No. 293.—Magnificent Concluding Story of the Great Cinema Series!

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Levi was lifted clean off his feet and swung out over the window-sill.

SOLOMON LEVI'S TRIUMPH

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 Christmas Plot," "The Schoolboy Builders," "The Cinema Strikers," and many other Stirring Tales.

January 15, 1921.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

FORWARD THE REMOVE!

TEN o'clock boomed out from the old clock tower at St. Frank's.

It was a clear, calm, frosty night, and at that hour, the Triangle should have been quite empty and deserted. The old school, in fact, was generally half asleep by ten. But on this particular night, things were very different.

There was no quietness—no peace.

The Triangle was filled with a crowd of noisy, excited juniors. Windows of both Houses were open, and seniors, prefects and others were gazing out—unable to understand what the commotion was about.

There, down in the Triangle, was the Remove—both sections. What could it mean? By ten o'clock the Remove ought to have been in bed, with lights out. And here they were—practically every fellow—fully dressed, and evidently ready to venture out on a journey.

Fenton, the captain of the School, came rushing out through the lobby of the Ancient House, and his face was black with anger. He rushed out in a most undignified way, and came face to face with Solomon Levi and myself.

"What's the meaning of this, Nipper?" demanded Fenton angrily. "You're the captain of the Remove, and you're evidently responsible for this outrageous affair. Every boy here will go back to his dormitory at once."

"Rats!"

"Go back to bed, Fenny!"

"We're just off to Bannington!"

"Hurrah!"

Fenton fairly staggered.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he ejaculated blankly.

"It's all right, you needn't worry," I said. "The fact is, Fenton, those strikers in Bannington are pretty certain to go dotty before long, and when rioting starts, they'll make a beeline for the Grange, and then, there'll be ructions. We're just off to defend the property from the mob."

"Oh," said Fenton.

"Any objections to make?" I inquired.

"What I think personally is of no importance," said Fenton. "I'm the Head Prefect, and I know that you haven't received permission to go on this trip. So you'd better get back to bed at once——"

"Nothing doing!" I interrupted.

"You cheeky young sweep——"

"Keep your hair on!" I put in. "No disrespect intended, Fenton. But, you see, we must go on this trip—it's absolutely necessary. We can't go to sleep in the Remove dormitory while all this trouble is brewing. We're simply compelled to go to Bannington to do the best we can for law and order."

I turned away before Fenton could

continue, and I found that the bicycle-shed had been literally cleared out. All the machines were taken. It was a matter of no importance who the machines belonged to. Every junior simply grabbed one, and held on to it. And there were plenty to go round.

And then, while Fenton still stood there, quite ignored, the fellows made for the private gateway, which was not yet locked, and emerged into Bellton lane. Then, mounting our machines, we sped along on our journey to the local town.

There had been a great deal of trouble there recently.

Mr. Isaac Levi—the father of Solomon of the Remove—was building a new super cinema in the Bannington High Street. At least, everything had been planned, and all the details satisfactorily concluded.

But the site of the new cinema had to be cleared—and Bannington Grange was now in the process of being demolished. But Mr. Stanley Webb, the proprietor of the only cinema in Bannington, had been doing everything in his power to wreck the scheme of Mr. Levi's.

Webb was being financed by a rascally American syndicate. Its representative, Mr. Hooker J. Ryan, was in Bannington, and he and Webb had plotted many times together with a view to bringing about the collapse of Mr. Levi's enterprise.

A crisis had now arrived.

All the workmen employed on the Grange job had thrown down their tools, demanding higher wages. This, indirectly, was Webb's doing, for he had sent out a number of men who agitated among the workers, urging them to demand more money, to strike, and to use violence. Spirits had been given away freely; and now, between ten and eleven o'clock at night, the strikers were in a reckless, dangerous mood.

Levi and I had seen some of this in Bannington, and we had immediately rushed back to St. Frank's for the sole purpose of obtaining assistance. Well, we had got it, and now the whole Remove was rushing away to defend the Grange.

There was no absolute certainty that the Grange would be attacked. But we were taking no chance, for both Levi and myself were agreed on the point. It was our opinion that the night would not pass without the rioters making a grim onslaught upon the now half demolished building.

It may be thought that these riotors would do the contractors a good turn by demolishing the old place—because it had to be pulled down. But there is a method in such work. A house must be pulled down scientifically. If it is destroyed by fire, or by explosion, great damage is caused, and the time in removing the debris would be all wasted time.

"It's all right, you chaps, we shall get there in heaps of time," I said, as we pedalled along. "But we mustn't go straight through the town."

"Why not?"

"Because we shall run right into the strikers, and it's quite likely that they're not very keen upon us." I continued. "They'll probably guess what our game is, and if it comes to a scrap in the open street, we shan't stand an earthly."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I wouldn't mind a scrap——"

"Perhaps not, Handy, but we can't risk it," I said. "There are hundreds of these men, and we simply couldn't manage the thing. Our best course is to go by the back streets, and to get into the Grange quietly."

"Why?"

"So that when the rioters attack the place, they will receive a rather large sized surprise," I said. "They'll find a force waiting to deal with them—and surprise is everything in an affair of this kind."

"Nipper's right," said Reginald Pitt. "His plan is the best."

"You bet your life it is," said Levi.

Fatty Little, who had come in spite of all hints that he would be more trouble than he was worth, was with the party, and he now forged ahead—owing to the fact that we were going down a hill. Fatty's weight caused his bicycle to shoot in front of the others. Up till now he had been in the rear.

"Do you think there'll be any tuck shops open in Bannington?" he inquired, rather anxiously. "I'm feeling awfully peckish——"

"Oh, bother you and your appetite!" I said. "You won't get any tuck to-night, Fatty."

The fat boy looked rather blank.

"No tuck!" he repeated. "But—

but I didn't have time to wrap anything up, and I'm jolly certain I shan't be able to do any scrapping if I'm hungry. It ain't reasonable to suppose that a chap can fight when he's half starved!"

I chuckled.

"Then the best thing you can do, my son, is to turn round, and go back," I said smoothly. "You might be useful, of course, even if you don't fight. We could use you as a battering ram, for example."

"Or if one of the doors got bashed down, we could wedge Fatty in the space to fill it up," suggested Reginald Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty ignored these brilliant suggestions, and for some little time he bewailed the fact that his hunger was growing more intense. And he confidently prophesied that by the time Bannington was reached, he would be on the verge of collapse.

However, nobody took any serious notice of him. Fatty was always talking about grub, and generally imagined that he was half starved. And just at present, we had much more serious things to engage our attention.

I was quite certain that some very dramatic events were destined to take place in Bannington before the night was out. The strikers, inflamed by Mr. Stanley Webb's agitators, were active, and there was little doubt that they would vent their rage against the Grange itself. And an excited mob is always a difficult proposition to handle. There were a good many police in the town, of course, but not nearly sufficient to cope with the large number of men who were rioting—or, if they were not actually rioting, they were on the verge of doing so.

Strictly speaking, it was not our business to interfere—we were not called upon to protect the Grange. It was work for the police, but as I have said, the police would be overwhelmed and rendered almost helpless.

Therefore, in order to save the Grange from the fury of the strikers, the St. Frank's Remove was rushing to the attack—or rather, to the defence.

And we did not make the mistake of going through the main streets of the town in order to reach our destination. We had no intention of advertising the fact that we were on the job.

We entered Bannington by a small, deserted lane, and then made our way, by various alleys and back roads towards a tiny lane which ran along the wall at the bottom of the Grange garden.

We dismounted here as quietly as possible, and found everything still. Although when we listened, we could hear a distant murmur of voices, with an occasional shout raised above the vague din.

I nodded grimly.

"We weren't far wrong, Solly, my son," I said. "Those men are getting out of hand already, and they're in the High Street and fairly close to the Grange, I should imagine. The sooner we get in, the better."

"Rather!" said Levi promptly. "Come on you chaps."

We left the bicycles against the wall, swarmed over, and then crept up towards the old house like so many shadows. But there was not much danger of our being seen, for at present, the old house was left completely to itself. There was not even a night watchman on duty.

We had no difficulty in gaining admittance, for there were no doors, and the greater portion of the Grange was already demolished. The upper floors were entirely missing, and the whole space of ground was smothered with piles of broken bricks, window-frames, old floorboards, rafters and all manner of other articles. The work had been progressing rapidly; but now, of course, everything was at a standstill.

We all entered the remains of the house, and it was not long before I had made a complete inspection. I came to the conclusion that the defence would be fairly simple.

There were still two cold water taps in action, and the lengths of garden hose, which we had used on a previous occasion, were still there. It was only necessary, therefore, for us to fit them up.

With regard to other defensive methods, we had very little in the shape of ammunition. Unless, of course, we were driven to the use of stones, pieces of mortar and that sort of thing. And we had no desire to resort to such methods. Our idea was to keep the mob at bay without inflicting the slightest injury. But if matters came to a head, it would probably be

necessary to use drastic methods. We relied mainly, however, on the cold water. There is nothing more calculated to dampen the ardour of a mob of rioters than a hose pipe in action.

"Well, we're all ready now," I said, at last. "And don't forget, every fellow must keep his position. If this place isn't attacked, we won't show ourselves, but if it is attacked, we'll let fly!"

"Good!" said Handforth. "But it's a pity we can't use our fists. If it only came to a good old scrap——"

"My dear Handy, we can't do anything of that sort," I interrupted. "You're game enough for anything, I know. I believe you'd attack a blessed army corps single-handed, but you couldn't win. It's the same in this case. Our only chance of success is to keep the mob at arm's length——"

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez and regarding us intently. "Dear old fellow, I've got an idea—I have, really!"

"Go hon!"

"Don't inflict it on us now, Montie!"

"But it's a rippin' idea," declared Tregellis-West. "It's absolutely stunnin', begad. As things stand now, we must rely solely upon those hose pipes. An' I think we ought to have ammunition of some kind."

"Exactly," I agreed. "But there isn't any that we can use."

"That's just where my idea comes in," said Sir Montie. "Only a few doors away—down the street—there is a grocer's. There's a long back garden, an' two or three of us could quickly nip across an' hammer at the back door——"

"Great bloaters!" ejaculated Fatty Little. "What a stunning wheeze! I see what you mean! We can buy some biscuits, and——"

"Oh, ring off, you glutton!"

"Dry up, Fatty!"

"Your ideas ain't required!"

"We could hammer at the back door," proceeded Montie, "an' find the grocer. It's quite likely that he's got a box of stale eggs for sale—or, if we're lucky, a box of frightfully squiffy ones——"

"Good!" I interrupted. "You've got brains in your head, after all. We learn things every day!"

"Really, dear old boy——"

"It's a good stunt!" I declared. "You buzz off with two or three chaps, and see what you can do. If the grocer's only got new eggs, don't buy them—it would be rather a waste of good food. But if they're stale, we could chance it. The older they are, the better. What we require is eggs of a nice rich juicy flavour—the sort that carry on the breeze for ten miles."

"Every grocer keeps that kind," said Pitt. "It's a dead certainty that we'll click."

Montie and Pitt and two others hurried away, and we waited rather anxiously for their return. For out in the High Street the sounds were becoming ominous. The mob was drawing nearer, and there was not the slightest doubt that their objective was the Grange. We could not see very well what was taking place out in the road.

For in front of the old building a great wooden hoarding had been erected, and this shut off the street from our view. However, our ears served us well. And we were rather puzzled by some lurid gleams of flickering light which seemed to be growing nearer as we watched.

"I'm blessed if I can make that out," remarked Bob Christine. "Do you think the rioters have set fire to one of the shops——"

"I should imagine they're carrying torches," said Solomon Levi.

I nodded.

"That's about the mark," I agreed. "But why should they want torches—the streets are all electrically lit. By Jove! I wonder—I wonder——"

I paused, and the others looked at me.

"Well, you wonder what?" inquired Handforth.

"Well, it's just possible that these men intend to burn the place down," I said grimly. "The mob's in an ugly mood, and once they get really on the go, they want a lot of holding back. We shall have to be very careful."

"Hallo! Here come the egg merchants!" put in Yorke suddenly.

Tregellis-West, Pitt and the others appeared—carrying a huge wooden box, which seemed of considerable weight.

"They're just in prime condition!" said Pitt cheerfully. "They've been in stock for about two years, I believe, and one or two of them must be broken—because there's a most awful whiff

everywhere we go with this box. About a thousand, my son—it ought to pull off the lid—— Phew! My only hat! What a glorious perfume!"

A most obnoxious smell was arising from the egg box, and there was little doubt that the contents were quite as ripe as we desired. We learned that they had been obtained for a mere song, and they formed a very cheap type of ammunition. Without the slightest doubt they would be effective. But we should have to be careful, or we should suffer as much as the enemy.

The box was opened and we found to our satisfaction that nearly all the eggs were whole. About a dozen juniors were set to the task of removing the eggs and placing them in handy piles near the window openings and various gaps in the half demolished walls. I took part in this task, and like the rest of the juniors, I found it highly necessary to bind my handkerchief round my face. Pitt weakly called for eau-de-cologne or lavender water, but there was none of this refreshing reviver on hand.

