, there is no danger of our rivals stepping in. You hold the option, and nothing can be done until the beginning of the new year. We are quite safeguarded—owing to your forethought. We might just as well take things easily until after the Christmas holidays, and then we can proceed at full speed."

"I expect you're right, dad!" said Levi. "We'll leave it at that, then. You have decided to buy the place, and you will do so immediately after Christmas—before the beginning of the new year."

"Exactly," said Levi. "That will be quite time enough to conclude the sale, and to begin operations. Of course, the two thousand pound purchase price will be a mere trifle compared with the total expenditure. It will need a great deal of money to carry this scheme completely through."

"Oh, rather, dad!" said Levi. "But I've got an idea about that. Wouldn't it be a good thing for us to form a company—or would you prefer to bear the entire expenses on your own?"

"I think I would prefer to make this a personal matter, Solly," said Mr. Levi. "The sum will not be a large one for me to manage, and it will be better, I think——"

"But I was going to let some of the fellows have shares," said Levi. "That's the idea, you see. We want to call this picture theatre our own, when it's built. We want it to be a part of St. Frank's, so to speak. If a lot of fellows had shares in the company—if they had interests in the cinema—everything would be first class."

Mr. Levi smiled.

"Well, there is no reason why you should not do that," he said. "It can easily be managed, I think. We will issue two or three hundred shares at a pound apiece. If any of the boys choose to buy these shares, all well and good. They will certainly be far more valuable later on."

"That's the idea!" said Levi. "That's exactly what I want, dad. Two or three hundred will be quite sufficient, I think—because the fellows in the Remove haven't got tons of money, you know.

If all the chaps only bought one share each, it would make them feel that they had a personal interest in the cinema."

"In fact you will all be part owners, eh?" chuckled Mr. Levi. "Well, it really makes no difference. And if it will please you, Solly, you can manage it in that way if you choose. We will certainly form this company, and we will issue the shares as you desire. And between now and the Christmas holdays, you can be selling these shares, or, at least, obtaining promises. Make a list of all the boys who want to buy shares, and then we shall know exactly where we are."

Solomon Levi's eyes sparkled.

"That's the idea, dad!" he said. "I'll have a book, and I'll put all the names down in there. For example, if De Valerie wants ten shares, I'll book him for ten. But, of course, I sha'n't collect the money until the goods are actually delivered."

Mr. Levi was quite amused at the idea. But to his son it was rather a serious matter. It would be splendid if the Remove could have a hand in this new picture theatre. They would all become schoolboy cinema owners, in a way of speaking. Even if they only possessed one share each, they would have a kind of personal proprietorship of the new Cinema.

And, very shortly afterwards, the trio left the old haunted house, and emerged into the street. The key was returned to the agent, and Mr. Levi re-entered his car, and stated his intention of driving straight back to London. It was not necessary for him to go to St. Frank's again—he had matters of far greater importance to attend to. And Mr. Isaac Levi was not the kind of man to waste any time.

Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin, therefore, were left in the Bannington High Street alone, after Mr. Levi's car had disappeared in the direction of London.

"I knew it!" said Solomon, taking a deep breath. "I knew dad would take it like this—I was absolutely certain he would fall in with my scheme. It's settled now, Dick, positively settled! The Remove is going to have a picture theatre of its own!"

"By gum!" said Dick Goodwin. "It's a grand idea—it is that!"

CHAPTER IV.

SHAREHOLDERS WANTED

"GENTLEMEN——"

"Go it, Ikey!"

"On the ball!"

"Gentlemen of the Remove ——"

"Hear, hear!"

Solomon Levi looked round, he was standing upon a table in the Remove Common-room, and he was endeavouring to commence a speech. But the large number of juniors who were present were evidently intent upon interrupting as much as possible. This, of course, was nothing unusual. It was always a difficult matter to make a speech to the Remove fellows.

"Gentleman of the Remove," went on Solomon Levi. "I am standing here now because I want to address you upon a most important subject."

"Hear, hear!"

"It deals with a matter which is of interest to every one of us," went on Levi. "As you are all aware, the picture palace in Bannington has been placed out of bounds by the Headmaster's orders!"

"Shame!"

"Three groans for the Head!"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth, glaring round. "The Head was quite right! It's a good thing that rotten picture palace is out of bounds. The man who runs it is a scoundrel, and he shows beastly pictures. They ain't fit for any decent chaps to see!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And what's more," went on Handforth. "If I catch any fellow breaking bounds, and entering that picture theatre, I shall punch him on the nose! Webb is a beast, and——"

"Who's making this speech, Handy—you, or Levi?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand down, you ass!"

"Let Ikey get on with it!"

"Go it, Solomon!"

Levi smiled.

"When I get the chance I shall certainly proceed," he said. "I wish you fellows would understand the seriousness of this matter. There is no cinema in Bannington which we can go to—and it is almost certain that the existing place will be kept out of bounds for all time.

There is, therefore, only one solution to the problem."

"And what's that?"

"We must build a cinema of our own!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come off it!" grinned De Valerie. "You were saying something on the same lines a day or two ago, Levi. But you know as well as I do that it can't be done."

"Of course it can't!"

"Dry up, Ikey!"

"It can be done—and what's more, it's going to be done!" said Solomon Levi, grimly. "That's what I want you fellows to realise. This is not merely empty talk—I'm not spouting out of my hat. A new picture theatre is to be built in Bannington, and the operations will commence immediately after Christmas!"

"Well, that's all right," said Armstrong. "As soon as the place is built, we'll go in and see what it's like. It doesn't interest us whether the place is built or not—what we want is to see the picture theatre up, and enter!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You don't seem to understand," went on Levi. "This new cinema was my idea, and I want the Remove to have shares in the concern——"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Shares!" said Owen major.

"Exactly!" continued Solomon Levi. "My father has consented to buy the property, and finance the whole concern. He is going to build this new cinema, and it will be a ripping place when it is done, believe me. But it has been my idea from the start for the Remove to be part owners of the cinema. I want every fellow here to have a financial interest in the concern."

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "This is frightfully surprisin', dear old boy."

"What do you mean, Levi?" I asked curiously.

"Precisely what I say," replied the Jewish junior. "Although my father is buying this property in Bannington, and intends to finance the building of the new cinema, he has consented to form a kind of company, with a good number of shares. If any fellow chooses, he can buy some of these shares, and so be in the swim."

"My only hat!"

"We can buy shares!"

"Exactly!" said Levi. "And if you'll take my advice, you'll buck up and give me your names, and get in on the ground floor. These shares are for sale at one pound each. Any fellow can have as many as he likes at the present moment at that price. But, later on, when the property becomes valuable, those shares will be worth a tremendous lot more. You can take it from me that it's a good investment."

"Oh, grand!" said Reginald Pitt. "I'll have five hundred of those shares."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put me down for two thousand!" grinned Owen major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a joke," began Levi.

"Oh, isn't it?" said Pitt, in surprise. "My mistake; I thought it was!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come off the grass, Levi!" grinned Hart. "We're not going to swallow any kind of that stuff, you know. Fellows in the Remove couldn't be shareholders in a cinema company."

"Anybody can become a shareholder if he buys one or more shares," said Solomon Levi. "You don't seem to realise that I am trying to do you all a good turn."

"By selling us these shares?"

"Yes."

"And taking money from us?"

"Well, I shall take your money, but ——"

"Exactly!" grinned Owen major. "There's nothin' doin', old man!"

"Rather not!"

"How do we know that this thing is straight, anyhow?" sneered Gulliver. "We all know what Jews are. They're famous for floatin' dud companies. This is one of them, I'll bet! We'll pay our money for the shares, an' then we sha'n't see anything back——"

"Shut up, Gulliver!"

"Don't be a beastly cad!"

"If he says another word, I'll punch his nose!" roared Handforth.

"Thanks all the same, but I'm quite capable of doing that!" said Levi grimly.

He jumped down from his table and walked straight across the common-room to the spot where Gulliver was standing Gulliver backed away slightly, looking rather scared.

"Don't—don't you touch me!" he stammered.

"Unless you apologise within ten seconds, I'll knock you down!" said Solomon Levi. "This scheme which I have thought out is absolutely straight and above board, and I'm not going to have any fellow like you call it a swindle. Either you apologise, or I'll knock you down. You'd better choose quickly."

Gulliver glared.

"I'm not goin' to apologise to you, you Jewish cad!" he exclaimed. "It's a disgrace to St. Frank's that you should be here!"

Biff!

"Ow-yarooch!" howled Gulliver, going down backwards and striking the floor with a terrific slam. "You—you —— Ow! Yow—ow—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the stuff to give him, Ikey!" said Pitt. "He jolly well deserves it!"

"Rather!"

Gulliver sat up, looking rather dazed.

"And if you say another word of that nature, hinting that I am attempting to run a swindle, I'll knock you down again!" said Levi calmly. "I'll knock any fellow down who calls me a swindler!"

"Good old Ikey!" said Handforth. "You've done the right thing!"

Levi crossed the common-room and once more mounted the table.

"Perhaps we shall now be able to get on!" he exclaimed. "I am talking quite seriously when I say that there are a certain number of shares available for you fellows. These shares are obtainable at one pound each—or, at least, they will be as soon as things are settled. If you want to buy shares, you can do so. It will be a good investment, believe me. If you can't afford more than one, only take one, but if you can afford seven or eight, all the better."

"When do we pay?" asked Owen major.

