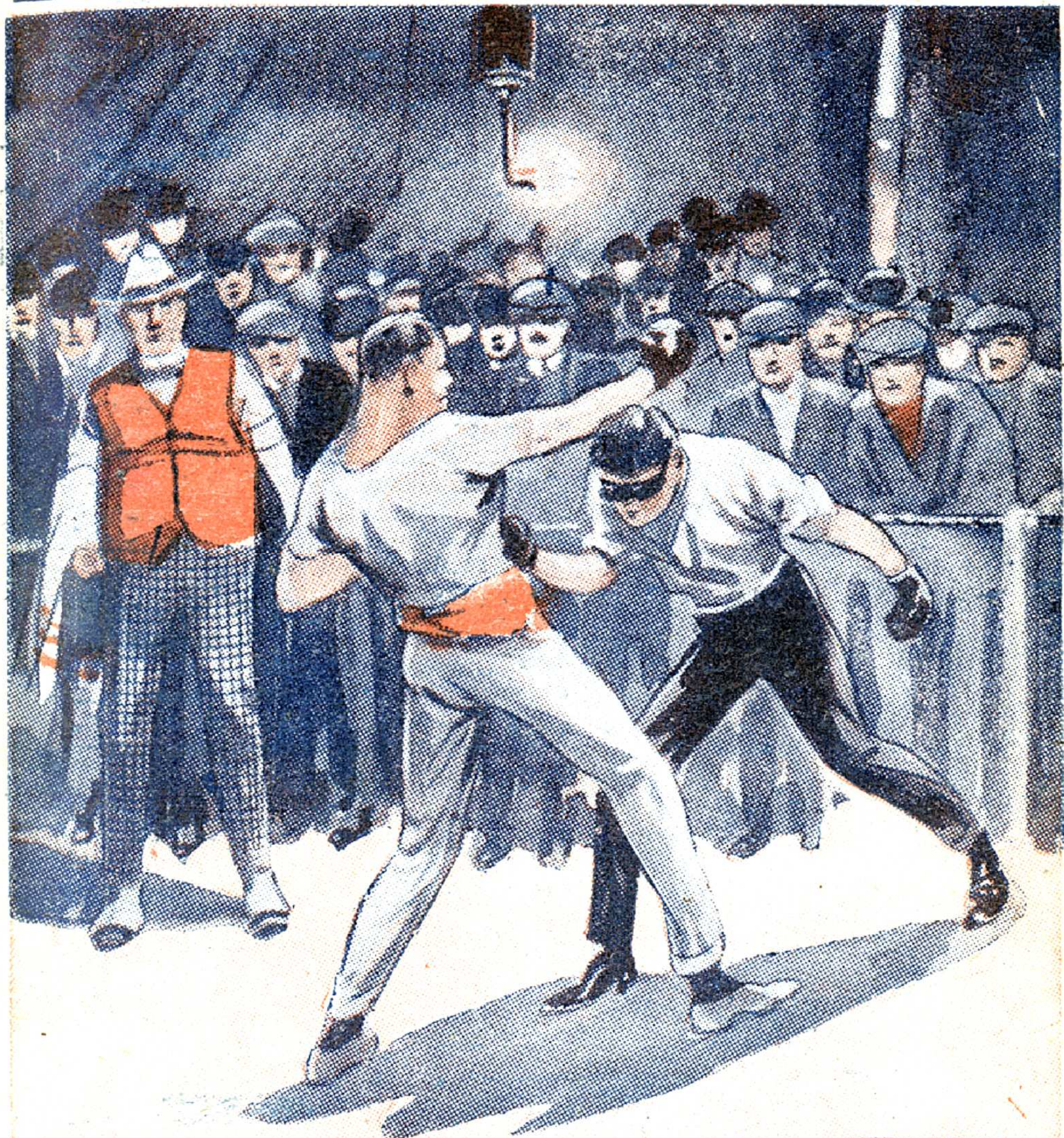


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A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boy's of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Cinema Strikers," "Solomon Levi's Triumph," "The College House Mystery," and many other Stirring Tales. *January 29, 1921.*

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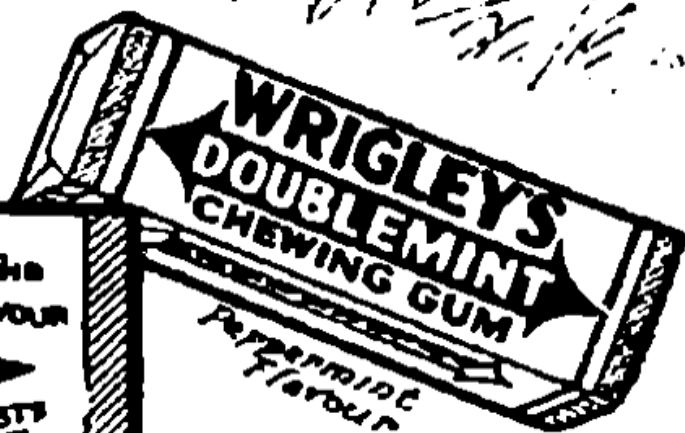
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A REGULAR TERROR!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST came to a halt, and adjusted his pince-nez. He gazed at Tommy Watson and me, with a rather doubtful expression upon his noble countenance.