However, we managed to survive, and then everything was ready. All the fellows went to their places, and we breathed freely for the first time. There was now no danger of us being taken by surprise.

"Of course, all these preparations may be needless," I remarked. "But it's just as well to be on the safe side. There's no harm in taking full precautions. And by the sound of things, it doesn't seem that we shall remain inactive for long."

I was standing by one of the jagged window openings, and with me were Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and Solomon Levi. It was our task to protect this quarter of the building, which was one of the most vulnerable, as it was at the corner. We were fully armed with hose pipes and plenty of eggs.

And it seemed that our preparations were completed only just in time.

For less than three minutes afterwards the attack commenced. It started so abruptly that we were rather taken by surprise. There came the rush of scores of feet—shouts, yells and wild cries.

Flames flickered out in the street beyond the hoarding, and we could see wreaths of smoke rising. Then came a fierce and determined battering upon the woodwork, and we knew that the hoarding was being smashed down.

The mob was in earnest.

But for that matter, so were we!

CHAPTER II.

THINGS BEGIN TO HUM.

CRASH! Crash!

The attack had begun with great force, and there was not the slightest doubt that the strikers were in a grim mood. Many of them, probably, were inflamed with strong drink, and the others were all excited and absolutely reckless. Once a riot starts, there is really no telling what it will lead to, or where it will end. A great mob of men, when fairly on the go, care little for any possible consequences.

"We shall have to be ready now, you chaps," I said firmly. "Pass the word down the line. Not a single fellow is to show himself until the order is given. I'll shout the signal, and then, we'll let fly. By Jingo! We'll give these idiots a surprise!"

We watched, excited and eager.

The men in the road were evidently completely out of hand, the police having failed to hold them back. And they were using pickaxes, spades and other implements in order to smash down the high wooden fence.

It was not such a difficult task.

Once a portion of the hoarding had given way, the rest collapsed almost at once. It fell inwards with a terrific, splintering crash. And then, the mob came surging into the private grounds of the Grange—in front of the house, round it and everywhere.

The sight was rather a startling one.

A large number of the men were carrying great torches—huge flaring things which flickered and smoked in a lurid, unearthly kind of way. The men themselves looked half inhuman in that strange light. Their faces were flushed, either with drink or excitement, and they were set hard and fierce.

This was a riot in the worst sense of the term!

"Now then, you chaps!" I bellowed. "Fire!"

"Let 'em have it!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"Hurrah!"

"Remove for ever!"

"Go it!"

And then the defenders got busy.

Swish—swish—swish!

Without the slightest warning two powerful streams of water burst out from the nozzles of the hose pipes. The water was icy cold, and it swirled down upon the mob in great drenching waves. The fellows at the taps had turned them on at the precise second, and the effect was really funny.

The rioters had had not the slightest notion that a soul was in the old house to defend it. They had assumed that they could smash the hoarding down, and swarm into the building without meeting any resistence.

But reality was very different.

At that first swirl of water, the foremost men stopped dead. Many of them went down, gasping and yelling. Then the others backed away with terrific haste, and their faces all expressed surprise and rage.

"Come on!" roared Handforth. "If you think you can get in here—try it on! There'll be nothing doing, you rotters! Three cheers for the Remove!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the Remove.

Nobody else cheered for them, so they cheered on their own account.

A huge, swelling roar of anger went up from the excited crowd. One of the men—apparently the leader of the mob—came striding forward, and he held his hand aloft, as though to signal to the defenders.

"Let him have it!" yelled Handforth. "Go it Nipper!"

"Not just yet," I said. "I think the chap wants to say something."

I switched the nozzle of the hose aside, and the man came nearer.

"What's the meaning of this 'ere?" he shouted roughly.

"Simply that we're going to hold this building against all attacks," I replied. "If you attempt to get in, it will be all the worse for you. We guessed what was coming, and so we arrived here first. The best thing you can do is to go away quietly, and cool down. If you don't, you'll get cooled down here—with cold water!"

The man uttered an oath.

"You young whelp!" he roared. "If you think we're going to be stopped by a 'andful of kids, you've made a mistake. If you don't clear out of this 'ouse within a minute, you'll be 'andled roughly—an' I won't be answerable for anything what my mates do. Savvy? My advice to you kids is—git!"

"Nothing doing!" roared Handforth defiantly.

"Not likely!"

"We're not shifting from here!"

"All right, you'll take the bloomin' consequences!" snapped the leader of the mob. "Come on, mates! We'll show these kids whether we mean it or not! Like their blinkin' nerve—trying to keep us hout! And don't forgit to use them torches—we'll set the whole blamed place afire!"

"'Ear! 'Ear!"

"We'll show the sweaters what we're made of!"

"We ain't going to be trodden down!"

The men came forward in an ugly rush—scores of them. And this time they knew what they had to face—at least, they thought they knew. But so far, only the water had been used.

And the rioters were in such a reckless, excited state, that they paid little heed to the hoses. One rush would carry them into the building, and then, they would have their revenge.

But very few of the attackers got to close quarters.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Twenty or thirty Removites, at various openings, let fly with eggs—which were handed out to them in a never ending chain by the other Removites. The eggs simply flew into the crowd like bullets from a machine gun.

Squelch! Splosh! Squelch!

It was absolutely impossible to miss. The juniors hurled the eggs at random—there was no time for anything else—but every one found a mark. If a man in the front of the mob escaped, another behind didn't!

And the eggs burst with sickening sounds in dozens of places at the same moment. The mob wavered, hesitated, and then fell back in hopeless disorder.

"Oh-o-o-o-h-h!"

"Pooooh!"

"Strike me pink!"

"Lor' love us!"

Most of the men simply gasped with horror. They were apparently of the opinion that a poison gas attack had

been opened. They staggered drunkenly, gasping for breath—many of them swearing in the most frightful way. These blackguards were rewarded by many other eggs in quick succession until further articulation was impossible.

The rioters were beaten back, utterly demoralised.

And it was the same at the rear. Only a comparative few had succeeded in getting to the back, but they had found, to their chagrin, that the defence here was as sound as it was in the front—to judge by the shower of eggs that came raining down.

"Hurrah!"

"Remove for ever!"

"Keep it up, my sons!"

"Don't let the beggars get in!"

All the juniors were excited and triumphant. But our efforts were not relaxed. We kept up the attack at full pressure, throwing the eggs wherever there was any certainty of finding a mark. The rioters in the end, had no alternative but to get out of the range. And they crowded out there, in the High Street, shouting swearing and soaked with water and smothered with the remains of rotten eggs.

Further away, on either side of the High Street, crowds of townspeople were looking on; and they were filled with admiration. The Remove had beaten the strikers back, and for the time being, at any rate, the peril was over.

For without doubt, there had been peril.

If the maddened crowd had succeeded in setting fire to the Grange, there was no telling what would have resulted. For a fair breeze was now blowing, and the flames would have been carried to other premises, which were in close proximity. Many of the tradesmen near by felt heartily grateful to the St. Frank's juniors.

"Well, we've whacked 'em to begin with, anyhow!" I exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "How much more ammunition have we got left?"

"Oh, any amount of water!" said Watson.

"I know that, you ass!" I snapped. "I mean the eggs!"

"Heaps!" exclaimed Pitt, hurrying up. "I've just been round. We've only used about a quarter of them so far. By gad! Things are beginning to hum!"

"Beginning?" said De Valerie, holding his nose. "Phew! They've been humming for a long time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The air was certainly somewhat jazzy in its composition.

Wafts of awful scent came to us through the windows, and indeed, the whole interior of the house was highly polluted. Those eggs were too loud for words!

"We ought to consider ourselves lucky," explained Christine, coming up with a handkerchief to his nose. "Only two casualties so far."

"What? Somebody hurt?" I said sharply.

"Hart and Singleton have fainted—that's all!" explained Christine, with a grin. "They went off beautifully, swooned away, you know. I think the niff was a bit too much for them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Little came staggering up.

"I—I say, you chaps!" he gasped. "I—I can't stand this, you know! This shocking smell has given me an awful appetite!"

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "It's taken mine away!"

"Anything would give Fatty an appetite," said Church. "It's a pity there isn't a gas-stove and a frying pan here, then the fat ass could fry himself half a dozen of these eggs!"

Fatty looked up.

"That's just what I've been thinking!" he said. "I've found two or three that seem fairly sound, you know, they must have got into the box by accident. If we could only cook 'em, I should be saved from complete collapse---- Yarooooh!"

"You—you thundering ass!" snorted Handforth, as he delivered a well directed kick at the ample seat of Fatty's trousers. "If you scoffed any of these eggs, you'd die in about two minutes! They're absolutely walking! It's a wonder to me how we can keep 'em in the box! I've been expecting them to run off every minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty groaned, and went back to his post. He had certainly been making himself useful, and very shortly he would find it necessary to forget all about his appetite. For the mob had not finished.

Enraged to a tremendous extent, the strikers came to the attack again with

renewed fury and determination. But this time they adopted different tactics. They obtained stones, bricks, anything solid that they could lay their hands on. And they commenced hurling these missiles at the windows and the openings in the brickwork.

Whizz! Whizz!

"Duck, you chaps, duck!" I shouted urgently. "Great Scott! We didn't bargain for this!"

The only thing we could do was to crouch as near the walls as possible, seeking cover where we could. And a perfect hail of jagged stones went shooting over our heads, and all round us, only to fall harmlessly behind. All the juniors had quite enough sense to keep perfectly still. For even one of those stones would have caused a dreadful injury.

And then, thinking that we had fled, the strikers made another rush. And we allowed them to get quite close; in fact, almost to the very walls. Then we let fly again, sending down a devastating hail of eggs. It was more than the mob could stand. With yells, curses, and gasps, they turned tail and fled.

And this time there was no renewal of the attack.

For the present, at all events, the strikers had had enough. They retired far out into the High Street, beyond the reach of our deadly ammunition. And then we saw another enemy approaching—an enemy that caused the juniors far greater perturbation than the strikers. In short, Dr. Malcolm Stafford himself appeared, accompanied by Nelson Lee, Mr. Crowell, Mr. Pagett, and one or two other masters.

The Head was looking very grim, and he was rather reckless in venturing so near to the rioters. Indeed, I half expected to see the little party jumped upon and roughly treated; but the strikers hung back, and watched sullenly, and with inward rage.

"Boys!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "What is the meaning of this? I am amazed—I am shocked! You deliberately defied all the school regulations, and left your dormitory to come here, to take part in this—this disgraceful——"

"Hold on, sir!" I shouted, jumping up.

"Nipper," exclaimed the Head, "what did you say, boy?"

"I don't mean to be disrespectful, sir, but you don't seem to understand the position," I shouted. "The circumstances are exceptional, and the Remove left St. Frank's without permission. This building was in danger from the rioters, sir, and we came along to defend it. We have defended it, and the mob has been driven back!"

"Hurrah!" bellowed the Remove.

"It is no excuse, and I cannot allow this to continue!" exclaimed the Head angrily. "The whole situation is impossible. Good gracious! You do not seem to realise that this action of yours will bring the whole of St. Frank's into bad odour——"

"Only the Remove, sir!" yelled Handforth. "And we're in bad odour already. Phew! Can't you niff it, sir?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Head evidently could, for he was holding his handkerchief ready.

"Ahem! This—this is no time for joking!" he said severely. "I realise, boys, that you acted in this manner from motives which were quite excellent. It is not my intention to inflict any punishments, as I fully understand that your intentions were good. However, I cannot allow you to remain here. This is final. Every boy will leave the building at once, and——"

"And leave it to the mercy of the strikers, sir?" I broke in grimly. "I'm sorry, but we can't come, sir!"

"Rather not!" roared Handforth.

"The Remove stays here!"

"Hurrah!"

The Head started.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated. "Do—do you dare to defy my orders?"

"Yes!"

"We came here to defend this place from the mob, and we're not going to leave our posts!" shouted Handforth. "If we leave now, the rioters will swarm in, set the place on fire, and then half Bannington might be burnt down! We're sticking to our duty—every one of us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We don't want to be defiant, sir, but we'd like you to understand that it is impossible for us to leave now," I said earnestly. "That's all, sir—no disrespect to yourself. The Remove took on this job, and the Remove has got to see it through!"

"Bravo!" murmured Nelson Lee.

The Head turned sharply.

"Really, Mr. Lee——" he began.

"The boys are right—absolutely right!" said Lee. "They can't leave now, Dr. Stafford. They have done splendidly so far, and our only course is to let them finish the job."

"But—but I have ordered the boys to withdraw!" exclaimed the Head grimly.

"And they have refused," said Nelson Lee. "And you can take it from me, sir, that they mean it. They are excited, and even at the risk of defying your orders, they will remain here."

Dr. Stafford drew his breath in sharply.

"Upon my soul!" he murmured. "I can't help admiring the young rascals! They have done splendidly—ahem! But it is disgraceful—positively outrageous! Hah-hum! I suppose we can do nothing but retire!"

He looked up at the building, and at the somewhat anxious faces of the juniors.

"Under the circumstances, boys, I will withdraw my order," he exclaimed, with as much dignity as he could muster. "Perhaps it is as well that you should finish your self-imposed task——"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

There was a deafening roar.