"Not now—not until the shares are actually available," said Levi. "All I want is to put down the names of those fellows who are supporting me in this enterprise. I want the names, and I want the number of shares required."

"Oh, you don't require the cash now?"

"No."

"All right," said Owen major; "you can put me down for a dozen shares."

"I'll take a dozen, too!" said Teddy Long.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll take twenty!" said Griffiths.

"Rats!" I interrupted, starting forward. "Don't take any notice of these asses, Levi. They haven't got a quid between the lot of them, and they're not likely to have, either. All you require is bona-fide names, names of fellows who can keep their promises. To start the ball rolling, I'll buy some of those shares."

"Good!" said Levi.

"I think it is a ripping scheme," I went on. "Levi ought to be highly complimented for planning it all out. If we all have shares in this new picture theatre, we shall be part-owners, so to speak. We shall have a hand in the whole game, and it will be just possible that the cinema will be available for our amateur theatricals, and all that kind of thing. And as the Remove will have shares in the company, it stands to reason that the Remove will have certain privileges. It will be a tremendous advantage to us."

"By jingo, I believe you're right!" said Reginald Pitt. "It's rather a stunning idea!"

"Well, you can put me down for ten shares, Levi," I said. "That will be ten pounds, of course. I shall be able to find the money all right when the time arrives, which won't be until after Christmas, I suppose?"

"That's right," said Levi. "Early in the new year, I expect—after the holidays."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "I'll take ten shares, too, Levi. Pray put me down, dear old boy!"

Tommy Watson looked rather glum.

"I ain't a giddy millionaire!" he growled. "I can't buy ten shares! But you can jolly well book me down for two, Levi. I'll rake up the money somehow or other, even if I bust!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all right, Tommy," I said. "Two shares are better than none at all. Many of the chaps will only buy one share, I suppose."

"I'll have one, anyhow," said McClure.

"Same here!" said Church.

"And you can book me down for five," said Handforth, glaring at his chums. "It's jolly well like your sauce

to give your names before I give mine!" said Handforth, with a snort. "I'm having five shares in this company, because I believe it's a ripping thing. Those five shares will be worth double what I paid for them before the end of the year. Put my name down, Levi."

"It's down already," said Solomon Levi, who was busily writing in a note-book.

Somerton, De Valerie, and Singleton all bought from five to ten shares each in the new cinema company—at least, they put their names down, and a considerable number of other juniors consented to have one share each. This was all they could afford, and, even at that, it was rather problematical whether they would have the money ready at the right time.

On the other hand, there were quite a number of fellows who were loud in their denunciation of the whole scheme. Juniors like Merrell and Marriott and Fullwood, they all maintained that the whole thing was a swindle and a put-up job. They did not hesitate to say that Solomon Levi was attempting to get up a bogus company, and that the shares would be absolutely worthless.

"Why, I wouldn't have anything to do with it, even if the shares were goin' at a penny a time!" said Fullwood, with a sneer. "The whole thing's a rotten swindle, and——"

"You'd better not say too much, Fullwood," I interrupted sharply. "If you can only insult Levi, you'd better keep your mouth shut. Otherwise I shall be obliged to shut it for you."

Fullwood scowled.

"I've got just as much right to my opinion as anybody else!" he snapped. "An' you won't prevent me from speakin', Nipper."

Levi smiled.

"Believe me, I don't take any notice of these insinuating cads!" he exclaimed calmly. "If I thought they were worth troubling about, I would teach them a few more manners. But I reckon they're beneath contempt!"

"Hear, hear!" said Handforth, with approval.

"So you can reckon yourself properly snubbed!" said Reginald Pitt, addressing Fullwood. "You're extinguished, my son—you're blotted out!"

A good many fellows chuckled, and further discussion was suspended at that moment owing to the arrival of Fatty Little. The fat junior entered the common-room, rubbing his hands together and hunching his ample shoulders.

"Great pancakes! I'm glad there's a good fire here!" he exclaimed. "It's terrifically cold outside, as cold as ice-cream! What do you think of it, you chaps?"

"What do we think of what?" I asked. "The cold? Do you expect it to be sweltoringly hot in December, Fatty?"

"I'm not talking about the cold, you ass!" said Little. "I mean the fog!"

"Eh?"

"Fog?"

"Rather!" said Little. "Haven't you seen it? It's impossible to see across the Triangle! It's as bad as a London particular!"

Several juniors hurried to the windows, while others passed out into the lobby, and then went to the door of the Ancient House. It was not a common occurrence for a fog to come over St. Frank's, but now and again a thick sea mist would drift in from the Channel. On these occasions St. Frank's would be obliterated in a white blanket of mist.

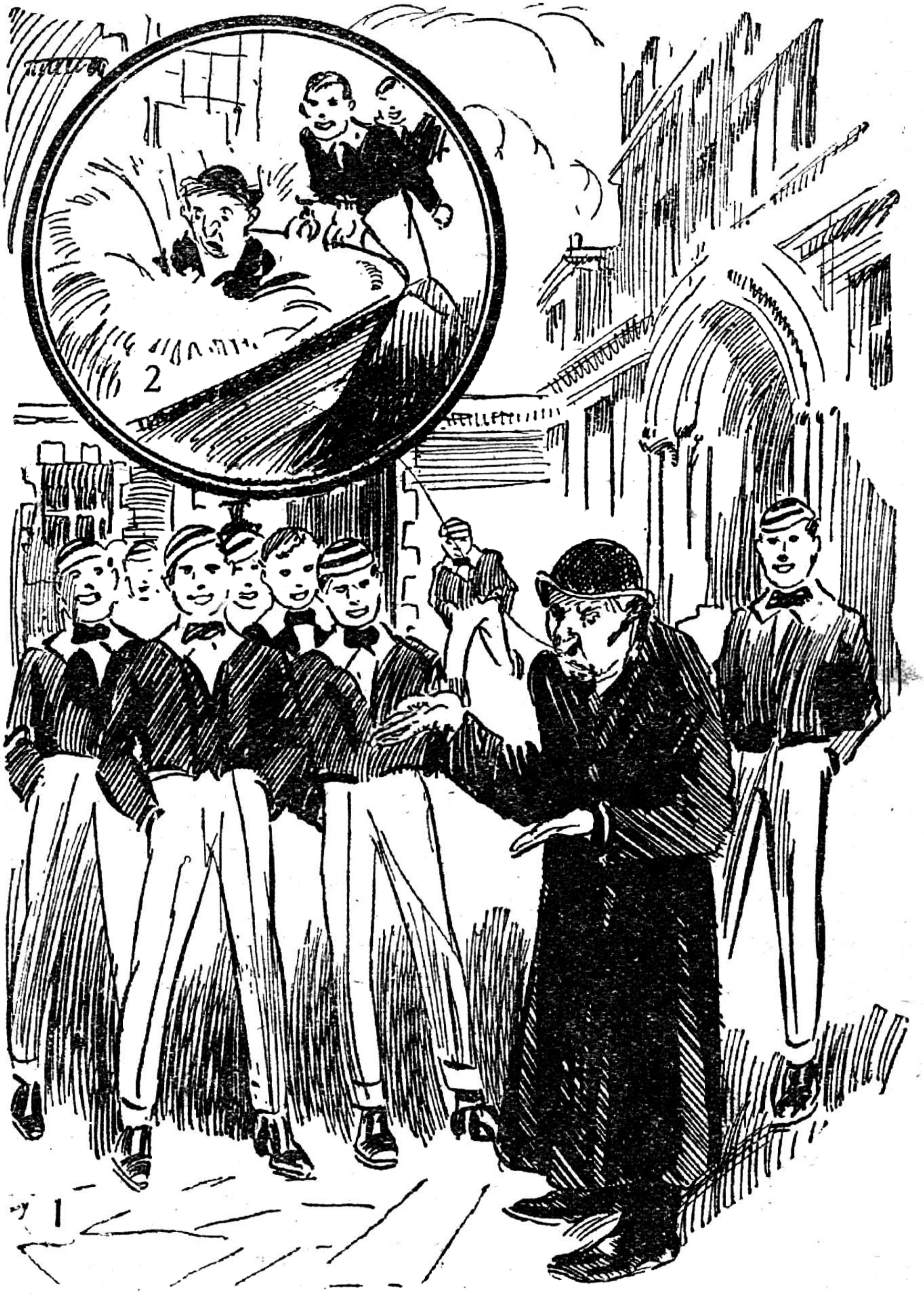
It was so on this occasion.

When the juniors arrived at the Ancient House doorway they stared out into a dense wall of grey. Nothing else was to be seen. The College House, Mr. Josh Cuttle's lodge—everything, in fact, had vanished! Nothing was to be seen except that grey wall of fog.

"By jingo, it's jolly thick!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt. "Why, only an hour ago there wasn't a sign of this fog! The evening was as clear as a bell."

"I expect it's rolled in from the sea!" I exclaimed. "It may last for an hour, or it may be with us all night. I'm jolly glad it's not necessary for me to be out!"

I shivered and turned back into the warm lobby, for the fog was chilling, and it seemed to grip hold of one. But out there in the fog, not very far from the Ancient House itself, two dim figures were lurking. They were trespassers; they had no right whatever within the school property. But they had taken



1. "I no longer stay here to receive the insults," said Mr. Isaacstein. "Oy-yoy! Never before in my life vos I so insulted! It vos more dan I can bare!"
2. "You cads!" howled Mr. Isaacstein. "By gad, I'll make you pay for this!"

advantage of this sudden fog to approach, and to even climb over the wall. They knew that they were safe, that they could not be seen or heard by anyone. It was an opportunity which was not likely to occur again.