"Really, dear boys, I think this is frightfully unwise!" he remarked. "It is, really!"

"Rats!" I said. "Don't be an ass, Montie."

"But we're goin' right into the lions' den, begad!" complained Sir Montie. "In other words, dear old fellows, we are just about to enter the College House—and Christine and Co. will certainly be on the alert. There will be shockin' trouble, and our clothin' will be simply ruined."

I chuckled.

"Never mind your clobber, old son!" I grinned. "Come along in—the Monks won't hurt us!"

Of late there had been a revival of the House rivalry between the College House and the Ancient House juniors. One or two japes had been brought off, and, in consequence, the rival sets of Removites were keenly alive for any fresh opportunity. Christine and Co., in particular, were very active of late, and they were determined, if possible, to "put one over" on the Fossils.

Dinner was just over, and it was a half-holiday. The whole afternoon lay in front of us, and we were just about to enter the College House, in search of Bob Christine, to discuss extremely important matters with him regarding football. There was no match arranged for this particular afternoon, but we were on our way to see if we could fix up a scratch match. Anything was better than nothing, and, under these circumstances, I considered that we should be allowed free entry into the enemies' domain.

But Sir Montie Tregellis-West was doubtful—he was thinking about his wonderful clothing. As a matter of fact, the suit which Sir Montie was wearing was nearly a new one, and a gorgeous one at that. It was hardly surprising that he did not wish to be engaged in a rough-and-tumble with the College House fellows. They were not at all particular regarding Montie's clothes; in fact, they took a particular delight in rolling him in the mud, if they ever got the chance.

We were just about to enter the College House when Clapson, Nation, Oldfield, and one or two other juniors appeared. They glared at us somewhat aggressively.

"Fossils! Come on, you chaps—let's hurl them out on their giddy necks! Like their cheek, coming over this side of the Triangle——"

"Peace, my children—peace!" I interrupted.

"Rats!" said Billy Nation. "We're not going to let you off—"

"Thanks!" I said calmly. "This is a half-holiday, and we're trying to see if we can't get up a football match. There's no need to get silly about it—we don't want to have any House rows, I want to see Bob Christine."

"Oh, that's different!" said Clapson. "If you're talking about getting up a match, all well and good; but don't you try any of your giddy tricks while you're here, that's all!"

They allowed us to pass inside, and Sir Montie breathed a sigh of relief.

"Good!" he murmured. "I really thought that frightful things were going to happen!"

We were about to pass through the lobby, on our way to the Remove passage, when we caught sight of a junior who was just about to pass us. I knew his name—Ernest Lawrence—and he was a new fellow in the College House Remove; he had only arrived at the beginning of this term.

I had not seen much of him, being, of course, an Ancient House fellow. Lawrence, as a matter of fact, had kept quite to himself, and I knew that he occupied Study T, alone. And as a general rule, he sat in his study "swotting" away at his books. Lawrence had done nothing particularly noteworthy in the athletic line, but this was probably because he had had no chance of showing his abilities. Certainly, he looked a strong sort of fellow, and well capable of joining in strenuous games. He was a junior about the same size as Tommy Watson. He had a fresh complexion and an open, pleasant face. His eyes were grey, and rather grave and serious in expression; his hair was curly and quite fair—indeed, almost golden. He was really one of the most unobtrusive fellows I had ever met. Yet he did not look a fool.

There was another point about Ernest Lawrence which I had noticed, and which nearly all the other fellows had noticed. His Eton suit, although very neat and well kept, was rather too small for him, and it was somewhat shabby. Lawrence did his utmost to make that suit look its best, but it was rather a hopeless task. The suit was almost worn out, and Lawrence's efforts were in vain. It seemed as though he had been sent to

St. Frank's by his parents, wearing the same suit which had been used during his Preparatory School days.

And, of course, it was almost always the rule for a new fellow to arrive at St. Frank's with a complete new rig-out. Lawrence's condition indicated that his people were not extremely well endowed with this world's goods—and yet the fees at St. Frank's were high. If his people could afford to send him to such a big school as St. Frank's, why could they not dress him in a fitting manner? It was a problem which I had not attempted to solve, since it was not my business.