"At the same time, boys, I wish you to fully understand that this affair does not meet with my entire approval," went on the Head. "I urge you, therefore, to get it over as soon as you possibly can, and then you must return straight to St. Frank's. I will have something further to say on the subject to-morrow."

The Head turned on his heel, and walked away, accompanied by Mr. Crowell, Mr. Pagett, and the others—with the single exception of Nelson Lee.

The latter went in the opposite direction, and I had an idea that he was holding himself ready for action, in case he was required.

The strikers showed no signs of making any further attack. Things were quiet; possibly the men were cleaning themselves, and scheming some fresh method of attack—some method which would be more successful.

And during this lull I caught sight of Mr. Williams. This rascally individual had been hovering on the outskirts of the crowd all the time—taking no active part in the proceedings, but urging on the others. I regarded him somewhat grimly, for I knew who he was, and why he was there.

Williams was the paid agent of Mr. Stanley Webb, and, in fact, he was largely responsible for the strike, for he and two or three other agitators had persuaded the men into throwing down their tools. Having succeeded, he had then spent a great deal of money in distributing beer and spirits, for the sole purpose of inflaming the men into violence.

How well he had succeeded, we all knew.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTURING THE PLOTTERS.

AND now that this quiet period had come, Mr. Williams, probably enraged by the successful efforts of the Remove, was looking on with fierce, sullen eyes. And as I watched him, he moved off and turned down a small side-street a short distance away. I started, for I knew that this side-street led almost directly to the alley at the back of the Grange garden, where we had left our bicycles.

I suspected further mischief.

And it struck me that here was an opportunity to find something out. It was no time for hesitation, and I turned quickly to Reginald Pitt.

"Look here, Pitt, I'm going to leave you in charge!" I said crisply.

"Right!" said Pitt. "You can do that safely!"

"I don't suppose I shall be long, but, if any other attack happens, do your best to beat it away," I said. "Montie! Tommy! I want you!"

"Dear old boy, I'm ready," said Tregellis-West promptly.

But Tommy Watson was curious.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"I'll explain that in a minute," I said. "Come on!"

I led the way out to the rear of the building, and then we hurried away across the garden to the bottom wall. And as we went, I enlightened my chums. I explained that I had spotted Williams going down the side lane, and I expected some fresh development.

"If we're quick," I went on, "we shall see the rascal as he comes out of the end of the lane, then we can follow him."

"What for?" asked Watson.

"To see where he goes, of course!" I replied. "It's quite likely that he will go to Webb, and there's no telling what might result. We've got to be on the alert."

"Dear old boy, you're quite right," said Sir Montie.

We slipped over the wall, and, sure enough, we were just in time to see Williams turn out of the lane, and make his way down the narrow alley. He was walking briskly, which clearly indicated that he had a definite object in view.

And the man had no suspicion that he was being watched or followed, for he did not once glance behind him. He went straight on, and after turning down two or three other turnings, he finally climbed over a low wall, and vanished. I went to the wall quickly, and peered cautiously over.

And I recognised the spot.

It was at the rear of Mr. Stanley Webb's cinema! The picture-theatre itself loomed up, dark and bulky, near by, and Williams made his way straight into a small shed, where a light was glowing through the window. This light was shaded, but it showed itself through one or two crevices.

"Oh-ho!" I murmured. "What have we here? A meeting place, by all appearances—and it's a dead certainty that Mr. Webb is here."

"What the dickens are you muttering about?" whispered Tommy Watson.

"We'd better not talk," I said in a faint whisper. "Williams has just gone into that shed, and there's a light there. If we're quiet we can hear a dull murmur of voices, and that proves that there are other men in the shed, too. You chaps had better stop here while I nip over. I'll see what I can do."

"Give us a hail, dear old boy, if you need assistance," murmured Sir Montie.

I nodded, and slipped over the wall. I dropped lightly down on the other side, and then crept like a shadow to the little shed. It was necessary to be very cautious, because I was walking on gravel —or loose stones, at all events—and one false step would create a distinct sound. And I had to avoid that.

At last I managed to get to the window, and then I had a look through one of the small slits which were left exposed.

At close quarters I found that the light within the shed was that of a lantern, and the window was covered by a thick piece of sacking.

Through the crack I saw Williams fairly close, and, further on, seated on a box, was Mr. Stanley Webb. He was looking very angry, and he appeared to be engaged in arguing. I could easily imagine why the rascally cinema proprietor was not pleased. The Remove had completely upset his calculations.

There were other men there, too—three of them. This made five altogether—Webb, Williams, and three others. They were obviously the agitators who had been so busy of late. They were the men who had poisoned the minds of the workmen at the Grange, and, apparently, further plotting was in progress.

I set my jaw grimly. It was impossible for me to hear what was being said, but I could easily guess that some villainy was being hatched which was directed against the Remove. Even now Webb was determined to have his own way.

I looked at the window, and I noticed that it had two stout iron bars across it. It was a small window in any case, and these bars made it impossible for any body to get in or out.

I moved quietly over to the door, thinking perhaps that I might be able to hear something via the keyhole. But I was quite wrong. There was nothing doing in that direction, and I was about to remove myself from this risky position when I noticed something which rather interested me.

Fitted to the outside of the door were two heavy bolts. They were, of course, out of use now, but the sight of them put a thought into my head.

"By jingo!" I muttered, my eyes gleaming. "The very thing!"

I made my way back to the wall, absolutely determined to put my scheme into execution. The idea had come to me quite suddenly, rather startling me at first. But it was so daring, so audacious that it commended itself to me on the instant. Something drastic was required now.

"Well," came a voice, what luck?"

It was Tommy Watson, and he and Sir Montie were looking over the wall at me.

"Listen, you chaps!" I said quickly. "Webb's in that shed—Webb and Wil-

liams and three others. The whole merry gang, in fact—the blighters who incited the workmen to go on strike. The window's barred, and the doors have got bolts on the outside——"

"What the merry dickens are you driving at?" asked Watson, staring.

"I told you to listen—not to ask questions!" I breathed. "I've got a wheeze—a beauty. Montie, I want you to buzz back to the Grange and bring at least a dozen chaps. Never mind what they're for—bring them."

"Dear old boy, I'll fly!" said Sir Montie urbanely.

"You needn't do that—a brisk trot will do!" I exclaimed.

Montie went off, and Tommy gazed at me rather queerly.

"What the thunder——"

"No need to ask questions—I'll explain," I said. "Those five men are in that shed, old son. We're going to bolt them in——"

"Eh?"

"We're going to make them prisoners!"

"Great goodness!" gasped Watson. "You—you must be off your rocker."

"No, I'm not," I went on. "When Montie comes back with the other chaps, we'll collar the five, rope 'em up, and march 'em back to the High Street. We'll parade the beggars up and down in front of the strikers, and I'll make a speech, explaining how these scoundrels have led the men away."

"Do you think it'll work?" asked Watson doubtfully.

"It might, and we'll take the chance," I said. "Violence is no good. The best thing we can do is to show these men how they've been driven into this silly rot. And I've got an idea that the whooze will work. We'll appeal to the workmen's common sense. And I don't think we shall be far wrong."

Tommy climbed over the wall and then we both crept to the door. With absolute silence we slid the bolts into position—for there was no need to make a noise about it, thus telling the men in the shed they were prisoners. They would find it out quite soon enough, and the longer they were kept in ignorance the better.

It was a daring plan, but the whole situation was dramatic, and it needed something of a startling character in order to bring the excited workmen to their right senses. I was quite convinced that the majority of them were sensible enough, and if the position could be put to them in its true light, there would be a great change in the aspect of things. Continued violence would only make the strikers worse. The finest course that we could adopt would be to appeal to the strikers' sense of fair play and honour.

And now we had a chance of capturing the plotters in one group. Such a chance was not likely to occur again. And I had seized upon this opportunity without hesitation. Decisions arrived at on the spur of the moment are frequently the most fruitful.

I reckoned that Montie would be back with the other fellows within ten or twelve minutes—certainly not longer. And seven minutes had already elapsed. And then the men within the shed became aware of their position.

Somebody tried to get out, for we heard the door being pulled. Then the voices were raised, and two or three men attempted to open the door. They pushed and shoved, and used all their efforts. Naturally, these efforts were in vain. Those bolts were strong, and the prisoners had no hopes of smashing down the door in the short time which they had at their disposal.

Tommy and I, standing outside, could hear Webb's voice raised in anger.

"You must be a fool, man!" he was saying. "The door's only stuck. If you use enough force, it's bound to come open. You've got it unlocked, I suppose?"

"I'm not a fool!" came Williams' rough tones. "Of course I've got it unlocked! I can't understand what the thunder—— Why, good heavens!"

"What's wrong?" demanded Webb.

"Those bolts on the outside of the door, sir," shouted Williams hoarsely. "Somebody must have bolted the door, so that we can't get out!"

"Right on the nail, my beauty!" I murmured.

Further efforts were made to open the door, but they were all of no avail. The door was constructed to open outwards, and I was very pleased at this, because it fell in nicely with a little scheme I had in view.

Tommy and I were still at the door when we heard sounds at the window. The next second it opened, and a head was projected into the darkness of the night. It came out between the iron

bars, but it was quite impossible for the man's body to follow, since the bars prohibited any further progress.

"Good-evening, Mr. Webb!" I said smoothly, for I had recognised the head. "I'm very much afraid there is no escape just now. Take my advice, and keep cool. It won't be so long before you are released."

Webb uttered a startled exclamation.

"Why, what—— You—you infernal young hound!" shouted Webb thickly. "Open this door at once! If you dare to ——"

"There's no need to get excited," I broke in. "I happen to hold the trump card, Mr. Webb, and you cannot dictate. I'm the fellow who's going to say what must be done. And, for the moment, you and your companions will remain captives."

Before Mr. Webb could say anything, further sounds were heard, and I glanced round quickly. Sir Montie Tregellis-West had arrived, and with him he brought twelve other juniors—Christine and Yorke and Talmadge, and two other fellows of the College House, and seven Ancient House juniors, including Handforth and Co., Hart, and Singleton.

"Here we are!" said Bob Christine cheerfully, as he came tumbling over the wall. "What's the wheeze, Nipper? Montie wouldn't explain——"

"For the simple reason that he could not," I broke in. "He doesn't know what the game is, but you'll all know in half a minute. We've got some prisoners in the shed here, and we need assistance. How's everything at the Grange?"

"Quiet—but the men are still hanging about in the High Street."

It only took me a few moments to tell the twelve juniors—or, rather, the thirteen—what my scheme was. When they learned that Webb and his four paid agitators were in the shed, they became excited.

I went into further details, and the juniors were highly pleased. Meanwhile Webb was still at the window, and he had been using threats and a certain amount of bad language. As a matter of fact, the man was greatly alarmed, for he was beginning to realise that his position was a precarious one. There was certainly no escape from the shed, and now that the other juniors had come up the chance of a successful fight was remote. There were fifteen of us altogether—three to each man—so it was quite certain that we should make short work of our victims.

But we took no chances.

I unbolted the door noisily, and instantly the door was forced open, and Williams appeared. In a second he was grabbed, yanked out, and the door was slammed to, and bolted. The man found himself held by many hands.

"You confounded young dogs——" he began.

"The less you say, Mr. Williams, the better," I said curtly. "And if you dare use any bad language you'll be sorry for it."

"You'll get a dot on the nose!" declared Handforth grimly.

Mr. Williams did use bad language—he let fly in a torrent of furious and lurid words. But he was brought to a swift stop—for Handforth's threat had not been an idle one. The leader of Study D lunged out with all his force, and Mr. Williams' nose suffered very considerably.

After that he was quiet, and we proceeded to deal with him. I was feeling very pleased with Sir Montie, for my noble chum had had enough forethought to bring along several long coils of rope. He had guessed that we were going to capture somebody, and he had come prepared.

Williams was quickly rendered helpless. Then the door was unbolted once more, and this time we bagged two of the prisoners, including Webb himself. The men attempted to fight, but they quickly found that this was useless.

They were hurled to the ground, and held down—about five juniors to each man, and then we proceeded to rope up our captives in a peculiar manner.

Mr. Webb's right leg was bound tightly to the left leg of Mr. Williams; and the latter's right leg was bound to the other man's left. Thus they were all three roped together. The remaining pair were brought out from the shed, and they were dealt with in exactly the same way. It did not take us long to complete the job.

And we regarded the hapless five with much satisfaction when we had done. They were bound together in a row, all the legs being secured together. But, by walking in unison, and with equal strides, it was possible for the men to progress, providing there was sufficient space for them to walk abreast.

And they were quite helpless, for their

hands were tied behind their backs. Long ropes were fastened to them, and drawn together at the rear. They formed reins, so to speak, and I tugged at these briskly.

"Now then, my bonny captives, you'll march forward," I said. "You'd better march well, or you'll all collapse in a heap—and that might hurt somebody."

Mr. Webb was the only one who said anything. The others had been subdued, and they were now resigned to their fate. Scared and somewhat sore, they felt that they would only aggravate matters if they spoke, or attempted to argue. But Mr. Webb was different. The man was nearly off his head with rage.

But, by a superhuman effort he managed to control himself.