"It's all very well, coming in here like this!" said one of the dim figures. "But what's the good of it, Ryan? What can we do, even now that we are here?"

The other man gripped his companion's arm.

"We can do a lot, Webb," he replied grimly. "This is a chance in a thousand, man. I guess it's up to us to look alive. If we don't, that infernal Jewish boy will defeat us. Say, I feel kinder mad! It's the first time I've been held up by a kid!"

One man was Hooker J. Ryan, and the other was Mr. Stanley Webb, the proprietor of the Bannington Cinema. Mr. Ryan was an American gentleman, and he had not been in Bannington very long. He represented himself as the president of a big syndicate which was planning to build big cinemas all over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Webb had had things all his own way in Bannington for a great many years. There was only one cinema, the one which belonged to Webb, and there had never been any opposition. Now, however, it seemed that things were about to move.

Solomon Levi and his father were determined to construct a new cinema, a palatial place, in the very centre of the Bannington High School. This position was far better than the one which Webb himself occupied, and as soon as the new cinema was opened, it was a moral certainty that Webb's place would be absolutely swamped. He would lose practically every patron he ever had, and he would naturally be ruined.

Therefore, the man was now alive to the fact that trouble was in store for him unless he moved rapidly. If, by any means, he could prevent the Levis building their picture theatre, it would be well, and it was Mr. Webb's plan to build a new cinema on his own, if possible, but with the help of Mr. Ryan's syndicate. In this way he would oust Levi, senior, completely from the scene of action.

But Webb and Ryan had met with many difficulties.

To begin with, they had discovered, much to their discomfiture, that Levi had already secured an option on the property in Bannington High Street. This option did not expire until the last day of the year, and it was quite certain that Levi, senior, would close the deal and would purchase the property. Bannington Grange was a huge old place, and the ground alone was worth double the money which had been asked for it.

Webb and Ryan had attempted to buy the option from Solomon Levi. They had offered him no less than one hundred pounds for that little piece of paper. But Levi, of course, had laughed at them, and had sent them about their business. Fair means having failed, the rascally pair had not hesitated to use foul means. In this, too, they had been unsuccessful, and now, it seemed, they were about to make another attempt.

"I guess it's about the only chance we've got left," said Mr. Ryan impressively. "It's not my habit to howl, but if this thing doesn't go through, Webb, I shall shout mighty loud."

"It's all very well to talk like that," said Webb; "but what can we do? This boy has got the option safely stowed away, and we don't know where to look for it, or where to lay hands on it. It's just as bad as trying to find a needle in a haystack. I tell you, Ryan, the thing is absolutely impossible!"

"Well, I'm not so sure about it!" said Mr. Ryan grimly. "The only thing we can do is to try, and try good and hard. This fog has helped us a heap. Anyway-I guess we'll get busy without any further talking."

"What do you propose?" asked Webb.

"Well, I guess that we'll be cautious," said Ryan. "We won't get busy on this job ourselves. But we're here, and we shall be able to direct the fellow who's waiting outside. By the way, is that man trustworthy?"

"Absolutely!" replied Webb. "I've known him for years, and he'll do anything for a pound or two. There's no danger of his talking, either, because it's more than he dare do. I know one or two things about him, and the police would give me a good deal if they could know what those things are. Oh, yes, Ryan, this man is quite all right!"

"Good!" said Mr. Ryan. "Then

we'll give him our instructions at once, and tell him exactly what to do. Then we'll get straight back to Bannington."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait here and learn the result of——"

"No, I guess that wouldn't do!" interrupted the American. "If this man secures the option, Levi would immediately suspect one of us, and we want to provide ourselves with a perfect alibi. We can do that by returning to Bannington at once, and Levi won't be able to prove a single thing."

Webb nodded.

"I suppose that will be better," he said. "In any case, we mustn't leave anything to chance."

A few minutes later the two men had crept away through the fog. Outside in the lane, a few hundred yards from the school, they met another dim, shadowy figure. They talked together for some little time, and then the third man crept to the school wall, rose to the parapet, and then dropped over into the Triangle.

Mr. Webb and Mr. Ryan lost no time in making straight for Bannington.

They were anxious, but somehow or other, they believed that their hireling would be successful in his quest.

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE FOG.

SOLOMON LEVI closed his notebook with a snap.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed approvingly. "A lot better than I expected, anyway, Dick. Over half the Remove have promised to buy shares in this new cinema company. Why, we shall all be cinema-owners before long!"

Dick Goodwin grinned.

"Ay, that's one way of looking at it," he exclaimed. "And it's a fine idea, Solly. It's a champion scheme—it is that."

"Of course, it's all in the air at present," said Levi. "Nothing has been definitely settled; but it's a dead certainty that this cinema is going to be built. The pater has got plenty of money, and he means to go into the scheme whole-heartedly. He won't spare time or trouble over it, believe me."

"But nothing is to be done until after Christmas?" asked Dick.

"Well, there's hardly time," said the Jewish boy. "Even if my father wanted to rush things through at once, I don't suppose he would be able to. No building firm would commence operations until after Christmas. Besides, an architect must be employed, and all sorts of other people. These things can't be done at a second's notice, you know."

"No, I suppose not," said Goodwin. "By the way, I suppose you've got that option safely enough?"

"You betcher!" replied Levi, nodding.

"Didn't you give it to your father?"

"Perhaps it would have been just as well if I had done so, but, as it happens, I didn't," replied the Jewish boy. "I've still got it in my pocket, safe and sound. I'll guarantee that nobody will take it from me!"

Levi pulled out his pocket-book, opened it, and produced a small envelope. From this he took out a sheet of notepaper. It was the option which had been supplied by Mrs. Cubitt, the owner of Bannington Grange. Levi looked at it rather proudly.

"As long as we've got this, we're absolutely safe!" he exclaimed. "Nobody can step in before us and steal a march on us. Until the thirty-first of December, we've got the chance of buying that old haunted house. And before the end of the month, my father will have closed the deal!"

"It's a good thing those beasts didn't steal it the other day!" said Goodwin. "By gum! They broke into this study, and smashed the desk, but they only got a blank piece of paper."

"Hardly blank!" chuckled Levi. "I wrote a few choice words upon it, and I expect they received a shock when they opened the envelope. No, Dick, I'm not letting this option out of my sight for a minute. I'm keeping it in my pocket-book all the time."

"Ay, it's safer!" said Dick Goodwin, nodding.

But neither of the two juniors noticed a somewhat startling incident which took place at that moment. A face was pressed against the window of the study—a face which came out of the dense

blackness of the fog. Just for a moment or two it peered into the brilliantly illuminated study. It was by no means a handsome face, and it hovered there for some little time, watching every movement of Levi's.

The man who was outside in the fog saw Solomon Levi replace the option in his pocket-book, and he saw the pocket-book slipped into Levi's jacket. The enemy had learned one fact, at all events—the fact that Levi carried the option on his own person.

"Well, it's a champion scheme!" said Dick Goodwin, as he poked the fire. "It made me mad when I heard those fellows running you down, Levi—it did that!"

Solomon Levi grinned.

"I don't take any notice of the rotters!" he said. "By my life, I expected to receive worse insults when I came to St. Frank's! And I'm jolly glad to find that all the decent fellows are with me. I can easily deal with the others if they get too fresh. I've got these!"

He held out his two fists.

"Ay, you can box, can't you?" asked Dick Goodwin.

"You bet your sweet life I can box!" said Levi. "Believe me, I'm pretty dangerous when I get going. That may sound like a boast, but it isn't. Can you box?"

"Ah, a bit!" replied Goodwin.

"If you'd care for a few rounds in the study, here, we'll just have a little sparring bout," said Levi. "Got any gloves?"

"Yes, in the cupboard."

"Good!"

Levi peeled off his jacket, placed the latter over the back of a chair, and then rolled up his sleeves. Dick Goodwin, smiling, copied his example. Then the two juniors proceeded to clear the centre of the room so that it would form a temporary ring.

The table was pushed on one side, the chairs were placed against the walls. By chance the chair which contained Levi's jacket was left just against the window. It was perfectly natural that it should be shifted to this position, although neither junior realised the peril of their innocent-looking movement.

Dick Goodwin produced two pairs of gloves, and then the juniors prepared to don them. They did not do so, however, and the reason for this was a startling one.

"We won't do any hard hitting," remarked Levi. "Just a few taps, you know. And the practice won't do us any harm, Dick. It might be necessary for me to——"

"Ay, look there!" shouted Goodwin abruptly.

His eyes blazed with excitement, and he pointed to the window. Levi wheeled round, rather startled. Goodwin had seen a dim, shadowy form outside the window, in the fog. It was the figure of a man, and his face was completely concealed, except the eyes, by the simple expedient of placing a handkerchief over the lower portion of his features.

Almost before Levi could look round, the lower sash of the window was flung open with a crash. A dark hand reached through into the study.

"By gum!" yelled Goodwin. "He's after your jacket, Solly—the option—look out!"

"By my life!" shouted Levi.

He made a spring forward, but when he arrived at the window his jacket had already been grasped, and it was being withdrawn through the window into the foggy night. But the intruder was not quite fast enough for the two juniors. Goodwin had leapt forward at the same time as Levi, and they both arrived at the window together.

"Grab him!" panted Dick.