Up till now, Lawrence had played no part in the affairs of St. Frank's—he had been a mere unit, extremely unimportant and almost unnoticed. Yet it was destined that this quiet boy should play quite a big part in the events of the near future. As it happened, Grayson, of the Fifth, came out of the cloak-room just at that moment. Grayson was a big, hulking sort of fellow, and his reputation in the College House was not of the best. He was, to tell the truth, a bully—and a vicious one at that. Bullying was not his only pastime—he took a keen pleasure in backing horses, gambling, smoking, and choice amusements of that description.

Grayson was not looking where he was going, and he bumped rather heavily into Ernest Lawrence. The Removee staggered, and Grayson almost tripped up, for he lurched forward under his own momentum. He only saved himself from falling by an effort.

"What the deuce—confound you!" roared Grayson angrily. "Why can't you look where you're going, you confounded young idiot?"

Lawrence looked rather astonished, as well he might.

"I'm sorry, Grayson!" he said quietly. "But I think it was your fault, really—you banged into me—"

"I don't want any of your beastly lip!" shouted Grayson harshly. "You nearly tripped me up, and you're going to apologise now—or have your arm twisted!"

"Begud!" murmured Sir Montie, glancing at me.

I gave him another glance in return, and Sir Montie understood that he was to take no action. But, if Grayson commenced any of his tricks upon the new boy, we should immediately take a hand,

and risk the consequences. We were not afraid of anything that Grayson could do, but, if we bumped the Fifth-former, we should probably incur the wrath of the College House Removites. They had no great liking for Grayson, but he was a College House boy, and, naturally, they would wipe us up if we touched him.

"Do you hear me?" demanded the bully. "Apologise! Go down on your knees, and say you're sorry!"

Lawrence didn't move.

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort!" he replied smoothly. "You banged into me, and I don't see why I should apologise for that. Strictly speaking, you ought to apologise, Grayson, for—"

"You cheeky young sweep!" roared Grayson. "If you don't apologise within ten seconds, I will twist your beastly arm until you howl for mercy! One—two—three—four—"

"I don't think that sort of thing will have much effect upon me," interrupted Lawrence quietly. "You won't twist my arm, Grayson, because you daren't. If you had me alone, you might try something of the kind; but you wouldn't do it here in the lobby, with five or six fellows looking on."

Grayson scowled. He knew well enough that Lawrence was speaking the truth. He would not dare to twist the junior's arm now, and the bully of the Fifth attempted to bluster.

"You'd better be careful what you say to me, you young rat!" he snapped viciously. "I wouldn't soil my fingers by touching you. Who do you think you are, anyway—coming to St. Frank's looking like a tramp? The next time an old rag-and-bone man comes round here, I'll direct him to your study. That suit of yours might fetch twopence half-penny!"

Ernest Lawrence turned crimson.

"I—I can't help my suit being a little bit shabby!" he muttered. "There's no disgrace in it, anyway."

"Rather not, dear old boy!" exclaimed Sir Montie warmly. "Don't take any notice of this frightful ass!"

Grayson twirled round.

"Who the deuce told you to interfere, you infernal Ancient House brat?" he snapped. "Clear out of here, before I chuck you out!"

Sir Montie started.

"Begad!" he exclaimed. "Did—did you hear that, dear old boys?"

"We're not deaf!" said Tommy Watson bluntly. "If Grayson ain't careful, he'll find himself used as a door-mat!"

Lawrence, still red, attempted to pass, in order to go out, but Grayson barred his path.

"Not yet!" he rapped out. "You're not going just yet, my fine pauper. It's a pity your people couldn't dress you any better—you're a disgrace to the College House—that's what you are! It's a wonder Mr. Foxe hasn't reported you to the Head!"

"Will you let me pass?" asked Lawrence quietly. "I don't want to quarrel with you, Grayson, and I don't want this affair to come to blows, but you had better be careful. And I should advise you not to sneer at me too much."

"Oh!" shouted Grayson fiercely. "And what the dickens do you think you can do?"

"It seems to me that you are looking for trouble," said Lawrence. "If that's the case, I can let you have some—and you had better say the word. But, as I told you before, I don't want any unpleasantness. I've been left alone since I arrived at St. Frank's, and I'm not anxious to start any trouble now; but, if you want it—well, I can let you have it."

Grayson grinned with rage.

"Oh, you can let me have it!" he repeated. "And what about the trouble you'll get? If I have any more of your sauce, I'll give you a smack across the face that'll sting for hours—"

"I don't think you will!" replied Lawrence. "And, what's more, Grayson, I'll fight you if you want me to!"

Grayson yelled.

"You'll fight me?" he roared. "Why, you silly little fool, I could smash you to bits with one finger! You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I think I do!" said the new boy. "Well, will you let me pass, or will you fight me?"

"Fight you?" said Grayson contemptuously. "You might just as well ask me if I'd fight a kid in the Second Form! And I wouldn't soil my fingers by fighting with a low-bred pauper like you—a ragged beggar from some rotten school! Your father and mother ought to be ashamed of themselves for sending

you to St. Frank's in this condition!"