"Boys, I have something to say!" he rapped out, his voice quivering with fury. "I will admit that you have beaten me this time, but this joke has gone far enough, you will understand ——"

"Joke!" exclaimed Handforth. "It's not much of a joke, you rotter."

"If you will release me I will repay you generously," said Webb, although it cost him a great effort to do so. "I will give you any money you like to name. I will give you twenty pounds——"

"Nothing doing, Mr. Webb," I interrupted calmly. "Even if you offered us twenty thousand it would make no difference. You have been bowled out at last, and now you've got to face the music. We're going to show Bannington what you are. The time has come when you reap the harvest of your blackguardism."

Webb drew his breath in with a sharp hiss.

"Wait!" he gasped. "I—I will not walk through the streets like this. Good heavens! You would not dare—release me at once boys! I will give you fifty pounds——"

"Quick march!" I interrupted. "We are simply wasting time!"

"Confound you!" snarled Webb, realising that we were in earnest. "If you dare to—— But you can't! I refuse to move a step! You can't force me any more than you can force my companions ——"

"Ain't it funny how some people make mistakes?" asked Handforth. "I've got a nice length of rope here, with a couple of knots at the end of it. Now, then, old hosses—gee-up!"

"Swish! Swish!"

The knotted rope whizzed through the air, and came into sharp contact with Mr. Webb's person. Handforth delivered several stinging cuts—and Mr. Webb fully realised, at length, that he was not in a position to say what he would, or would not do.

Several of the juniors had opened the yard gate, and now the five men were forced out. The spectacle they presented was a ludicrous one, and although we regarded this affair seriously, we could not help bursting into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! This is jolly rich!"

"Too funny for words, begad!"

Webb and his companions could only walk in one way—clumsily and awkwardly, and the whole five had to move at once, as though actuated by a single spring. And as they progressed down the lane their fury turned to alarm and fear. For they were coming to one conclusion—the truth was dawning upon them.

They were being taken to the High Street—in front of the mob! With what object? Obviously there could be only one explanation. They were to be exposed in their true colours before the workmen they had let into such trouble. It was not exactly a pleasant prospect.

But Mr. Webb was consoled to a certain extent. He told himself that the workmen would turn on the juniors and attack them, and then Webb and his companions would be released from their preposterous predicament.

And, in a certain degree, Mr. Webb was right.

We marched our prisoners into the High Street. It was now very late, of course, and, usually, Bannington was quiet and asleep by this time. On this particular night, however, the whole town was alive. The streets were thronged, and the main thoroughfare, near the old Grange building, was simply packed.

The crowds parted as we appeared, and we marched through. There were all sorts of shouts, a great deal of laughter, and even more curiosity. The townspeople could not understand the affair at all.

And then the strikers caught sight of us!

At first the men could hardly believe their eyes. Over a dozen schoolboys—who were supposed to be in the Grange

—were here in the open street, marshalling along a group of helpless prisoners!

Before we could be surrounded we had arrived right in front of the wrecked hoarding, and we could see dozens of Remove fellows gazing at us from the walls of the Grange. They were all looking rather startled. Solomon Levi was there, and he was taking a great interest in the whole scene.

I had time to notice Levi's father a little distance up the road, standing with Mr. Farrow and a police-inspector. Then the mob swarmed round us, shouting and decidedly threatening.

The moment had arrived.

"You young varmints!" shouted one man fiercely. "What the thunder do ye mean by handlin' these gents like this? You've asked for it now, and you'll get it! Come on, mates; collar the young beggars!"

"That's right—lay 'ands on 'em!"

"We'll larn 'em!"

"Hold on!" I shouted loudly. "There's no need to get excited! You don't understand the position, and that's why we're here. We're just going to tell you the true state of affairs——"

"Garn! We don't want none o' your bloomin' cheek!"

For a few moments it was impossible to make myself heard, for confusion reigned, and in the midst of it Nelson Lee appeared on the scene. I knew why the guv'nor was there. He was going to make himself useful in case he was wanted, and it seemed quite certain that he would be wanted.

However, the strikers were rather non-plussed by this move on our part, and they did not immediately attack us. That they would do so in a minute or two was positively certain, and so I seized my opportunity while I could.

"Look!" I shouted. "Do you see them?"

I pointed to the five prisoners as they stood there, roped together.

"Do you recognise them?" I went on loudly. "One of them is Mr. Stanley Webb, the proprietor of the Bannington Cinema; the other four are his tools, in his pay. Webb is responsible for all this trouble. He gave instructions to these other men to agitate and to stir up trouble. We're exposing them in their true colours, and if you fellows have got any sense, you'll realise that this game of yours is all wrong. If you'll only listen to the facts——"

"We know all that we want to know, kid!" shouted one of the strikers. "Them men is pals of ours, exceptin' the gent at the end, and we ain't standin' none o' your lip! Understand? Come on, mates; we'll teach these young cubs a lesson!"

And then came an interruption.

It came from the direction of the Grange, and I saw that Solomon Levi was standing on a high position—on a pile of ruined masonry. He stood there, in a position which seemed rather precarious, and he had given a great shout. We all looked at him. His face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming.

"Thanks, Nipper!" he shouted. "But I think I'm in a better position than you are to address these men. I'd like to make a bit of a speech—if I have your permission."

"Go ahead!" I replied promptly.

And Solomon Levi went ahead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JEWISH BOY'S TRIUMPH.

SOMEHOW or other the crowd was quietened. It was as though a magic wand had been waved, and all those excited men stood there quite still, looking up at the Jewish boy. Whether it was something in Levi's personality, or whether it was because the men were surprised into inactivity, I don't know. But they were all attention.

"Listen, men!" shouted the Jewish boy, in a firm, steady voice. "Not long ago we had a scrap. We were all excited, and you tried to get into this place and we kept you out. No harm was done, and, I hope, no enemies were made. There's no reason why we should quarrel. The St. Frank's fellows want to be your friends."

"Hear, hear!" roared the juniors.

"Friends!" yelled one of the strikers. "You was blamed friendly when you drenched us with water, I don't think!"

"We won't listen to this durned rot!" shouted another man. "Clear out of it, you dirty Jew boy!"

"I may be a Jew boy, but I'm not dirty!" retorted Levi. "And I'm not ashamed of being a Jew, either. But that's not the point. I've got to talk to you about something far more important. Just recently there's been a lot of trouble in Bannington, and the main cause of this trouble is down there among you—Mr. Stanley Webb."

A roar went up, but it soon died down.

"If you'll only listen to me for ten minutes, I'll put the whole thing clearly before you," went on Levi, his voice louder and stronger than ever. "You haven't fully understood what you've been doing, or you would never be attacking this place now. The majority of you are not Bannington men, and you don't know what trouble there was over this job before you came. I'm going to tell you about that trouble, and I'm going to tell you why it was caused."

The crowd, which had seemed inclined to make an attack, remained quite still. Levi's very attitude commanded attention, and by this time he had claimed the full interest of his audience.

The men stood in the road, a great throng, looking up at the slight, well-made figure which stood upon the broken masonry. Personally, I was very glad that Levi had got on his hind legs, so to speak. He was in a far better position to speak to the crowd than I was, and he was far more likely to keep the crowd quiet.

"It was my idea, originally, to make this old house the site of a new picture theatre," shouted Levi. "I had been to the cinema with some of my chums, and we were shown a beastly degrading picture which never ought to have been exhibited."

"Hear, hear!" shouted many of the townspeople from the rear. "You're right there, young 'un!"

"Mr. Webb was not particular, so long as he attracted the crowd," went on Levi grimly. "Well, the cinema was placed out of bounds for all the boys at St. Frank's, and I thought it might be a good idea to provide Bannington with a new cinema—a better place, where good, clean pictures would be shown. My father approved of the idea, a company was formed, and all the plans were made. But before we got to this stage, Mr. Webb made himself active. I managed to get an option on the property, and then Mr. Webb began to realise that if he wasn't careful he would find himself left in the cold. He tried to beat me over that option. He tried fair means, and then he tried foul. He even resorted to attempted robbery!"

"You confounded young liar!" snarled Webb, almost foaming at the mouth with rage. "Are you going to stand there listening to this, men? Are you going to let this boy defame my character in public?"

"You shut your 'ead!"

"Let the kid go on!"

"Speak up, Ikey!"

Even Levi himself was surprised to find that the strikers were listening attentively.

"Mr. Webb failed to get that option," he shouted "and then, when a start was made on these building operations, the man tried another dodge. The Grange has always had a reputation of being haunted, and Mr. Webb used that as an excuse to stir up trouble among the local workmen. They're here now—most of them out of a job. You men came into the town to fill those jobs, and now you're on strike! It's wrong—absolutely wrong, I tell you! By my life! You don't seem to realise that the whole thing is a conspiracy, and that you've been drawn into it almost against your will! After you've heard me through you'll probably think in a different way!"

"Ripping!" I muttered. "That's the stuff! Go it, old man!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "The strikers are payin' full attention, you know!"

They were, every man of them.

"It was Mr. Webb's idea to bring all work on the Grange to a full stop," went on the Jewish boy. "His object in doing that was to cause delay while he stole a march on us. If he had used fair means, we couldn't have grumbled; but he didn't use fair means. I suppose you all know the story about the ghost. That ghost was Mr. Webb, and he also had his men on the job, pretending to be workmen, and causing all sorts of unaccountable things to happen. It was a conspiracy.

"Fortunately the thing all came out, and my father and I believed that there would be no more trouble. But there

was more trouble. An attempt was made to blow up this old place, and I needn't tell you who made that attempt. Williams, the fellow who has pretended to be your friend, is in Webb's pay, and so are the other three men. They went among you agitating, and urging you to go on strike for more money.

"You thought they were the same as yourselves, but they're not. They're snakes in the grass! And there they stand before you, roped up in a row, exposed for what they really are! You may have thought that we schoolboys are against you, and, if you thought that, you are wrong! We only came here to-night to protect this property. Believe me, this affair has gone far enough, and what we want now is peace. I hope that we shall understand one another better after this, and there won't be any more quarrelling!"

"We never wanted no quarrel!" shouted one of the men. "We're only strikin' because it's right we should have more money!"

"I don't agree!" shouted Levi promptly. "What are your wages? twenty per cent. higher than the wages paid to any men on any other building job! You've been told by Webb's agitators that this is a rush job, and that you're working at double pressure. It is a rush job, but every man here is only required to work the usual way. I want you all to be sensible, and I don't want you to have any ill-feeling towards us. Any scraps that we've had can easily be forgotten. My advice to you is to out out all this kind of stuff and get back to work."

"Hear, hear!" shouted a dozen strikers.

"We've had enough of this sort of thing, anyhow!"

"Half of us never wanted a strike!"

"And the other half was drunk!" shouted somebody else.

"The fact is, you were led away by all the talk," went on Levi. "You're just the same as the fellows at St. Frank's. If a few chaps get busy enough, they can get up a great agitation over nothing, and when a big body of people are excited, that body is liable to do silly things. I'm only a boy, and I don't suppose you'll take much notice of me. But I hope you will, all the same. I want you to understand that those men down there—those rascals who are roped up—are not worth looking at. They've been causing trouble for weeks past, and they've been paid to do it by Mr. Webb. Well, what's the verdict? Are you going back, or shall this war continue?"

"The kid's right!" shouted one man. "This strike was a blamed silly thing, anyway. Let's get it over, mates, and get back to work!"

"'Ear, 'ear!"

"We won't take no more notice of them rats!"

"They've been causin' trouble all the time, just as the young 'un says!" shouted another man. "Strike me pink! We ain't 'ad no more sense than a pack of bloomin' sheep! We've bin led away by them wolves!"

"Listen, men!" yelled Mr. Webb desperately. "That boy has been lying——"

"Garn! Shut yer lip!"

"We've 'ad enough of you already—you an' your paid Bolshevics!" exclaimed an elderly workman wrathfully. "It's the fust time I've bin taught sense by a schoolkid, an' I ain't ashamed to admit it! We was mad, an' that's the truth of it. 'Ow we come to leave our jobs and' go on like this, fair beats me!"

"There's just one more thing I want to say!" shouted Solomon Levi, his face alight with enthusiasm. "I'm jolly pleased to find that you men understand the position. I knew jolly well that I'd judged you rightly. But it's Nipper's doing, right from the start! Nipper collared Webb and those four other men, and made it possible for me to get ahead with this speech. It's the first speech I ever made, and I was scared stiff when I started, believe me."

"Good for you, young 'un!"

"You've got pluck, whether you're a Jew or not!"

"This cinema that's about to be built is wanted as soon as possible," went on Solomon. "Therefore, the faster the work goes on, the better. Not a minute's time must be lost, and yet days and days have been wasted, and every hour that passes is of the greatest importance. So I want to give it to you chaps straight from the shoulder. Get busy! Work like the deuce, and you can take it from me that you won't be sorry. If you work hard and make the pace hot—well,

The infuriated cinema owner opened the window to its widest extent and then let himself into the dormitory.

believe me, there'll be something special in the way of wages. But, don't forget, it's only those men who earn the extra money who will get it! I'm saying this absolutely on my own, but you can bet your life that my dad will back me up."

"Good old Jew boy!"