Levi needed no telling. He was already reaching out in order to seize the man. But the jacket had already been removed from the study, and Levi lunged out, and just managed to grasp a portion of the man's clothing. He held on to it like grim death.

"Quick! Lend me a hand!" he gasped.

It all happened in next to no time. Levi discovered, to his alarm and dismay, that he was only grasping the thick woollen scarf which the stranger had been wearing. And as he pulled at it, the scarf slipped, and came completely away. The man staggered back, and vanished into the fog. Both the juniors heard him tumble over.

"Ay, the thief!" exclaimed Goodwin huskily. "After him, Solly!"

They both scrambled out of the

window as though they had taken leave of their senses, and when they arrived outside in the dense fog, they heard faint, muffled footsteps retreating across the Triangle. Goodwin and Levi rushed into the fog blindly, one taking one direction, and one the other. And after they had been running several yards they halted, listening intently.

All was silent.

The thief had vanished!

This was not very surprising, considering the dense state of the fog. It had been an easy matter for him to rush away and to find concealment. For it was obvious that the thief had retreated to a safe distance; and had then become stationary, so that he should make no sound. After that, of course, it would be a very simple matter for him to climb over the school wall to reach the road, and to make a complete and safe escape.

It was the fog which was responsible for the disaster.

Without the aid of that smothering grey mist, the enemy could have done nothing. It would have been impossible, indeed, for any intruder to have approached the window of the end study; he would have been seen at once by somebody or other. It was the fog which had made this thing possible.

Dick Goodwin, finding himself momentarily lost, hardly knew which way to turn. Then, away to his left, he heard a movement. It was caused by a boot scraping over a loose stone. Dick Goodwin stood perfectly still, rigid.

"By gum!" he muttered.

As stealthily as a cat he moved forward in the direction of the sound. After going a few yards he paused, again listening, and now he heard footsteps quite close. He stood quite still, straining his eyes through the fog.

And then a form loomed into vision just a few yards away. Dick Goodwin did not wait to think twice; he flung himself at that form, and as he did so, the other figure flung itself forward.

The pair met with a thud, and they crashed over.

"Ay, I've got you!" shouted Goodwin quickly. "Help! Levi! I've got him ——"

"Great Scott!" gasped the voice from under him. "It's me, you ass! I—I thought you were the thief——"

"Levi!" panted Goodwin.

The two juniors had flung themselves at one another, both under the same misapprehension!

"Ay, I'm sorry!" gasped Dick, rising to his feet. "I—I thought——"

"And so did I!" interrupted Levi. "But that doesn't matter; there's not a second to lose. The option has gone! That scoundrel has stolen my jacket, and the option is in the pocket! What shall we do, Dick? It means everything! We've lost the game now!"

"Ay, it's terrible!" said Goodwin.

Solomon Levi was nearly frantic. Only a few minutes before he had been congratulating himself upon his complete success, and now, at a moment's notice, the enemy had gained the upper hand. Either Webb or Ryan, or somebody in the employ of the two men, had managed to obtain the option. And, what was more, the thief had got completely away with his spoil. It would be an absolutely impossible task to run him to earth in such a fog as this. To get on the track was out of the question.

"Let's get back into the study!" said Dick Goodwin. "We can't do anything here, Solly. It's no good crying over spilt milk——"

"But the option has gone!" repeated Levi, in a dull, miserable voice. "We shall be defeated. Webb will take it to Mrs. Cubitt, and then he'll pay a deposit on the property—and after that it will be impossible for my father to do anything. Oh, this is awful, Dick! We must do something—we must!"

They hurried back to the wall of the Ancient House, taking a direction which they believed would lead them straight up to the window of the end study. But, in the fog, they made a miscalculation, and when a lighted window loomed up, it proved to be that of Study C. And, at that very moment, I was standing at the open window, peering out into the fog.

"What's the trouble out there?" I inquired, as I saw the two figures looming up. "Who was that yelling for help just now?"

"Ay, it was me!" said Goodwin. "Something awful has happened!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie, who was just behind me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Some awful scoundrel has stolen that option!" said Levi, in a dull, listless

voice. "Oh, it's no good talking, Nipper—we can't do anything!"

"The option has been stolen?" I repeated. "Why, that's serious, Levi!"

"Serious!" said Levi bitterly. "It's—it's the end of everything!"

"But how did it happen?" demanded Tommy Watson excitedly.

Levi and Goodwin came in through the window, and we looked at them curiously. It did not take the two juniors long to describe exactly what had happened. They told us how the window had been flung up, and how the jacket had been seized. I listened intently, and nodded.

"Somebody must have been watching you for some little time," I said.

"How do you know?"

"Why, it is obvious!" I exclaimed. "The man outside knew, for example, that the option was in Levi's jacket. Did you take the paper out a short time before you put your jacket over the chair, Levi?"

The Jewish boy started.

"Yes, I did!" he exclaimed. "I was having a look at it, and then Dick suggested a few rounds with the gloves ——"

"Nay; you suggested that!" said Goodwin.

"Well, it doesn't make any difference!" went on Levi. "The option has gone, and we can't possibly get it now!"

"Well, it seems pretty hopeless," I said. "This man outside was evidently watching you, and, as soon as he saw that jacket placed over the chair, next to the window, he seized his opportunity."

"That's about the size of it!" said Tommy Watson. "Well, things are in a pretty pickle now!"

"Dear old boy, I'm frightfully sorry about this!" said Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez, and regarding us all gravely. "This is frightful—it is, really. It is a shockin' misfortune. If you had only been a little quicker, you might have detained the man until some more of us had arrived on the scene——"

"We did grab him," said Levi. "We got hold of his woollen scarf, but the beastly thing came away in our hands, and it was left with us. The man escaped, taking my jacket with him."

I looked at Levi sharply.

"Have you got that scarf?" I asked.

"Yes; it's just outside our study window," replied the Jewish boy.

A keen look came into my eyes.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed crisply. "I've got it!"

"You've got what?"

"An idea—we can track that man down!" I said quickly. "If we hurry up, we can overtake him before he has gone very far!"

A light of intense hope sprang into Levi's eyes.

"How?" he demanded eagerly.

"What can we do?"

I stood there with clenched fists.

"Yes, he'll be able to do it!" I exclaimed absently. "I'll bet a shilling to a pound that, by the aid of that scarf, he will be able to pick up the trail."

"He?" repeated Levi. "Who?"

"Charles Dickens!" I replied promptly.

CHAPTER VI.

RUN DOWN.

"CHARLES DICKENS?" repeated Levi, in a tone of blank astonishment.

"Yes!"

"By gum!" said Dick Goodwin.

They both stared round, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West grinned.

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Levi. "Charles Dickens! Who is he?"

"My little dog!"

"What?"

"You—your little dog!" repeated Dick Goodwin.

"Yes, you asses!" I grinned. "Didn't you know? I forget who called him Charles Dickens originally—I believe it was Lord Dorrimore—but we shortened his name down to Boz. He's a cute little beggar, and I generally keep him round in the kennels, at the back of the Ancient House. He hasn't had any exercise for some little time, and this will do him good."

"Which will do him good?" demanded Levi, with a touch of irritation in his voice. "You don't seem to realise, Nipper, that this matter is terribly urgent—and here you are, talking about your dog! Just as if that matters now! What good can this dog do in a case of this sort?"

"You evidently don't know Boz, or you wouldn't speak like that, Levi," I said. "Boz is one of the smartest little dogs on the face of the earth. He's got a nose that's just about as keen as any bloodhound. My idea is for us to get Boz on the trail of this man, and he will lead us straight after him—fog or no fog. If we hurry up, and if Boz sticks to the trail well, we shall overtake the man before he has gone very far. That is absolutely certain—unless, of course, he got away on a bicycle, or a conveyance of some other kind. If that turns out to be the case, we shall be completely done. And I hardly think the man would have come on anything but his own feet."

"But how will Boz be able to pick up the trail?" asked Watson. "How will he know?"

"What about that scarf?" I said grimly. "If Boz can't pick up the scent after sniffing that scarf, he's not the dog I think he is!"

"By Jingo!" said Watson. "You're right, Nipper!"

"It is a rippin' suggestion, dear old fellow!" said Sir Montie. "We had better waste no further time, begad!"

Levi's eyes were shining afresh.

"If we could only get on the trail, it would be great!" he declared. "For goodness' sake, use every effort, Nipper! You don't know what depends upon it ——"

"Yes, I do!" I said briskly. "I know exactly what this means to you, Levi, and you can rely upon me to do my utmost."

"Thanks very much!" said the Jewish boy.

It did not take us long to hurry down to the lobby, and to get into our overcoats and mufflers and caps. Then, while I went round to the back to secure Boz, the other juniors went to the window of the end study. There they found the thick woollen scarf which had been left behind by the intruder.

As I hurried round into the Triangle, with Boz on the leash, I wondered for a moment whether I should approach Nelson Lee—whether I should get the guv'nor into this thing. But I decided very promptly that I would not do so. It would mean another delay, and, in any case, Nelson Lee would not be able to do much. We had Boz to put us on the scent, and there were quite enough of us to deal with the man, if we overtook him. So I went straight to the window of Levi's study, and found a group of juniors waiting there.

"Oh, here you are!" said Levi. "By my life, what—what do you call that thing?"

He pointed to the little spaniel who was standing by my side, wagging his tail vigorously.

"That," I replied, "is Charles Dickens."

"But—but a dog of that sort won't be able to get on the trail!" said Levi. "Only bloodhounds can track men——"

"That's all you know," I interrupted. "Boz is certainly an exception; but he is a masterpiece. What he doesn't know about tracking isn't worth learning. If it was possible to start a school of learning for bloodhounds, Boz would easily qualify for the position of headmaster!"

The fog was dense, and it whirled round us in wreath-like masses, being thicker in some places than in others. It was a dense sea mist, actually, and it was quite possible that it would roll away almost as abruptly as it had come up. But it would probably be morning before the air cleared.

"Where's the scarf?" I said briskly.

"Here it is!" said Sir Montie, holding it out to me. "It ought to put Boz on the scent at once, dear old boy. I hope he doesn't disappoint us on this occasion."

I took the scarf, bent down, and gave it to Charles Dickens to sniff. The little beggar was as keen as mustard, and he knew exactly what was required of him. He sniffed at the scarf eagerly, and got the scent well into his nostrils.

"Good old boy!" I said, patting his back. "Find him, Boz! After him! Good old boy!"

Boz understood.

He sniffed round on the ground eagerly, and in a very businesslike manner, and, after a few seconds had

elapsed, he gave a cracked yelp of excitement.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "He's got it!"

"Really?" said Levi. "Oh, by glory!"

There was no doubt that Boz had got on the scent. He tugged at the leash impatiently, and off we went across the Triangle, Boz leading the way, and the others following behind in a crowd. The Jewish boy was almost beside himself with anxiety and worry.

And I was not very surprised at this, for the precious option had gone, and if that was not recovered, the whole cinema scheme would fall to the ground. For it was a moral certainty that Webb and Ryan would step in, and would make any further operations on the part of Mr. Isaac Levi absolutely out of the question.

We had no proof that Webb or his American confederate were responsible for the theft, but we were quite certain in our own minds that this was the case.

We followed a roundabout course before we arrived at the school wall. Boz was hot on the scent, and he never once faltered. He went across the Triangle in a fairly straight line until he reached the trees—the big clump of trees not far from the ruins of the old monastery. Here Boz turned off at a tangent, and, after following this new direction for a few yards, turned off again.

"The chap evidently lost his bearings in the fog here," I said. "He didn't know exactly where he was, and scouted about for a bit. Hallo! Now we're going towards the wall all right!"

I was correct, for, a few moments later, we found ourselves at the wall. Boz was jumping up eagerly, giving little yelps.

"All right, old man!" I said. "We'll soon be over, and then you'll be able to get a brisk move on."

It was not long before we were all over the wall, Boz included. And the little beggar did not believe in wasting any time, for, the very instant he reached the ground, he sniffed about among the grass, and set off straight away down Bellton Lane, towards the village. After we had traversed about a hundred yards, I turned to the other juniors, who were following close behind.

"Good!" I exclaimed.

"What's good?" said Watson.

"Why, it's fairly certain now that the man was on foot," I said. "If he had had a bicycle, or anything of that sort, he would have mounted it before coming this distance."

"That's quite right," said Levi. "But do you think we shall be able to overtake the man, Nipper?"

"It all depends," I said. "If the fellow went off at the run, it may be doubtful. But I should think he would take it quietly in this fog. He knew well enough that he would not be followed, because he couldn't possibly guess that we should have a dog of this sort on the premises. So it's quite likely that the man is now walking quite leisurely and contentedly towards Bannington. Anyhow, all we can do is to put on as much speed as possible, and hope for the best."

"That's the idea, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "You had better tell Boz to put in his high gear!"

Boz needed no telling. I gave him his head, and he went off down the road at a brisk trot. We followed at the double. So strong was the scent that Boz never once hesitated.

By this time we were all fairly convinced that the thief had gone straight through the village and had taken the Bannington Road. But we very soon found out that we were mistaken, for Boz suddenly swept off towards the edge of the road.

And we almost ran right past him.

"Hallo!" said Watson. "What's the idea?"

"The stile!" I said. "The man must have passed through the wood—anyhow, Boz is leading up in that direction."

This was true. The little spaniel had arrived at the stile by this time. We helped him over, and then he went straight along the footpath which led through the heart of Bellton Wood, and which ended, ultimately, upon Bannington Moor.

"Yes, this is right," I said. "If anybody is walking, it is quicker to get to Bannington by this means than by taking the main road. The fellow has gone back across the moor."

"Good!" said Levi. "He may have lost himself."

"That's quite on the cards," I agreed.

"In this fog, a fellow might be walking about for hours. He's a silly ass not to go by road; but it gives us a good chance to overtake him."

We progressed rapidly, all of us being rather excited. There is really nothing more exhilarating or grim than a man-hunt. Our nerves were all on edge, and we were ready for anything. Sooner or later, we believed, we should overtake the man who had stolen Solomon Levi's jacket. Then there would be a fight, and we were all grimly determined that the fight should end only in one way.

On we went, until at length we had passed through Bellton Wood. It had been rather a trying time, for it was impossible to see a yard in front of our faces. The path was not very wide, and my companions were constantly banging into the trees and stumbling against bushes. I had the best of it, for I was immediately behind Boz, and he kept to the path fairly well. I judged from this that our quarry had had an electric torch with him, and had been able to stick to the path in spite of the fog.

"Well, here we are on the moor!" I said, staring into the blackness in front. "Goodness knows which direction the man took after this! Not far from us is that old mill; but I don't suppose the fellow will be there. He probably went to the left, and joined the moorland road to Bannington. In any case, we shall soon know."

By this time we were all hot and perspiring, in spite of the chilly dampness of the atmosphere. We had been trotting practically all the time, and our blood was circulating rapidly.

Boz led the way straight on, and the going was now more difficult. For it was clear that our quarry had gone straight over the rough moor. And the surface was bad; wild patches of gorse were constantly cropping up in our path.

It was rather a trying business. The fog made it impossible for us to see more than a yard in any direction, and all we could do was to go exactly where Boz took us. But at last, after a very roundabout course, we arrived upon the moorland road, and now Boz went forward with increased speed, and with even greater eagerness than before.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "The scent is stronger here; it proves that we are not far behind!"

"Ay, we shall have to be careful, then!" said Dick Goodwin. "We mustn't speak, lads; and we must walk as quietly as possible. We mustn't give the fellow any warning that we are on his track!"

We went on without any decreasing of speed. On the other hand, we went faster, for, now that the trail was hotter, we were spurred on to further effort. We were now following the road, and the going was much better. We went at the double, Boz leading us accurately and certainly. The fog hemmed us in on all sides, and it was impossible to see more than a yard in any direction.

Without the aid of Boz, we should have been absolutely helpless. The thief would have got away quite easily, without any trouble of any kind. If we succeeded in overtaking the fellow, we should have nobody else but Boz to thank for it. He didn't care anything about fogs and mists. He relied upon his nose, and the fog did not interfere with the scent.

On we went, covering the ground rapidly. It was obvious that our quarry was hurrying, now that he had reached the road. But we were rather surprised by the man's erratic course; he continually went from side to side, in a drunken manner.

"He must have been pretty muddled by this fog," I remarked. "I can't understand why——"

I broke off, for at that moment Boz had left the road altogether, and was now going straight across the grassland, over the moor. He was tugging at the leash with greatly increased eagerness.

I pulled him to a halt at once, and turned to my companions.

"We'd better go easy here," I muttered. "It's pretty certain that the man is only just ahead of us now. He must have heard us coming, and dodged off from the road on to the moor, thinking that we should walk straight past. He evidently doesn't know that we've got a dog with us."

The juniors were excited. They knew that the climax had been reached, and that within a few minutes we should be right on the heels of our quarry. Indeed, we were on the heels of him already, and presently we should overtake him.

"Come on!" I whispered. "Now then, Boz! On, old man! Find him!"

Boz needed no urging. He went on very rapidly, and, as it happened, it was not necessary for him to go very far, for, before we had covered more than a couple of hundred yards, Boz dodged round a big pile of gorse; then, giving several excited yelps, he leapt forward.

As he did so, a big figure loomed up in the fog. It had been crouching down behind the gorse. But now it rose to its feet, and then went rushing away, Boz barking furiously.

"There he is!" shouted Levi. "After him!"

We simply ran over the moor blindly, for we were now all thoroughly excited. We went charging through the fog, and then, quite abruptly, the chase came to an end.

For our man had crashed over, stumbling over a root. He lay upon the ground, and he sat up, panting heavily.

"Keep that dawg off!" he gasped. "Don't let that blooming dawg touch me!"

"It's all right; you needn't worry!" I said. "The dog is quite harmless. He's not one of the biting kind. Now then, my man, you'd better get to your feet, and explain yourself!"

The man was still sitting on the ground, and he uttered an oath.

"What's it got to do with you?" he demanded. "What's the idea of this 'ere? Can't a honest man walk along the road without you tracking him down, like a criminal?"

"It's no good putting up that kind of bluff, my friend!" I interrupted grimly. "We know for a fact that you broke into a study at St. Frank's, and that you took a jacket belonging to Levi."

"You're mad!" snarled the man. "I ain't been near St. Frank's——"

"Don't tell lies!" I put in. "This dog has trailed you the whole way from the window—you seem to forget that you left your scarf behind. Denial is absolutely useless, and the best thing you can do is to own up at once, and deliver up that jacket. If you do, I dare say we shall let you go free, without making any further inquiries. It's too much trouble to take you along to the police, in any case. Now then—bring out the truth!"