"There's another thing," continued Levi. "I believe I'm talking to a lot of men who live in this town—the workmen who were engaged on the job originally, and who left their employment because of that faked ghost of Webb's!"

"You are, Master Levi," shouted several men. "An' we're out of a job now. Times are hard this cold weather, with kids to feed, and fires to keep up ——"

"Well, I'll guarantee employment for every man who comes to the office tomorrow morning," shouted the Jewish boy. "Some time ago, all you local men offered to get back to your jobs, but you were refused. Well, I'll now give you a guarantee that you won't be refused a second time. If you apply for work, you'll be engaged——"

"Hoorah!"

"Crikey! The kid's a good 'un!"

"Not 'arf!"

"There's plenty of work for all—the more the merrier!" said Solomon Levi cheerfully. "And I hope that this will be the last of the trouble, and that everything will now go on smoothly."

"You bet it will, young 'un!"

"You can all come out now—we won't touch you!"

"An' we fergives yer for them heggs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was absolutely amazing.

In this short space of time the temper of the crowd had completely changed. Before we brought Webb and his associates on the scene, the workmen had been sullen, angry, and in a dangerous mood. But now, everybody was laughing and grinning; the men were happy.

But, after all, it was not so amazing as it first seemed. Levi's speech had cooled the men down, and they could see now what they had failed to see earlier—that they had only made fools of themselves, and that there never had been the slightest excuse for a strike. On every hand men were clasping fists, and declaring that they would return to work on the morrow.

For the very first time the men understood the position, and Solomon Levi, from that moment, was a popular hero in the eyes of the Bannington working classes. All those men had been given permission to get to work again, and it was positively certain that they would accept the offer.

The strikers had had their lesson, and it really seemed that the trouble was truly over.

And feeling ran high against Mr. Webb, Williams, and the others. Indeed, but for the fact that a number of police surrounded the five, they would have been very roughly handled. And it was necessary for the police to escort them away from the scene. And Mr. Stanley Webb was a changed man; his eyes had a fixed, glassy kind of look. Defeat had come—utter and absolute defeat. Never would he be able to influence the workmen again. He had played his last card—and lost!

There was much singing in the High Street. The strikers went off to their homes and to their lodgings, happy and relieved. They saw the thing clearly now, and they understood that they had never really wanted to strike.

As for Solomon Levi, as soon as he got into the High Street, he was surrounded by a crowd, and when his father could get near him, nearly all the breath was knocked out of his body. For Mr. Isaac Levy's hand was a hearty one, and it thumped Solomon's back with unmistakable vigour.

"My boy—my boy! It was wonderful!" declared Mr. Levi enthusiastically. "I should never have believed it possible——"

"But is it all right, dad?" inquired Levi junior. "I mean, about the workmen coming back to their jobs—the local men——"

"All right!" echoed his father. "Solly, my boy, you couldn't have done anything better. Everything will go on oiled wheels now—and you have achieved a wonderful victory!"

"Begad, rather!"

"Rats!" said Solomon. "It wasn't my victory—it was the Remove's! We all took a hand in it, and we'll all share the credit equally. Without the other fellows, I should have been absolutely helpless. It was Nipper who——"

"Cut it out, my son!" I interrupted. "We all did our bit, but your bit was the biggest! You can't get away from

the fact, old man, that you delivered the goods! It's your victory all along!"

"Hear, hear!" echoed the other juniors.

"Good old Solly!" said Handforth. "I'm only sorry for one thing—I was hoping for a good old scrap; but there was nothing doing."

"I—I say! Can't we find some grub somewhere?" inquired Fatty Little plaintively. "I'm nearly starving, you know—I feel as weak as a rat——"

"And you look as strong as a gorilla!" grinned Pitt. "There'll be no grub, Fatty, until we get back to St. Frank's."

"Oh, pancakes!"

"And then you'll have to wait until the morning—until breakfast-time!"

"You—you ass!" gasped Fatty. "Do you think I can wait until then? I should be dead. You'd find me a mere skeleton in bed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty's troubles did not worry us. As a matter of fact, quite a number of juniors were feeling hungry. And this was not to be wondered at; the keen night air had had its effect, and appetites were put on edge, but there was no chance of obtaining any food until to-morrow.

"Well, you fellows, we mustn't stay here now that the excitement is over," I exclaimed, looking round. "We've got to get back to St. Frank's as quickly as we can. If we do, it's just possible that the Head won't punish us severely. If we get off with detention and gating for a fortnight, we shall do well."

"Rather!"

"And, anyway, it was worth it," declared Bob Christine. "If it was left to old Foxe, I don't suppose he'd do much—he seems to be an easy-going bird, by what we've seen!"

"Your new Housemaster?" inquired De Valerie.

"Yes."

"I haven't seen much of him," put in Augustus Hart. "Is he better than Stockdale, or worse?"

"We haven't been able to size him up properly yet," replied Bob Christine. "Mr. Smale Foxe! It's a rummy name, but he seems pretty all right."

The College House junior was talking about the new Housemaster. Mr. Stockdale, who usually presided over the College House, was away this term. He had not had a holiday for eight or nine years—that is to say, a prolonged one. But now, patience was rewarded, and Mr. Stockdale had gone off on a trip to India, to visit some relatives there, and to have a good time generally. He would probably not be back at St. Frank's until the summer-time.

And, in the meantime, the vacancy caused by his absence was being filled by another Housemaster. This gentleman had been in command of the College House when the term started, much to the astonishment of the Monks—as the College House boys were called. They had known nothing of the change until they arrived.

But we didn't worry ourselves about Mr. Smale Foxe just then.

In a happy, contented mood, our bicycles were secured, and then we mounted them and commenced the ride back to St. Frank's.

"Well, I reckon we can congratulate ourselves," remarked Pitt, as we rode along. "The strike is settled, and Webb's hash is settled!"

"Rather!"

"The rotter must be feeling pretty miserable now!" said Tommy Watson. "He ought to be sent to prison; but I don't suppose he can be touched."

And when we arrived at the school a very pleasant surprise awaited us. Nelson Lee had got there in advance—to say nothing of the Head and the other masters; and Dr. Stafford was waiting on the steps of the Ancient House as we appeared in the Triangle. He was doing his utmost to look stern, but was hardly successful.

"Well, boys, I suppose you fully realise that this is practically unprecedented in the history of the school?" he exclaimed sternly. "For the whole Remove to be out of their beds at such an hour as this is scandalous. The circumstances, however, are exceptional, and I am inclined to overlook your delinquency, particularly in the light of the fact that your mission to Bannington was such an outstanding success."

"Hurrah!"

"You're a brick, sir!"

"You will all get to bed, and I shall give instructions that you are not to be aroused in the morning until an hour after your usual time," went on the Head. "There will be no punishments, and——"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

The Remove let themselves go, much to the Head's confusion, for he knew how strange it would sound in the village for the juniors to be cheering him at that hour of the night.

However, the excitement died down, and the juniors trooped in and made their way up to the Remove dormitory, many of them, of course, going over into the College House. In the Ancient House all the Removites were tired, sleepy but contented, and they got into their beds with the feeling that they had earned a long, uninterrupted sleep.

They little realised that their sleep was not to be uninterrupted for long.

For the night's excitements were not yet over!

CHAPTER V.

THE MADNESS OF HATE!

MR. STANLEY WEBB raised the excellent French timepiece from his office mantelshelf, raised it above his head, and sent it crashing into the empty fire grate. The clock smashed to atoms with the force of the concussion, and Mr. Webb snarled evilly.

It was a most peculiar thing for him to do—to smash that clock. He had no grudge against it, and it had been keeping accurate time for years; but just now the cinema proprietor was hardly responsible for his actions. He was a very different man from the calm, calculating rascal who had presided over that little meeting at the rear of the cinema.

Mr. Webb had lost, and he knew it!

He could hardly recall the incidents which had been crowded into the past hour or so. His mind was in a whirl—in a kind of maze. It was impossible for him to think clearly.

He dimly remembered being escorted home by the police. But he had not remained there. Filled with alarm and apprehension, he had made his way, by means of the back streets, to the Grapes Hotel.

And there he had inquired for Mr. Hooker J. Ryan. This gentleman was the representative of the American syndicate which had promised to finance Mr. Webb in his own enterprise, and Webb had almost choked with renewed fury when he discovered that Mr. Ryan was no longer in the hotel.

The American gentleman had taken his departure, by car, less than half an hour earlier. He had left the hotel suddenly, in the middle of the night, without giving the slightest reason for his sudden move.

But Mr. Webb knew the truth.

Ryan had probably witnessed that scene in the High Street, and he knew well enough that the game was up. And, instead of waiting to interview Webb, he had gone off—he had sneaked away—leaving his confederate in the lurch.

As Webb walked away from the Grapes Hotel, something had seemed to snap in his mind. His insane passion was almost too much for his brain, and now, in the privacy of his own office, he acted like a maniac.

The telephone instrument was already lying shattered on the floor; a chair lay with a smashed leg in one corner of the apartment; papers were strewn in the most hopeless confusion all over the carpet; books were lying about with their covers torn off, and with pages wrenched out.

Mr. Webb had been letting himself go. For five minutes he had raged round the office, laying his hands on everything that came within his reach. He felt that it was necessary for him to expend his fury in some way—either that, or he would go stark, raving mad.

And at last, somewhat exhausted, he sank down into a chair, and stared before him fixedly. He was breathing hard, his cheeks were pale, and his fists were clenched. The expression upon his face at that moment was not a pleasant one; it would have horrified his employees if they could have seen him then.

"I've not finished yet!" he muttered again and again. "By Heaven, no! And that boy, he shall pay—he shall pay to the utmost extent! He has ruined everything, and there is no further hope!"

Mr. Webb sat forward, still staring at nothing. He was alone now; Ryan had deserted him. Williams would no longer come near; the others would shun him. Yes, he was alone, and his own position in Bannington was unsafe.

Webb knew it, instinctively.

As soon as he revealed himself in the public streets, he would probably be mobbed—he would be hissed—he would be shunned. And on the morrow all the workmen would be back at their jobs, and there would be additional men, too. Everything had gone in favour of Mr. Levi—and only one person was responsible.

That person was Solomon Levi.

Mr Webb would have to flee from the town, he would have to give up everything. He knew it was as well as he knew that the sun would rise. The people of Bannington would not tolerate him for another day. Yes, the end had come. The final crash had arrived, and instead of his rival crashing, Webb himself had met with the disaster.

And it was all Solomon Levi's doing. The Jewish boy of St. Frank's had caused the whole exposure—it was he who had brought about Webb's downfall.

The cinema proprietor was almost a maniac with hatred. He only thought of one thing now—one thing only. Revenge on Solomon Levi!

There was nothing else left for him. He was ruined, and he would probably find himself in the hands of the police. The inspector had even hinted that he might be coming again. Some charge would be brought up against him—conspiracy possibly—and then he would find himself in the dock.

Webb didn't care a dash what happened now. The hatred in his eyes blazed out with even greater intensity, and he rose to his feet with the air of a hunted animal. He crouched as though about to spring, and then, gave vent to a wild, insane kind of laugh. He was thinking of his next meeting with Solomon Levi.

Oh, yes, he would have his revenge.

Webb left the office, and did not even trouble to switch off the electric light. He passed out into the open street, leaving the cinema unbolted and unlocked. He never thought of securing the door behind him. His one obsession was to get to St. Frank's—to feel his fingers round Levi's throat.

And half running, half walking, he went on his way towards the school. He did not meet a soul, and he trudged on desperately—grimly. With every step that brought him nearer to St. Frank's, his rage grew more maniacal.

He kept muttering to himself. He kept up a continuous jabber as he walked along. Much of it was incoherent, for Webb was talking mechanically—unconsciously. He was certainly not under control. His brain seemed to have cracked, and he went on his journey with only one fixed purpose in mind.

And in his present state, Mr. Webb had only cunning and brute force left to assist him. Caution was thrown to the winds—he did not care whether he sank or swam. He made no plans—he prepared no avenue of escape for himself. Indeed, he did not even think of what would happen afterwards. To get to Levi, that was the only thing he had to live for now.

And at length, Mr. Webb arrived at St. Frank's. He found himself out in the lane, with the school wall looming up before him. The gates were locked, of course, so Webb did not even try them. He leapt towards the top of the wall, and clutched the parapet. Then he hauled himself up with quite surprising agility, although he was a somewhat heavy man. But in his present excited state he was capable of almost anything.

As Webb crouched at the top of the wall before dropping down into the Triangle, he heard the school clock solemnly boom out the hour of three. Everything was still and quiet, except for the faint rustle caused by the wind in the leafless trees. St. Frank's lay in darkness—fast asleep.

Nothing could have suited Mr. Webb's purpose better. He dropped down into the Triangle, walked through the few trees which grew near, and then, came out within sight of the Ancient House. He knew which were the windows of the Remove dormitory, he had been to the school before, and he had even studied the matter, and had mentally fixed the positions of all the windows. For, on one occasion, Webb had forced an entry into the school.

He felt a glow of satisfaction as he glanced at the dormitory window. It was not particularly high, and there were many thick roots of ivy leading up from the ground. It would be a comparatively simple matter to climb up and to gain admittance by means of the window. It would not even be necessary to obtain a ladder.