"Where's my jacket?" demanded Levi, pushing forward. "We saw you take it, you scoundrel——"

"Keep your 'air on, young gents!" interrupted the man. "It seems that it ain't no good my denying the thing. Yes, I did take the jacket—but not for myself. I was paid to do it!"

"Who by?" asked Levi.

"That don't concern you!" growled the man. "I took the jacket, but I ain't got it now!"

"You haven't got it?"

"No."

"Look here—that won't wash!" I said sternly. "Unless you produce that jacket within twenty minutes, my man, we will tie your arms behind your back, and then we'll run you along to the Bannington police station, and give you in charge. You've got one minute to make your choice."

The man breathed heavily, and then tenderly touched one of his eyes.

"Honest, young gents, I ain't got the jacket!" he said earnestly. "I ain't tellin' lies, and I ain't trying to bluff you. I hadn't got more than twenty yards down the road, just outside the wall at St. Frank's, when I was stopped by a man. He asked me what I was doin', and then went for me. Knocked me over, he did, and give me a black eye. And he was off with that jacket afore I knew what 'ad happened. That's the gorspel truth, young gents!"

"A man took the jacket from you just outside St. Frank's?" asked Levi quickly.

"Yes, he did!"

"Who was the man?"

"I dunno, sir; I never had a chance to see him in the fog."

Levi clenched his fists.

"I don't believe it!" he said hotly. "This is a trick—a trick to defeat me! Well, it won't work. And if you don't produce that jacket—or, at least, my pocket-book—we'll take you straight along to the police station!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tommy Watson.

"Lor' lumme, ain't you got no sense?" demanded the man. "I keep tellin' you the truth, and you don't believe it. I ain't got the jacket, nor the pocket-book, nor nothin'! It was took from me by a man outside St. Frank's. That's the honest truth, young gents, and I can't say no more."

The man certainly spoke with an earnest note in his voice, and I came to the only possible conclusion—either Mr. Webb or Mr. Ryan had been waiting out in the road, and as soon as this

fellow appeared with the jacket, it had been taken from him; therefore, it was now in the possession of Webb. The worst had happened—the option had got into the hands of the enemy.

Solomon Levi was thinking this way, too; for he was breathing hard, and he nudged my arm.

"It's no good!" he muttered. "The rotter evidently gave the jacket to those men. We're done, Nipper—absolutely finished!"

"Yes, I'm afraid we are," I replied. "Jolly hard lines, Levi!"

The Jewish boy uttered an exclamation.

"And we can do nothing—absolutely nothing!" he exclaimed. "It's no good taking this man to the police-station, because they could get nothing out of him, and it would only cause a lot of trouble for us. But I'm not satisfied yet. It's quite possible that he threw the jacket away, and put the pocket-book in his own pocket."

"Yes, that's possible," I said. "In any case, we'll search him."

"That's what I was going to suggest."

I turned to the prisoner.

"We don't believe you," I said bluntly. "We don't believe this story of yours, and we are going to search you."

The man grunted.

"You won't find much," he said. "I ain't got the pocket-book on me, nor the jacket, neither. I keep tellin' you it was took from me by a man just outside the school. Lemme go, young gents. It won't do you no good to take me to the cops. I didn't mean no 'arm; I didn't think it was anything much to pinch the kid's jacket."

He broke off as we seized him. Then, keeping him down on the ground, we went through every one of his pockets. The result of our search was not exactly satisfactory.

For, although we found a packet of cigarettes, a few shillings in silver, a box of matches, and a number of odds and ends, we found not one single article which had ever belonged to Solomon Levi. Neither the pocket-book nor the other things which had been contained in Levi's jacket. The man had been speaking the truth when he declared that he did not carry anything of that nature on him.

"Well, you can go," I said to the fellow. "and you can thank your lucky stars that you're not given in charge of the police. But if ever you come prowling round St. Frank's again, we won't hesitate for a second. You'll be given into custody at once, and this affair will tell against you, too. Clear off!"

"Thanks, young gents!" said the man, staggering to his feet. "By thunder, you're sports!"

He went off into the fog, and we stood looking at one another rather grimly. We were extremely disappointed.

"Drawn blank!" I exclaimed. "It's hard on you, Levi!"

"I—I don't know what to do," said the Jewish boy, with clenched fists. "I feel like rushing straight to Bannington and going to Webb's place. I want to confront the man—to charge him with this robbery——"

"That's no good, Levi," I interrupted. "Webb would deny it, and we haven't got a single atom of proof against him. Did your pocket-book contain any money?"

"Yes, a good bit," replied Levi.

"How much?"

"About twenty-five pounds in notes."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "How frightful, dear old boy!"

"I don't mind about the money; I don't care a rap!" said Levi. "It's the option that worries me. It's gone, and I shall never be able to get it again."

"Well, you see, Webb is safe," I said "Even if we pursued this matter and charged him with the theft, he would deny it. And it is quite clear that the man who took the jacket could have done so from a motive of his own—to obtain the money in the pocket-book. If you go to Webb, he will only laugh at you, Levi. The best thing we can do is to go back to St. Frank's and get the advice of Mr. Lee. He'll tell us what to do for the best."

"Yes, I suppose we'd better do that," said Levi heavily. "It's as clear as a bell that this man went over the wall of St Frank's, and handed the jacket straight to Webb, who was standing out there. But we can't prove it; that's just the rotten part of the whole thing."

Levi spoke in a very low voice. He was quite listless, for this affair had come as a great blow to him. After all his great hopes, it would be a terrible thing for the cinema scheme to fizzle out to nothing.

We returned to St. Frank's in exactly

the same way as we had come—by following Boz. I put him on the track again, and there was no fear of us getting lost in the fog. Boz led the way accurately by following the scent.

Finally we reached the other side of Bellton Wood, went up the lane towards the school, and then climbed over the wall. It was not late even now, and we should still be well in time for supper. Nobody had known that we had gone out, and there would probably be no inquiries, for in this fog anything was possible. Prefects or masters could not possibly see what we had been doing.

The four juniors accompanied me round the back of the house while I put Boz back in his kennel. Then we strolled round together and entered the Ancient House lobby. We were all rather tired, and Solomon Levi was looking depressed.

We went straight to Study C, and when we had arrived there we entered and closed the door.

"Well, we haven't met with much success," I said. "It's a terrible pity, Levi, and I'm awfully sorry. I don't exactly see what can be done now. That option is probably in Webb's hands by this time."

"It's destroyed, I expect!" said Levi fiercely. "Either that, or Webb took it straight away to Mrs. Cubitt. Of course, he's told her some false story, and she believes that we have backed out of the deal. Oh, it's rotten! I don't know what I shall tell my father."

"Dear old boy, you have our sympathy," said Montie. "It is a shockin' position, and I wish we could do somethin' to help you."

"You've done a lot already. You did your best, at all events," said Levi. "I want to thank you for all the trouble you've taken."

"Rats!" I interrupted. "We quite enjoyed the trip. But it would have been far more satisfactory if we had met with success at the end."

"Ay, but we must do something!" said Dick Goodwin. "It wouldn't be right to let the matter drop now, Nipper. We shall have to fix upon some plan—ay, and quickly, too!"

I nodded.

"The best thing we can do is to go straight along to Mr. Lee's study," I said. "We will place all the facts before the guv'nor, and he will be able to tell us——"

The door opened at that moment, and, strangely enough, Nelson Lee himself appeared.

"Oh, you're here now, Nipper!" he said. "I have been looking for you, and I have also been looking for Levi."

"I'm here, sir!" said Levi, who had been concealed by the door.

Nelson Lee entered.

"So I observe, my boy," he said. "Well, where have you been? For over an hour past I have been trying to find you, and I am convinced that you have been breaking bounds."

"We—we went out, sir."

"But we were justified, guv'nor!" I put in. "Something happened, you know."

"Something happened?" repeated Nelson Lee.

"Rather, sir!" I said. "I dare say you know about this scheme of Levi's—he and his father are going to build a new cinema in Bannington."

"I heard something about it," said Nelson Lee. "It is quite an excellent scheme, and I hope it will go through. The present cinema in Bannington is a disgrace to the town, and we can certainly rely upon a good, wholesome place being set up if Mr. Levi has charge. Well, what was this event that happened?"

"Why, sir, Levi has an option on the property in the Bannington High Street," I explained. "It was in his pocket-book, and the pocket-book was in his jacket."

"Oh, I see!" said Nelson Lee.

It did not take me long to describe exactly what had happened. I told Nelson Lee how the man had come up in the fog and had broken into the end study, stealing the jacket and making away with it. Then I described how we had fetched Boz, and how we had immediately got on the trail, only to meet with grave disappointment at the end of our quest. Nelson Lee nodded when we had come to a finish.

"Well, under the circumstances, boys, I will not punish you for breaking bounds," he said. "You could hardly do anything else, and I must say that it was a very cute dodge of yours, Nipper, to set Boz on the track so promptly. It must have been a great disappointment for you to meet with failure when you had run your quarry down. But, taking everything into consideration, I hardly

think you could have met with any other result."

"Why, what do you mean, sir?" asked Levi.

"I am quite certain that the fellow was speaking the truth," said Nelson Lee. "I am convinced, in fact, that he was attacked soon after he left the school property, and the jacket was forcibly taken from him."

"What reasons have you for being so sure, sir?" I asked.

"A very excellent reason, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee calmly. "I hope, Levi, that I shall be able to relieve your anxiety. Your jacket, at the present moment, is in my possession."

We all stared, rather dumbly.

"I have got your jacket and pocket-book, Levi," smiled Nelson Lee.

"You've got it?" we all shouted excitedly.

"Dear me!" said the guv'nor. "There is no need to raise your voices to that extent, boys. Yes, I have got the jacket, and the pocket-book, and, presumably, the option. It was I who attacked that fellow in the lane, and it was I who deprived him of the jacket."

"Begad!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"By my life!"

"You appear to be surprised!" chuckled Nelson Lee. "You see, boys, I was on my way home from the village—in fact, I had just arrived, when I saw a man dropping over the school wall. In the fog I at first took him to be one of the senior boys. But he commenced running as soon as I addressed him. It did not take me very long, however, to overtake the fellow, and to seize him. I demanded to know what he was doing, and he commenced swearing at me. Then I observed that he was carrying an Eton jacket. I took posession of this at once, after delivering one or two rather severe blows. The man took to his heels, and I did not trouble to follow him. Your jacket, Levi, is in my study, and you can have it whenever you wish."

I burst into a shout of laughter.

"This is pretty funny!" I grinned. "While we were chasing that chap all through Bellton Wood and across the Bannington Moor, the guv'nor had got the jacket and was trying to find Levi! We needn't have gone on that trip at all, and if it hadn't been for that fog we should probably have seen Mr. Lee."

Solomon Levi was tremendously relieved, and his delight was apparent. He had soon recovered his jacket, and he found that nothing was missing. His pocket-book was there, and the option was safely enclosed within it. Everything, in fact, was all serene.

We had had some excitement, but Nelson Lee had turned up trumps in the end. The great detective had been on the alert, and he had deprived Mr. Webb's agent of his spoils almost before he had obtained them.

Once again the enemy had failed.

What was to be the next move in this grim and exciting game?

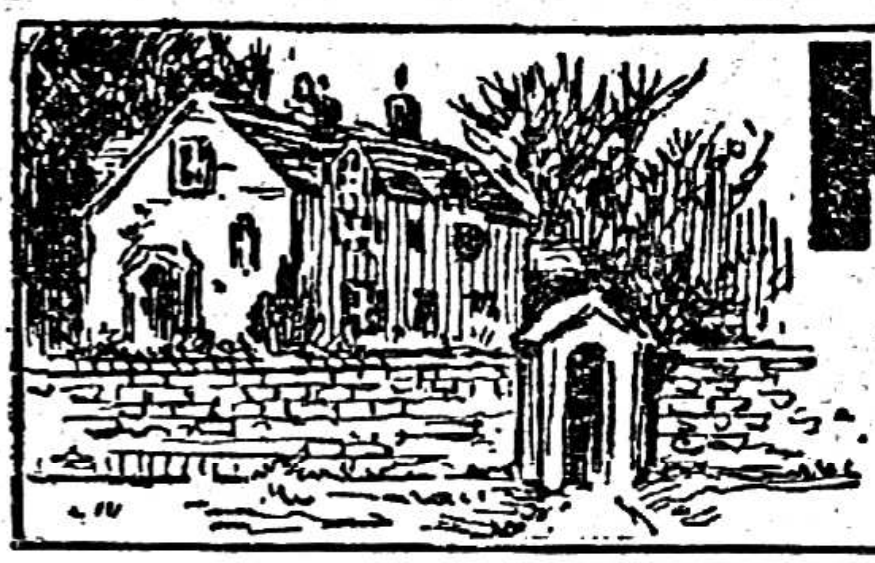
THE END.

TO MY READERS.

THE tragic history of the old empty house, which Levi hopes to transform into a picture-palace, does not concern us except as giving rise to the general belief that the old place is haunted. The boys who are interested in Levi's scheme decide to investigate the strange stories that have been circulated in Bannington about this old house. What they discovered will form the subject of an exciting ghost story next week, entitled: "THE HAUNTED HOUSE!" We are so near Christmas that a good ghost story will be quite in season. Nevertheless, there will be a special story for the Christmas Number. I shall have more to say about this next week.

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. Later Lin is employed 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, and is thrown over in disgust by his employer. While looking for work, he gets into trouble with an old enemy, and has to appear before the magistrate. The charge is black against him, and, just as he is being sentenced, the proceedings are interrupted by "Mr. Mysterious."

(Now read on.)

The Tables Turned!

SENSATION in court naturally followed. All eyes were turned in the direction of that clear voice, with the distinct note of authority or command in its tone.

The waiting witnesses in their pew-like pen below, turned their heads as one, and stared and buzzed with speculation. The gallery became noisy with wordy strife, as those at the rear contested for places at the front rail, to hang over at the risk of their necks and stare down.

It was some time before the magistrate could make himself heard; then, purple with indignation, he thundered out:

"I have a great mind to commit you, sir, for disturbing the court and provoking this unseemly uproar! Retire instantly, sir! The case is closed, and I will not hear another word of evidence. You are too late, sir!"

"I trust that I am not too late to prevent a grave injustice," was the firm response. "I regret the delay; but I am still in time, and I insist that you hear me."

His worship glared at the speaker, sending sparks of fire at him through his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"You insist!" he boomed, in a gale of magisterial wrath. "And who, sir, pray, are you, that you presume to insist upon a hearing?"

Others beside the magistrate wanted to know that, and the court became silent enough to make the tread of a spider almost audible.

Who was that tall man in dark grey who dared to beard "Old Bearham" in his own court? All were curious; but a disappointment awaited the many.

"You have, of course, a right to demand my name before you hear me," said the stranger, with a slight bow to the magistrate. "But I do not desire that it should be made public, and I feel sure that you will respect my confidence. Hand that to his worship, if you please."

The magistrate frowned, and seemed inclined to reject the folded slip of paper—a leaf from the stranger's note-book—which an officer of the court brought to his desk. But his clerk took it, unfolded it, and read its one line with a sharp glance at the tall figure in grey, then turned to his chief and spoke in an undertone.

His whispered words seemed to work a remarkable change in his worship's attitude towards the new witness.

"Very well, sir," he said, almost suavely; "this is somewhat irregular, but I will hear your evidence."

The man in grey bowed, and stepped into the witness-box with a slight glance at the boy in the dock, and just a glimmer, Lin thought, of a kindly smile in those keen grey eyes.

There was no need to call for silence as he began to give his evidence. His very tone seemed to command attention, and his clear voice reached every part of the court.

"I first noticed the big dingy-green car," he said, "as I passed behind it to cross to the other side of the Strand. It was then standing at the kerb, opposite to the opening of a narrow passage between the shops; a passage which is chiefly notable,

I believe, as leading to the side-entrance of a well-known tavern. The driver of the car (he is seated yonder, I observe), got down and disappeared hurriedly up that passage.

"I might have thought little of that, if he had not left the engine running—which I thought was a foolish and dangerous thing to do, as the car was a powerful one, but with old and worn gear, requiring but a touch to start it. And the only occupant of the vehicle was a little boy of rather impish appearance, who looked not at all unlikely to give it that touch!"

The chauffeur opened his mouth as if to protest angrily. But the magistrate frowned at him, and he thought better of it.

The witness continued:

"I crossed the roadway and paused there for a few minutes, looking into the window of a shop. Then, hearing shouting and some screams, I turned—as everyone did about me—and looked across the road. The big car was then upon the pavement and moving fast! The pavement was very crowded just there, and it looked as though nothing could avert a terrible accident! Yet it was averted, and by a boy—that boy, who stands yonder, in the dock!"

He then told the true story of Lin Fleet's act; told it in clear, concise style, without the least attempt at dramatic effect or heightened colour. Yet it thrilled the court, and even Lin, for the first time, saw something remarkable in what he had done.

With the last word the witness again bowed to the bench and left the box.

Lin felt dreadfully uncomfortable. He might have been guilty of a dozen shocking crimes, for he flushed fiery red and hung his head in very shame. He wished himself out of it—even in a cell! For every eye was upon him, and no longer with scorn or contempt!

There was even some cheering, which the magistrate for once was not in a hurry to suppress. He even beamed at Lin through his glasses, and when at length silence was restored, addressed him in a decidedly changed tone.

"The evidence of the last witness throws an entirely new light upon your conduct, and I am disposed to place more reliance upon his account than that of any preceding witness. It is now apparent that, so far from having been guilty of a wanton and mischievous act, you actually prevented what might have been an appalling accident, by a display of promptness and courage which would call for admiration in a man, and is still more remarkable in a lad of your years. I regret that you should have been placed in this position. You are discharged."

There was more cheering. A lock clicked behind him, and Lin bolted out of the dock, head down. In the passage behind someone caught him by the arm. It was P.-c. Joe Dale, his face relaxed with a smile of pleasure.

"Congrats! You're jolly well out of that! Knew there was a mix-up, or a bit of lying somewhere," he said, with genuine friendly warmth. "But I fancy his worship won't let that chauffeur-chap go without a bit of a dressing down! Better stop and hear it, my lad. It'll help put your fur straight after the roughing-up you've had!"

Lin was much more keen upon getting out of the place with all speed; he wouldn't feel really free until he was out in the open street again! But the young policeman seemed so friendly that he hardly liked to turn his back on him and hurry away.

Once more he heard the magistrate's voice—again stern, as when it had first addressed him.

"Ezra Lamb, stand up!"

The chauffeur rose to his feet. But he got up slowly, and there was no grin upon his face now!