Webb's hatred now blazed out even more actively. His fists clenched and unclenched themselves, his jaws worked furiously, and there was a light in his eyes which would have alarmed any onlooker, had there been one.

Webb strode across the Triangle, and made his way to the old elms. There was a certain amount of cover there, for the night was inclined to be moonlight. In the shadow of the trees he could then slip across to the Ancient House wall. He reached the shelter of the old trees, but did not hesitate there. He continued his forward movement; and just then, he received a bit of a shock. For silently, and like a shadow, another figure had appeared!

It was the form of a man—dim and indistinct, in the shade of the trees. And it was quite obvious that this other man had been totally unaware of Webb's presence until this very moment. For he came to an abrupt halt, and he drew his breath in with a sharp hiss of surprise.

But that was the only sound he could utter. For Webb did not allow the man to ask any questions or to advance to the attack. Webb hurled himself forward, and his right fist went smashing into the face of the other man.

Thud!

He went down with only one faint gasping grunt for Webb's fist had hit him fairly and squarely in the centre of the temple, and the stranger was stunned. He fell down to the ground, and lay there in a huddled heap.

Who he was, Webb did not care—the man did not even move, and Webb did not trouble to investigate to see who the stranger was, or what injuries had been inflicted.

The cinema proprietor was filled with one desire only, and that was to get into the Remove dormitory, and lay his hands upon Solomon Levi.

He ran lightly across the exposed patch of the Triangle, and then found himself at the Ancient House wall. A brief examination of the ivy told him that it would bear his weight.

And then, he commenced climbing—slowly, deliberately, but with a certainty which was rather uncanny. Not once did Webb make a slip, he progressed upwards all the time—steadily. And at length he was able to grasp the wide stone window-sill. He hauled himself up, and sat on the sill breathing heavily.

But only for a moment did he rest. Then he turned, examined the window, and found that it was slightly open at the top. It was, therefore, an easy matter for him to push open the lower sash. He did so until the window was open to its widest extent. Then he let himself into the dormitory, and stood there on the matting which covered the floor.

All was dark in here, and the only sounds which came to his ears were those caused by the sleeping boys.

Like a shadow, Webb crept up and down the central passageway of the dormitory. There were beds on either side of him, set three or four feet apart, and each bed was occupied. Everybody seemed to be asleep, and Mr. Webb glowed with triumph. He was here—he had reached his objective. Within another few moments he would locate Levi, and then—and then——

Mr. Webb moved up and down like some sinister wraith of the night. He paused at every bed, sometimes bending right over the sleeper, and before he had looked closely at half the boys his quest was ended.

He found himself bending over the sleeping form of Solomon Levi.

The Jewish boy was fast asleep, breathing regularly, and evidently peaceful with the world at large.

Webb raised his hands above his head. Success! He had got his victim at his mercy, and there would be no escape! The man was really and truly insane now. Possibly it was only a form of temporary insanity, which would pass off when his rage had left him. But it was real enough at the moment!

With a wild cry Webb sprang upon his victim. He tore the bedclothes back, seized Levi in a vicelike embrace, and pulled him bodily out of bed with one tremendous heave. The junior gave a startled gasp, which rapidly changed to a gurgle.

Webb's fingers were round his throat, clutching him madly.

The Jewish boy, bewildered and half-dazed, had no idea what was happening for the first second or two. But then the very nature of the situation caused him to collect his wits rapidly.

And Levi knew the truth.

He could dimly see the evil face of Stanley Webb before him. But Levi could not speak, for those fingers were clutching at his throat, and he found it almost impossible to utter any sound. And Solomon Levi was frightened; he was scared more than he had ever been scared before.

For he could see that Webb was insane with rage, and that he was hardly responsible for his actions, and, strong and agile as the Jewish boy was, he was certainly no match for this powerful maniac.

Levi struggled with all his strength, and the pair swayed to and fro in the dormitory between the bed and the window.

"I've got you now, hang you!" snarled Webb. "And you shall pay the price! Yes, you shall receive your reward!"

By this time, however, other fellows were awake. I had been aroused at that first cry, and I was already out of bed, staring at the pair in horror. Other juniors were sitting up in bed, asking all sorts of sleepy questions.

"What the dickens——"

"Great Scott!"

"Look—look! Who's that struggling ——"

"Help, help!" yelled Gulliver, start-up. "Burglars, thieves!"

"Fire!"

"Shut up, you idiots!" I rapped out. "Somebody's attacking Levi, I believe. Quick, lend a hand! We've got to——"

I paused, for I saw something which made the words choke in my throat.

Levi and his unknown assailant were struggling in the most desperate manner. It must be realised that only a very few seconds had elapsed since the dormitory had been aroused. So far, none of the juniors had had any chance of going to Levi's rescue. The whole affair was over almost before we could realise that our sleep had been disturbed. It was impossible for us to know who the man was who had broken into the school; but I made a shrewd guess.

"It's Webb!" I told myself grimly.

But, even as I was rushing forward, Levi and his attacker swayed towards the window. The Jewish boy could not very well cry out, since Webb's fingers were at his throat. The Jewish junior knew perfectly well that his life was in danger, and that he was fighting desperately for his existence.

And Levi knew that this man was Webb.

He had caught a glimpse of the man's face in the pale light which came in from the window, and it was a sight which made Levi feel alarmed and scared, for Webb's face was like that of a demon.

But Levi was strong, and, although his senses were reeling, he used every effort he poseibly could in order to beat the maddened rogue off. He gave one tremendous heave, and nearly succeeded in getting free.

And this heave took the pair of them over to the window, lurching across the floor drunkenly; and then, just as a crowd of juniors were about to take a hand in the game, the end came.

It was swift, sudden, and appalling.

Webb uttered a fiendish cry, a cry which rang through the dormitory, and which caused many of the juniors to shudder. It was like nothing human. And then Webb seized his chance. He and Levi were near the window now, and the insane cinema proprietor put every ounce of his strength into the next effort.

He lifted Levi clean off his feet and swung him out over the window-sill, and, without doubt, it was the man's intention to fling the junior down on to the gravel below.

It was not such a long drop, but it was sheer, and if Levi fell flat on his back he would probably injure himself severely; and it was just possible that he might fall on his head.

But Levi had all his wits about him.

As he felt himself being forced out, he clutched with even greater desperation at Webb's clothing, and the man found it impossible to keep his balance. At that very moment I arrived, with Pitt, Grey, Handforth, and several others. When we got to the window we were too late.

Webb's great effort had been successful—too successful.

For not only did he fling Solomon Levi out into the night, but he followed him! The pair of them went hurtling down on to the hard gravel. They fell like stones, and then——

Thud!

They struck the ground with terrific force, and both lay still—terribly still.

CHAPTER VI.

EXIT MR. STANLEY WEBB.

"GOOD heavens!"

"They've been killed!"

"They're both dead!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"But what can it mean? Who was that man?"

"A burglar, I expect," said Handforth. "Levi must have spotted him, and——"

"Rot!" I interrupted. "The fellow was no burglar! He was Webb, and he came here for revenge!"

"Great Scott!"

"Webb!"

"We'd better rush down and see what we can do," I went on quickly. "I expect they're only stunned, and there's no telling what Webb might do."

"Yes, that's the idea—we'll buzz down," said Handforth.

He and the others left the window and rushed towards the door, all of them thoroughly excited and considerably alarmed. I remained at the window for a moment longer. Gazing down, I could see the dim forms of Webb and Solomon Levi on the ground. They had not moved their positions—they were lying exactly as they had fallen. Obviously, they were both stunned—or worse. I didn't like to think that, however.

Then, just as I was about to leave the window, I was astonished to see a figure some ten or twelve yards away from the Ancient House wall. It came from the shadow cast by the old chestnuts, emerging into the weak moonlight. And the man appeared to be staring fixedly at those two still forms on the ground. He swayed slightly as he stood there, for all the world as though he had been imbibing strong liquor.

I couldn't imagine who he was, and curiosity kept me at the window.

And then, just as I was going to follow the other juniors out of the dormitory, a cloud passed away from the moon's face, and the light became much stronger for a brief instant. It shone fully upon the face of the man in the Triangle—and I uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise.

For I recognised the man instantly.

He was Mr. Smale Foxe, the master of the College House!

If I was surprised at this disclosure, I was astounded at Mr. Foxe's next move. For instead of going towards the helpless figures on the ground, he turned abruptly, and walked drunkenly into the shadow of the chestnuts. I lost sight of him after that, for the blackness was intense.

So I turned from the window, and hurried out on the landing, where a great many juniors were talking excitedly. Doors were opening, seniors were appearing, and half the school was already awake.

Meanwhile, Handforth and the other juniors had arrived down in the lobby. And the first person they saw was Nelson Lee. The great detective had apparently come from the direction of his study, and he was fully dressed. Nelson Lee, obviously, had been sitting up before his study fire, and he had been disturbed by the shouts and cries which had proceeded from the distant dormitory.

"What are you doing here, boys?" he demanded sharply.

"We're just rushing out into the Triangle, sir," exclaimed Handforth. "We——"

"Good gracious!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "You will do nothing of the sort, Handforth! You're only attired in your pyjamas, and many of you are barefooted! You will go back to your dormitory——"

"But Levi has just fallen out of the window, sir," put in Pitt quickly. "Or, rather, he was thrown out by a man who got in from outside—I believe it was Webb. They both fell down, sir, and they're injured. They might be dying for all we know. Webb seems to be mad——"

Pitt got no further. For Nelson Lee dashed to the outer door, and wrenched it open. It was not the detective's way to waste any time in useless questioning. His main idea was to go outside, and see what had actually happened. He pelted down the Ancient House steps, ran round the angle of the building, and came within sight of the Remove dormitory. And there, lying beneath the window, were two indistinct figures.

But they were no longer motionless.

One of them was rising, and Nelson Lee gave a startled exclamation as he saw something glint in the weak light. It was a revolver, and it was being

pointed at the head of the motionless form on the ground.

Swift as lightning, Nelson Lee dashed up, and tore the weapon out of Webb's hand. Lee had only been just in time. Another second, and Levi would have perished. Even as it was, he lay on the ground, still and silent.

Webb was badly battered. He had, in fact, received the brunt of the fall, and his head was bleeding, he was bruised from head to foot, and, under ordinary circumstances, he would have been incapable of any action. But just now his madness lent him strength, and he lurched to his feet, snarling like a wild animal.

And, with appalling ferocity, he flung himself at Nelson Lee. The next moment they were fighting fiercely, and with intense desperation. Lee, of course, had only one intention in mind, and that was to render his assailant helpless as soon as he possibly could. But Mr. Webb was like a demented savage.

He kicked, he scratched, and he clawed at Nelson Lee. It was impossible to fight the man in the ordinary way, and Lee found that he had his hands full in dodging those vicious plunges.

Meanwhile, a good many juniors had come out into the Triangle, in spite of orders to the contrary. I was there, too, and as soon as I saw what was happening I did not hesitate.

"My hat! They're going it hammer and tongs!"

"Rather!"

"We can leave it to Mr. Lee—he'll settle the bounder!"

But I did not see the reason for letting the guv'nor do everything single-handed. I dashed forward, dodged round to the back of Webb, and then, with a sudden thrust, I seized the man's legs near the ankle, and pulled with all my strength.

Crash!

He went headlong, face forwards, and sprawled upon the gravel. The next moment both Nelson Lee and myself were upon him. He kicked and screamed and made the most appalling noise.

Other juniors came up, and between the lot of us we succeeded in making Mr. Stanley Webb quiet. But it was a most unpleasant task, for Webb was terrible to look upon. And, suddenly, he crumpled up, and all his strength went. He had done his worst, and he had failed.

But—had he failed? Solomon Levi was still lying helpless on the ground, and he had not moved an inch. Was he merely stunned, or had he received some terrible injury? It was impossible to tell until we had made an examination.

Webb had been a terrible proposition, but ropes were on hand—and Cuttle, the porter had been aroused, and he had lost no time in bringing a length of stout, strong cord, and, at last, our prisoner was bound up.

"Phew! We've had some trouble!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "It's Webb right enough, too—as I guessed at first. I say, guv'nor, what's the matter with the man? Has he been drinking, or——"

"There is not the slightest doubt, Nipper, that Webb is insane," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Insane!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mad!"

"Off his giddy rocker!"

"We thought it was something like that," said Pitt. "I'll guarantee that he's been dotty for weeks—but never violent until now. It's a good thing we weren't all blown up—he might have dropped a bomb in the Remove."

"But what about Levi!" asked Handforth. "I believe he's dead!"

Nelson Lee and I were bending over Solomon, and we were making a thorough examination. To our intense relief and satisfaction, we found that the Jewish boy was quite whole. Except for one or two bruises, and a very nasty bump on the head, he seemed little the worse for his dramatic adventure. Indeed, while we were turning him over he opened his eyes and attempted to sit up. It was clear that he must have fallen uppermost, Webb himself receiving the bulk of the shock.

"Hallo!" he murmured faintly. "By my life! I—I seem to remember falling——"

"That's all right, Levi," said Nelson Lee softly. "You must not worry yourself. Everything is over now, and——"

"It was Webb!" exclaimed Levi suddenly. "Yes, I remember! Webb! He was mad, I think, and he tried to kill me. What happened to him, sir? Did he escape?"