"There is, I understand," said the magistrate, referring to a paper which his clerk had placed before him, "a police-summons against you, Ezra Lamb, for negligence in connection with this very affair; and it is now perfectly clear that your counter-charge against the boy, Fleet, was a deliberate attempt to screen yourself by making it appear that he meddled with your car in a spirit of pure mischief, and caused him to be placed in that dock, where, but for his timely act of agility and most remarkable courage, you might have stood yourself—on a charge of manslaughter! Your conduct—a combination of cowardice and cunning—deserves sharp punishment! I regret that I cannot send you to prison, but I shall certainly cancel your license!"

There was something more than a mere murmur of approval at the back of the court at this. The discomfited chauffeur glared around, very red in the face. Happening to catch sight of Lin he gave him a black look of baffled spite and malice.

"You want to watch out for that chap, young Lin," remarked Joe Dale, as they left the court together. "He seems to be a black-hearted sort of rotter, and means to do you another mischief if he sees a chance!"

"He did look spiteful!" laughed Lin. "But I don't suppose that I shall see or hear anything more of him. Anyhow, I am not afraid of the fellow. He can't do me much harm."

Delighted to be out of that court, and free of the shame that had weighed upon him like a nightmare, he did not bother himself much about the black looks of Ezra Lamb. He might be spiteful after his defeat, but it did not seem that there was much to fear in the malice of such a clumsy lout.

In fact, boy-like, he soon forgot the chauffeur and his malevolent look, in spite of Joe Dale's warning. But he might not have dismissed the matter so easily from his mind had he seen what happened as the motor-driver slouched away from the police-court, scowling and nursing his spite, like the mean and vindictive brute that he was. For he was followed by a squat-built young man whose putty-coloured face, and small, rat-like eyes were all too familiar to Lin.

For it was Blimber!

Blimber, having an acquaintance who was to appear before the magistrate that morning—as not a few of his friends did occasionally—had been among the spectators in the police-court (quite at the back and modestly out of sight), when Lin Fleet was placed in the dock.

The rascal's amazement was succeeded by a glow of satisfaction. At last! For he had been vainly trying to trace the boy ever since his flight from Cowl Street that memorable night. He followed the case against Lin with an intent interest that wouldn't let him miss a word. But it was hardly of the friendly sort, for his conduct was very peculiar! He began to grin and rubbed his dirty, podgy hands together in satisfaction bordering on delight, when the magistrate spoke those stern words to the boy in the dock, and seemed about to send him to prison.

Then came that new witness—and the total reversal of things!

Blimber hurled anything but a blessing, under his breath, at the head of the tall unknown in the witness-box! When Lin left the dock, discharged, Blimber got up, intending to dog the boy as he left the court. But Lin went out and walked away with a policeman; and Blimber had a rooted objection to policemen!

He had to let the boy pass out of his sight. But if baffled for the time he was not beaten. He was a rascal of resource, and set his cunning brains to work. He rather liked the looks of Ezra Lamb, who seemed to be a fellow of his own kidney—only not so brainy, of course; a fellow with just cunning enough to make a useful tool, but not so sharp as to be unsafe to use. Ezra Lamb would know where young Lin was living, or he couldn't have dragged him into court to make him the scapegoat in that motor-car affair. Also the chauffeur plainly had a bitter spite against the boy, and might be useful in a certain little scheme which he—Blimber—had in mind.

So Blimber decided to make the acquaintance of Ezra Lamb. It was easily done. Blimber knew how to approach his man, and there was the magnetic attraction of one mean, dirty rascal for another of the same stamp. Ten minutes after he had introduced himself by a request for a light for his "fag," he was standing drinks to his new pal, and before they parted they had sworn a sort of blood-brotherhood.

It was an evil alliance, and one of sinister omen for Lin Fleet!

* * * * *

"Old Sam will never believe that you've been cleared and discharged without a stain," grinned Joe Dale, as he walked with Lin back to the coffee-shop in Red Lion Street.

For the genial young policeman, having a few hours off, and delighted—for Jess's sake—at the boy's acquittal, proposed to celebrate the occasion by a little feast at his own expense.

"Old Sam is as obstinate as they make 'em," continued Joe. "He hasn't any clear idea as to the charge against you—thinks it's stealing a motor-car, I fancy. But he has made up his mind that you're guilty, and it won't make a bit of difference to him to tell him that you've been honourably acquitted. He will only shake that turnip he calls a head, and go on thinking that you were guilty up to the eyes, and got off by bribery or a fluke."

"Oh, he can't be as pig-headed as all that!" laughed Lin.

Relieved and light-hearted as he felt just then, he couldn't worry much about Sam Wade's views and opinions.

"Well, just rub that happy look off your face, young Lin," said Joe Dale, with another grin; "try the nearest to a hang-dog phiz and crushed culprit air that you can manage, and we'll make old Sam look wise and shake his head, I'll warrant!"

And, putting on his sternest official countenance, he strode into the coffee-shop, pushing Lin before him.

It was the slack hour after the mid-day rush. The last of the diners had gone, and Jess, alone in the shop, was clearing the tables, preparatory to sitting down to her own belated dinner, which, to save time, she combined with her tea. She looked rather dismayed at the solemn faces of the pair as they marched in. But a wink and a word were enough, and then the warm-hearted girl fairly hugged Lin in her delight, until Joe Dale declared that he wouldn't have that sort of thing unless it was share and share alike. Whereupon Jess offered him a kiss—if he could get it! And when he tried, tilted his helmet over his eyes and neatly swept his blonde moustache with a spoonful of mustard!

Then she bustled away to fix up a little feast, a sort of "high tea," in the kitchen at the back, in honour of the great occasion. As it partook of the nature of a dinner and tea combined it was a substantial repast, and a somewhat complicated one, including Irish stew, kippers, tea-cakes, watercress, muffins, and marmalade. But it had to be rather hurried, as Jess hadn't much time at her disposal. They had just about finished when she held up her finger and said:

"Ss-h! Here's Sam!"

All three straightened their faces. Joe Dale picked up his helmet and hastily put it on.

Sam Wade came in slowly from the door at the back. He had been having forty winks upstairs, after his exertions with the carving-knife and soup-ladle, and his never over-clear head was still a little misty with sleep. He stared at Lin, then at Joe Dale, who had risen and stood erect—six feet of official solemnity in blue.

"Wh-at—you've brought him back! He ain't gone to pri——" stammered the little man, as though he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Just looked in for his nighty and tooth-brush on the way to Wormwood Scrubs," said Joe Dale gruffly.

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"So I thought you wouldn't mind if I gave the poor boy one last good meal before he went, Mr. Wade," said Jess demurely. "Nothng but skilly and black bread there, you know!"

She wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron. Joe Dale had a slight attack of throat-trouble, making him very red in the face and causing an explosive cough. Lin kept his head down, staring at the mark on his plate where the last muffin had been. He did not dare to look up, for he was grinning; and convicts on the way to prison do not usually display mirth. He could not help it, for Sam Wade actually groaned aloud! Even Joe Dale had hardly expected Sam to take the rather barefaced little joke seriously. Yet he had! He looked positively horror-stricken—yet rather triumphant, too.

He rolled his bullet-head solemnly, then said:

"Knew it 'ud come to this! Bound to come to this! Run away from home—wouldn't go back again! Out late o' nights! Didn't I see him come in nigh on one o'clock in the mornin'? Knew it 'ud come to this! Wormwood Scrubs! And so he's a convic', and'll wear them awful clothes with broad arrers all over 'em?"

Joe Dale nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Oh, it's awful—awful!" groaned the little man again, as a new horror seemed to strike him. "It'll be in the papers! I know it will! He was arrested here—took away in custody from my hotel! And it'll be in the Sunday papers, with a picter of him, and another picter of my hotel! And—and, maybe, one of me, in a round thing up in the corner with my name underneath. Me, that's been a respectable man all me life!"

And he rolled his bullet head and groaned so dreadfully that Jess laughed outright.

"Don't see much to laugh at, me girl!" said Sam, staring at her in shocked amazement.

"I do!" cried Jess "I see a silly little man taken in by a simple jape that a baby might have seen through! Convict! Prison! Pooh! Lin isn't a convict, and he isn't going to prison any more than you are! Lin has been acquitted! Now do you understand? He wasn't guilty at all. It was a trumped-up charge. He hadn't done anything wrong, but something brave and splendid instead! So, instead of being sent to prison, he's been discharged with honour! Now do you understand?"

But apparently Sam Wade's fixed idea was not to be shifted so easily.

He only looked darkly wise, like an old owl, and mumbled something about: "Might be all right, but he was a plain, honest, respectable man, he was, and he didn't want to get mixed up with that sort of thing. He supposed it was all right, but it looked fishy to him!"

And he rolled his head round and round, until the downright Jess, thoroughly exasperated, felt tempted to seize him and shake it off his shoulders! But the little man—still looking darkly wise and knowing—went away to begin his evening labours of frying and toasting; and Jess herself was soon busy, as the early tea-time customers began to come in. Joe Dale, his time being up, went back to duty.

Lin mounted up to his little room on the top-floor-back, rather wondering how much longer he would have even that place to come to as a home. For it was clear that Sam Wade would rather he went than stayed, and might at any hour give him notice to turn out—especially if he had the misfortune to shock the little man's notions of respectability again! Another late night would about settle it!

Then he sighed. There was not much chance of that. "Mr. Mysterious" had done with him. Beyond that rather friendly smile across the court he had made no sign; hadn't even waited to speak to him afterwards, but gone away without a word!

(To be continued.)

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