"Mr. Webb is quite helpless, Levi, and the affair is now over," said Nelson

Lee. "The man is mad—dangerously so—and I can only assume that his failure in Bannington turned his brain. At all events, I do not think the town will be troubled with his presence any longer."

Solomon Levi was taken up to bed, and Nelson Lee declared that it was not necessary to fetch Dr. Brett up from the village. Levi objected to sleeping in a separate bedroom—for this is what the matron suggested at first. The Jewish boy insisted upon going back to his own bed in the Remove dormitory, and he declared that he would be quite all right by the morning.

However, when the morning came Levi was not quite all right. His head was very bad, and he remained in bed until midday. Then he got up, dressed, and came down into the junior commonroom. He found all the fellows discussing the excited happenings of the previous night. A good many juniors were yawning, too, for they had missed several hours of sleep. Not that this mattered for once.

"I suppose we shall get a period of quietness after this," Handforth was saying rather gloomily. "There'll be nothing doing in Bannington, anyway. No more strikes—no more holding the giddy fort!"

"Well, we mustn't grumble," said Pitt. "The Remove did pretty well, on the whole, and if we live long enough we shall see the new picture theatre erected."

"If we live long enough!" echoed Levi. "It won't be necessary to get very much older, my boy. I'll guarantee that our new cinema will be opened to the public within six weeks."

"It couldn't be done," said McClure.

"No?" exclaimed the Jewish boy. "It's going to be done—and you can bet your life on it. By the way, what about Webb? What's happened to him?"

"Oh, he was taken away by the police—in a giddy ambulance," replied Handforth. "He committed a criminal assault upon you, and it's an absolute fact that he's dotty—clean off his chump. I expect he'll be put quietly away in an asylum. The best place for him, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

Later on we heard from Bannington. And the news was of the best. All the strikers had returned to work, and they were performing their tasks with even greater energy than before. Other men had been engaged, too, and work was going on at full pressure. And there was now no doubt that no further hitch would occur.

But, of course, it would be several weeks before the new cinema was erected. Solomon Levi's idea had panned out well, and victory had come to him in the finish. But we should have to wait a good few weeks before the concrete result of Levi's scheme was to be seen.

In the meantime, we had other things to think about.

That evening, during tea in Study C, I talked over the events of the night with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. And I did not mind admitting that I was puzzled.

"There's one thing I haven't told you yet," I said, as I poured myself out some more tea. "You know when Webb and Levi fell out of the window?"

"Yes, of course," said Watson.

"Well, I had a look out, and all the other fellows cleared off, and went downstairs. I remained behind for a minute."

"Yes, dear old boy, I remember that," said Sir Montie, nodding. "I was rather puzzled, you know—I was, really. Why didn't you come at once? Why did you wait at the window in that way?"

"Because I saw something queer."

"Queer?"

"Yes," I said grimly. "A figure came into view, out of the shadow of the old chestnuts. I couldn't make out who it was at first, but he was reeling rather drunkenly, and I honestly believe that he'd had a few."

"Who'd had a few?" asked Tommy.

"That's what I'm coming to," I said. "The moon came out, and I distinctly saw the man's face. And who do you think he was?"

"Goodness knows," said Watson.

"Dear old boy, we're no good at guessin'," said Sir Montie.

"Well, I'll tell you—it was Foxey!"

"Eh?"

"Mr. Smale Foxe," I explained. "The man I saw out in the Triangle was the Housemaster of the College House."

My chums stared at me.

"What the dickens was he doing out in the Triangle at three o'clock in the

morning?" asked Watson. "And why didn't he show himself——"

"That's just what I'm puzzled about," I interrupted. "Foxey reeled about for a bit, and then he went straight off into the shadows—although he must have known that Levi and Webb were lying there. Why did the man scoot, instead of lending a hand?"

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez.

"It's certainly very mysterious, dear old boy," he agreed. "But it's too frightfully awful to suppose that Mr. Foxe was intoxicated, begad!"

"Well, he looked like it," I said. "And it's struck me as being mysterious ever since."

"You're quite sure that the man was Mr. Foxe?"

"Positive."

"Well, we can't very well explain the mystery," said Watson. "Perhaps Mr. Foxe had been out on the razzle, and was coming home with the milk. You never know, with these masters! And this chap is new to St. Frank's—we haven't found out what he is, yet. But Christine and Co. seem to think he is fairly passable."

We did not discuss the matter any more then. But, later on, I happened to be crossing the Triangle to the gymnasium. And I came face to face with Mr. Smale Foxe on my way. The new Housemaster was rather tall, slim, and not exactly distinguished in appearance. His nose was very prominent, and a bushy moustache adorned his upper lip. The ends were waxed, and this gave him an appearance of smartness. His hair was dark brown, and he wore it unusually long.

"Good evening, sir," I said politely.

"Oh, good evening, my boy," said Mr. Foxe. "I do not seem to remember your face. Are you one of my boys?"

"No, sir; I belong to the Ancient House."

"Ah, that accounts for it," said the Housemaster. "You see, my lad, I am not precisely familiar with all the faces yet; I am new here, and it will take me some little time to shake down. What is your name?"

"Nipper, sir—I'm the Remove captain."

"Ah, yes, of course," said Mr. Foxe, nodding. "I judge that you were the ringleader in the affair last night, eh? A most extraordinary occurrence, my boy. I think the Headmaster was very lenient."

"Rather, sir," I agreed. "Did you see anything of the excitement?"

Mr. Foxe shook his head.

"No," he said. "I was indoors the whole evening."

"I suppose you heard something of the disturbance at three o'clock in the morning, sir—when Webb tried to kill Levi?"

Again Mr. Foxe shook his head.

"No, Nipper; I saw and heard nothing," he replied quietly. "I happened to be suffering from a rather severe toothache last night, and I retired early. But towards one o'clock I fell into a sound sleep, and did not awaken until the early morning. I hope there will be no more occurrences of that kind."

And Mr. Foxe, nodding, passed on.

Instead of continuing my way to the gymnasium, I went back into the Ancient House, and made my way to Study C. My chums were there, just commencing their prep.

"I've just seen Foxey," I said, as I closed the door.

"Nothing very startling in that!" grunted Watson. "Don't bother, you ass! I'm right in the middle of some frightful arithmetic. I'm blessed if I can understand why Crowell wants all this rot done!"

"Never mind about your arithmetic," I said. "I've bowled the bounder out."

"Which bounder?"

"Foxey!"

"You bowled him out?" inquired Montie, looking up.

"Absolutely," I said. "I met him in the Triangle just now, and we got talking about last night's affair, and all the rest of it. I thought I'd find out a few things, if possible, and I asked Foxe if he saw anything of Webb."

"And what did he say?" inquired Watson curiously.

"He told me that he went to bed early, and slept soundly until the early morning," I replied. "Now, why did the chap tell me a lie like that? We know well enough that he was out in the Triangle at three o'clock."

"Well, you know it," said Watson. "You saw him, and we didn't. Of course, it's just possible that you made a bloomer. The man might not have been Foxe at all."

"I don't make bloomers of that kind," I said. "He was Foxe all right, and he acted as though he were drunk—that's all I know. There's something rather queer about the man, in my opinion."

"Well, I suppose we shall learn a few more things before long, dear old boy," said Sir Montie.

"I don't mean to make a mystery out of nothing," I continued. "There may be no significance at all in the fact that Foxe was out in the Triangle last night. But why didn't he go to Levi's assistance? That's the puzzle."

"Because he knew he was half-seas-over, and didn't want anybody to see him," suggested Watson. "That's about the truth of it."

We discussed it for some little time further, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. We were quite certain, however, that Mr. Smale Foxe was not everything he appeared to be.

And then the matter was dismissed from my mind, for Solomon Levi appeared, and he ushered into Study C Mr. Isaac Levi. Solly's father was looking pleased and happy, but it was clear that he had been rather anxious.

"I thought you'd be over to-day, sir," I said. "Solly had a jolly narrow escape last night; it was a near shave. Webb was absolutely a maniac, and he——"

"Yes, I know all about it, Nipper," said Mr. Levi, "and, if you don't mind, I would rather not discuss the subject. I am thankful that my son is all right—and Webb is now in safe keeping."

"By the way, sir, what about Ryan?" I asked. "He's the man who was financing Webb——"

"Mr. Ryan has left Bannington," interrupted Mr. Levi. "And, curiously enough, he omitted to mention his destination to anybody. I rather think we are to be left in peace."

"By my life," said Solomon, "we deserve to be!"

"And now the building will progress by leaps and bounds," said his father. "There will be no more strikes—no more delays. From to-day onwards, my lads, the new cinema will begin to take shape, and before long I shall invite you all to the opening performance. But, of course, several weeks must elapse before that interesting event takes place. You must be a little patient, boys."

As events turned out, it was not difficult for us to be patient, for the next few weeks were destined to pass quickly. They were weeks which were filled with excitement and adventure and mystery; in fact, almost at once some very startling happenings were to take place.

And those happenings were not entirely unconnected with Mr. Smale Foxe!

The fortunes of the College House were in the balance!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Owing to lack of space, I was unable to publish the result of the Map Competition last week, as I had intended. After careful consideration, I have decided to award the prize of 10s. to Master Robert Dickson, 86, Somerset Street, Gateshead-on-Tyne, his map being the most accurate in detail according to a rough sketch with notes from the author. I regret that I cannot reproduce the winning map in these pages for technical reasons, but next week I hope to publish a complete map of St. Frank's and surrounding country on the whole of page 2 of cover. It will be specially drawn by our artist from the author's notes.

Another important feature next week is the commencement of a grand new series, beginning with—"THE COLLEGE HOUSE MYSTERY!"

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 then 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 employs Lin on some dangerous missions in order to give the lad an opportunity of displaying his detective abilities. One night Lin accompanies his employer to a lonely house inhabited by a dangerous gang of foreign secret service agents. Having obtained valuable information concerning the gang the daring detective and Lin are caught, and only succeed in getting away by pretending to be common burglars.

(Now read on.)

The League of Light.

TWYFORD nodded approval, and answered in the same earnest undertone:

"You are right, Cora. I mean to tell him—at least, as much as he needs to know. I will even tell him that in the work before him to-night he must face perils greater than any he has yet dared. Then I will give him his choice; tell him that he is free to risk it or refuse. If I know the lad, I am pretty sure what his choice will be."

"I think I can guess," murmured Cora. And with a nod and a smile to Lin—a friendly smile, but shadowed with a touch of regret or foreboding—she turned and tripped from the workshop.

Lin wondered why she had looked at him like that—almost the look she might have given to a friend who was starting on a dangerous journey and might not return. He could not understand it.

"Now, Lin," said Twyford, when his sister had gone, "make a perch of that sawing-block while I have a bit of a talk with you."

His tone was genial and friendly, though at the same time rather grave. Lin took a seat on the sawing-block and waited, wondering what was to come.

Twyford cleared a corner of the big bench and swung himself up for a seat. Filling a pipe, he smoked for some minutes in silence, as though thinking deeply. Then he took his briar from his lips, and said:

"Last night you were with me in an adventure which you did not understand, and more than half disliked. Oh, don't tell me, lad!" Here he laughed. "I knew all the while that you simply hated that burglary stunt, and hated me for dragging you into it. I don't wonder. I did not love the part myself. Yet, though you hated the work, you did your bit well. Whatever your doubts, you stuck by me gamely, and helped to make a success of a very risky exploit!"

Lin felt that glow of pleasure which a word of approval from Mr. Mysterious always gave him. A long, flowery speech of praise he couldn't have stood; but this always rang true, and delighted him.

"Our work last night was both difficult and dangerous," said Twyford, "yet it was only one part of a great adventure—the second act, so to put it, in a strange drama of real life. With the first act you had nothing to do—it was played out before you joined our little company. In the second act you supported me—and did it right well! The third, and as I hope, the last act, is to be played to-night."

"And I am in it, sir?" cried Lin eagerly. Boy-like, he was rather tickled with the touch of stage-land Twyford gave to the thing.

"Before I answer that," said Twyford gravely, "I will drop fancy language for plain, straight talk, my lad. The work before us to-night, if less difficult, is likely to be even more dangerous than that we faced together last night. More than that, your part would be the most dangerous of all. And you would have to face it alone."

"I'm ready, sir," declared Lin, with flashing eyes. "Whatever it is I'll do it!"

Twyford looked pleased. But he shook his head, as he said:

"No, lad, I'll not accept your decision until you have heard more of the truth, and know what you would be up against if you undertook this thing. Now listen."

He paused to take a pull or two at his pipe, then laid it aside.

"You must have wondered, Lin, who and what those men were, whose queer den we

broke into last night; men who, in a house not twenty miles from London, carry automatic pistols and knives upon them, and store their cellars, not with coals or wine, but with arms and ammunition, bombs, and other agreeable little things of that nature."

"I have been wondering, sir," said Lin; "but I thought they might be foreign anarchists—Bolsheviks, or something of that sort."

Twyford smiled rather grimly.

"Nothing so honest, my lad!" he said—"though that is how they like to be regarded. They call themselves 'The League of Light'—League of Darkness would be a more fitting name!—and are supposed to be banded together to spread freedom and liberty throughout the world, and make all mankind one loving brotherhood; but, as a matter of fact, although the League may have been started by some political fanatics with ideas of that sort, it has long since become nothing more nor less than a highly-organised society of scoundrels, the scum of many nations, whose sole object is crime for the sake of gain."

"Just a big gang of crooks, sir?" said Lin.

"Precisely," said Twyford. "And a very formidable gang, too! For they stick at nothing; murder is all in the way of business with them. But robbery is always their object. They are brigands. In fact, this 'Madame Otterie,' whom the League now acknowledges as its head, was the daughter of a notorious Sicilian bandit. He was its leader, until one day he had the madness to get angry with his daughter, and strike her. Whereupon she promptly whipped out a derringer and shot him dead. This took place at a council of the League, and the spirited act so delighted the members of the council that they at once elected her leader, and swore allegiance."

"Perhaps they thought it safest, sir," remarked Lin, with a grin, "if she was so handy with a pistol."

"Very likely," agreed Twyford. "She is a terrible woman—well-fitted to command such a horde of scoundrels—daring, capable, and cruel, serpent and tigress in one! Had it been the real Madame Otterie in that house last night, my lad, I doubt if you and I would have left it alive."

"But how awfully daring of Miss Cora to play the part!" exclaimed Lin. "She must have done it splendidly for none of those men to detect the impersonation. But where is the real Madame Otterie?"

"Captured on her way here some days ago, and now in prison at Naples. None of the League knows that. But we knew it, and hence my sister's chance. She had met the real Madame Otterie several times—for the woman went about everywhere—and Cora studied her carefully, so that when the time came she was ready to play the part—and she did it well!"

"She must have done it marvellously to have deceived all those men," declared Lin. "But what is this plot that they have on the way now, sir? Are you going to tell me?"

"Yes," said Twyford, "I will tell you all; and you will see what a daring scheme it is, and what desperate men we are up against in the fight before us."

Lin Makes His Choice.

TWYFORD relit his pipe and smoked for a while in silence. Then he once more laid it aside, and said:

"Of course, Lin, you know something about Monaco?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" responded the boy. "Monte Carlo—the great gambling place."

"That's it," said Twyford. "It is a little principality, you know, and our friends of the League are plotting to bring about a revolution, and set up a nice little republic instead, with themselves holding the reins of power. They have, no doubt, carefully sewn the ground, and those cases full of so-called 'sports requisites,' which we saw last night, in the cellar of that house, are intended to equip the 'rebel army'—that is, the scum and riff-raff of the small population, easily won over by the promise of plenty of rioting and plunder."

"What a daring plot!" exclaimed Lin. "But surely they could not hope to carry it through. Monaco is under the protection of France or Italy, isn't it, sir? If they succeeded at first, they couldn't hope to hold the place for long."

"They probably don't expect to, or even wish it," said Twyford. "Twenty-four hours in power would be quite long enough for the purposes of the League. That would give them quite sufficient time to scoop the entire treasury of the little state—which is a wealthy one—and get away with the proceeds—of course, leaving the 'rebels' to shift for themselves. But Great Britain, where the plot was hatched, cannot allow it to get as far as that, for it would mean bloodshed, and possibly international complications. So the thing is to be quietly nipped in the bud, without any fuss or world-wide sensation. And that is our task to-night, Lin."

The boy's heart swelled with pride and pleasure: "Our task!" That way of putting it made him feel that he was to be an equal partner in some important and daring enterprise.

"We've got to stop them getting those cases of arms away, you mean, sir?" he said eagerly.

"That's it—and something more besides," Twyford said. "Now, as to details, my lad; so that you shall see where your part comes in, and decide whether you care to undertake it."

"Oh, as to that, sir," Lin broke in excitedly, "I——"

"Stop a little, my lad," said Twyford. "It is a daring and dangerous part you would have to play, for these are bold and

desperate men—criminals who hold life cheap, and do not know the meaning of mercy. And they have all the infernal cunning of their kind. So listen first, before you give your word."

He paused, as if to give emphasis to his words; then continued:

"Of course they have the whole thing very completely arranged. The League pays well, and never has any difficulty in getting the right sort of help for its dark purposes. There are men everywhere, in all walks of life, who will do anything for a price, and ask no questions. So those cases are to be conveyed in nice, respectable-looking vans to a certain wharf down the river, not very many miles below London Bridge. In fact, we may take it for granted that the cases are already there by this time. From there the cases are to be transferred, per barge, to a steamer lying a little farther downstream—one of those boats which ply between the Italian ports and London with fruit and wine, and go back with any cargo they can pick up. Those members of the League who were in that house last night some eight or ten in number—their work finished here, are to go aboard the steamer as part of its crew, and see their precious cargo safely through."

"And we don't mean to let either the men or the cases get away from the wharf!" exclaimed Lin, excited at the prospect of a really big and stirring adventure.

"That is it precisely," said Twyford. "We must not let them get aboard with the cases, and mingle with the crew—disguised to suit the character, of course. For then it would be not only difficult to pick them out, in the confusion of a small, crowded vessel getting under way in the darkness, but it would be hard to prove that they had any more connection with those packing-cases than the rest of the hands, who simply helped to stow them."

"Yes, that's what I meant, sir," said Lin. "We want to drop on them red-handed, so to speak, whilst they are still at the wharf, in the very act of handling the cases, if possible."

"Exactly!" agreed Twyford, looking well-pleased at the boy's shrewdness. "We want to make our coup just as they are busy transferring the cases to the barge alongside. Then we have them, and full proof of the conspiracy at one scoop. But to do that will not be as simple as it may sound."

"But you have a plan, sir?" asked the eager boy.

"Yes; and it depends upon you, my lad, and upon this contrivance here." He touched that curious packing-case as he spoke. "And now to explain your part, Lin. Listen attentively, for I have no time to go over the ground again. The evening is growing late, and the hour of action will soon be here.

"This wharf of which I spoke is a small place," he continued. "Half-ruined, it has been closed for years, until an agent of the League saw how it was suited to their purpose, and lately rented it, putting a man in charge as caretaker. This man is not a member of the League, nor in its secrets. He is simply one of the sort who, if suspicious, never causes trouble as long as the pay is all right. He has been instructed to be there to receive some cases of goods this evening, and when they are delivered, to lock up the wharf and leave it. This he will do when the three cases we saw in that cellar last night have been delivered."

"And the wharf will then be deserted?" said Lin.

"For about an hour—perhaps longer," said Twyford. "But in that time another case will be quietly taken there; the doors will open magically, and the case will be placed among the others."

"You mean, of course, this one here, sir!" exclaimed Lin, his eyes sparkling, as his keen, eager brain grasped Twyford's plan even before the full explanation.

Twyford nodded, and smiled.

"And, as I see you already guess, my lad, the wharf will no longer be deserted. One watcher and listener will be there, awaiting the moment when the chief actors appear—the members of the League, come to put their precious cargo aboard the barge alongside."

"Yes, sir—yes?" cried the boy eagerly, as Twyford paused.

"Probably they will divide and make two parties; one to bring the cases out of the wharf, and the other on the barge, to receive and stow them," Twyford continued. "That would mean four men inside the wharf, and, the cases being heavy, they could only handle one at a time. Care will be taken to place our case so that it cannot be got at until the others have been removed."

"But won't they smell a rat directly they see the extra case, sir—one more than they expected?" said Lin.

"There is, of course, that risk, and we have to take it as part of the big gamble which the whole thing really is. In such an affair we cannot bar out the element of chance, or avoid all risk. But I don't think the risk of that is as great as it looks. That man Sapt is probably the only one who would know positively how many cases should be there—and he, you know, is blind.

The others are only subordinates, and are little likely to notice another case, more or less. Besides, they are sure to work in the dark. They will not risk showing a light, as the wharf is still supposed to be vacant. Of that I am so sure that I rely upon it as part of our plans to-night. We shall need a signal at a certain moment; but a call would be too risky. It might be lost amid other sounds, and it would certainly imperil the life of him who gave it."

"How shall I signal, then, sir?" asked Lin.

"You? So you take it for granted that it is to be you!" laughed Twyford. "That isn't settled yet, my lad, remember. But supposing that is so, you are to wait for that moment when the men have carried out the last case but that in which you are concealed. That will leave the wharf vacant for a few moments at least; and you must instantly slip out of the case, cross to that small loophole you will see in the side wall looking up the river, and signal with the flash-lamp you will take with you. One long flash, and then two short ones in quick succession."

"I'll not forget, sir!" declared Lin. "And then?"

"And then you might get away, for your work would be done," answered Twyford. "But every exit is sure to be watched, and you would probably be captured before help reached you. Best get back to your case. For soon after your signal things are likely to get exciting. There may be some shooting, for these are desperate men, and extremely handy with their weapons. Get inside the case and lie low in the cradle; a stray bit of lead isn't likely to reach you there. If there is any rough work you don't want to be mixed up in it."

Lin grinned. He had his own views about that!

Twyford threw off his apron as though he had finished in the workshop, and was about to prepare for another and very different form of activity. His look was thoughtful, and his tone grave and impressive, as turning to Lin he said:

"I have kept my word, lad; I have told you enough of this plot, and the sort of scoundrels we are seeking to defeat, to show you that the part you would undertake is one of no common danger. A small mistake, a slight mischance, and your life might pay the forfeit. And so, having told you all, I give you free choice. You have every right to refuse."

Lin Fleet heard him, with a curious, half-impatient smile. Then he suddenly broke out:

"Refuse—be out of that, sir! Why, I wouldn't for heaps and heaps of money! I've made my choice. I'm going to do it."

That same evening, some four or five hours later, when it was quite dark, a little "moving-job" took place at Hampstead.

It was quite a small affair, and might have been merely the shifting of some lodger's goods and chattels to new quarters in another part of the town. That is probably the impression a sight of the small, shabby, covered van would have conveyed to any chance spectator who happened to notice it, and took the trouble to give it a passing thought.

For that is what it looked like, as it came out of the lane which runs at the rear of that wilderness of a garden surrounding that curious solitary house at the heathside, known as "The Watchbox," and made its way down through the town towards London. In appearance it might have been just the small van of a small greengrocer, who did moving-jobs in a small way; and the wooden-faced Mr. Crabb, who sat on the front seat, driving, might have been the greengrocer himself, and the grimy individual who sat beside him, muffled from head to foot in a shabby greatcoat, and smoking awful tobacco in a black clay, his partner or assistant.

It was a commonplace turn-out, such as may be seen any day, at any hour, in the streets of London or the suburbs. No one who saw the thing would have fancied, by the wildest flight of imagination, that it carried a concealed passenger, bound upon a secret errand of great daring.

A strange journey! Yet Lin Fleet really enjoyed it.

It was really very comfortable in that queer swing-cradle. Quite dark, of course; but the packing-case was so cunningly ventilated that he was not in the least troubled by a want of fresh air. Nor was he cramped for space to stretch a limb now and then, or galled with the hardness of his curious hammock; for it was well-padded throughout.

In fact, it was quite a luxurious ride! Lin chuckled often at the queer but pleasant sensation. It was a novel experience, and the whole adventure much to his taste. The end of the journey, and the desperate nature of the task before him, did not trouble his mind or spoil his enjoyment of the passing hour.

The rough jolting of the van was to him in his swing-cot converted to a gentle swaying motion, like that of a boat rocked upon a quiet sea.

This, with the complete darkness, and the soft, subdued nature of the only sounds which reached him, must have lulled him to sleep before the journey's end.

It was the cessation of all movement that awakened him—that, and the muffled sound of a voice, coming wheezily from a mouth close to the camouflaged holes in the side of the case.

"There y'are, young 'un—landed at the scene of haction! An' now we've got to leave yer to yer lonesome. Won't say keep yer pecker up, 'cos we knows you'll stick it with real grit. May you 'ave the luck with yer, an' come out smilin'. That's the 'earty wish of yer ole pal Nick Crabb! So long!"

Then Lin heard footsteps retreating; the sound of a door being carefully closed, and faintly, very faintly, the rattle of wheels over cobblestones without. Then even these sounds died away and ceased; breaking, as it were, his last link with the outside world.

Whatever befell, he could look for no help now. He was alone!

(To be continued.)

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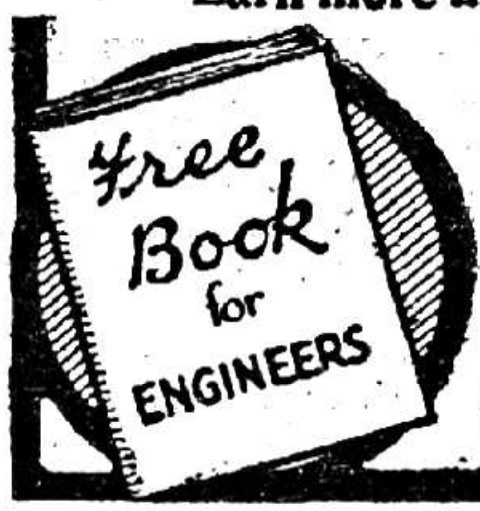

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