Smack!

Quick as lightning, Lawrence's hand came forward, and it hit Grayson's cheek with a smack which resounded throughout the lobby. It was a sharp blow, and Grayson's cheek was flaming. He staggered back, with a sharp cry of pain, and his eyes were blazing with fury. Lawrence stood there, hot and flushed, with an expression of defiance in his eyes. Tommy and Montie and I looked on with interest—and, certainly, with excitement.

"You—you mad little idiot!" snarled Grayson. "Why, I'll—I'll—— You want me to fight, do you? All right, you young cad, I'll fight you—I'll smash you to bits! I'll make your face so that it won't be recognised!"

"All right!" said Lawrence. "You can do it—or, at least, you can have a try. I'm ready to fight you now—here, if you want it!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Bob Christine, who had appeared towards the end of the little scene. "You can't scrap in the lobby, you asses! If there's going to be a fight, you'll have to go behind the gymnasium. By Jingo, you're a young ass, Lawrence! You'll be beaten!"

The news spread like wildfire, and before long almost every junior in the College House knew that a fight was to take place behind the gymnasium, almost at once—a fight between Grayson of the Fifth, and Lawrence of the Remove. It was an extraordinary bout, for it was regarded as a foregone conclusion that Lawrence would last about one minute only. Grayson was a renowned bully. His right was a terror, and he could bring it round with tremendous force. It would be impossible for Lawrence to last out more than one round.

"Of course, the whole thing is ridiculous!" said Bob Christine. "Lawrence will be eaten up in less than a minute. But it's his own fault—he smacked Grayson's face, and asked for it."

"But not before Grayson insulted him, and goaded him to it," I put in. "Don't forget that, Christine. I think Lawrence is a plucky young beggar!"

"He's a young ass!" said Christine. "But he'll pay for it now all right!"

Before ten minutes had elapsed, practically all the juniors in the Ancient

House, too, were aware that a fight was about to commence, and a great crowd collected behind the gymnasium, which was a kind of natural amphitheatre. There was a hollow, with grassy banks all round. The bottom of the hollow formed the ring, and the spectators were able to stand round, with a splendid view of the proceedings. Handforth, naturally, was very prominent. Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D, generally managed to make himself seen and heard wherever he went.

"It's all rot!" he declared warmly. "I never heard of anything so absolutely mad in all my life! We ought to stop this fight, you chaps—it isn't fair!"

"Rats!" said Clapson. "We're all waiting to see Lawrence wiped out of existence!"

"Rather!"

"The young ass asked for it, and he'll get it!"

"A fight's a fight, but this won't be a fight!" roared Handforth. "It isn't fair to Lawrence. He ain't capable of dealing with Grayson. Grayson is a hulking great beggar—and a bully, too. What hopes will Lawrence have against such a chap as that?"

"No hopes at all," put in Reginald Pitt. "But it's no good talking, Handy; if they've arranged this fight, it will have to go through. Lawrence smacked Grayson's face, and forced him to fight, and so he must take the consequences. In other words, he called the tune, and he'll have to pay the piper!"

Handforth glared.

"What's the good of trotting out those mouldy old proverbs?" he demanded irritably. "Blow the tune, and blow the piper! I like to see a fight—nothing better, in fact. But this won't be a fight at all—it'll be a slaughter. And I've got a jolly good suggestion to make."

"Whose is it?" inquired De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mine, of course, you dotty ass!" roared Handforth. "This is the suggestion, if you want to hear it——"

"We don't!"

"I'll fight Lawrence's battle for him, if he wants me to!" said Handforth generously. "Leave Grayson to me—I'll wipe him up—then you'll see a fight! If you let Lawrence enter this thing there'll be nothing worth seeing at all. Leave it to me, and——"

"My dear chap, you don't come in

this act at all!" interrupted Bob Christine. "Lawrence doesn't want you to fight for him, and we don't want to see you make an ass of yourself—Nature did that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth could not obtain a hearing, and he was finally shouted down when Grayson came charging into the ring. The bully of the Fifth was looking surly and aggressive. He was evidently determined to finish the fight as quickly as possible, for Grayson considered the whole thing to be *infra dig*.

Ernest Lawrence appeared a moment or two afterwards. He was looking quite calm and collected. His face was slightly pale, but there was no doubt about his pluck. He was quite ready to fight, although it was practically a certainty that he would go under.

Bob Christine and Talmadge volunteered to be Lawrence's seconds. Grayson only had one—his study companion, Shaw, of the Fifth.

"Don't waste any time over it, Grayson," said Shaw. "Give him one swipe, and lay him out."

"That's what I am going to do," said Grayson viciously. "I'll make him wish he was never born!"

"Right-o! Go ahead! I'll hold your jacket!"

"No, you won't!" said the bully of the Fifth. "I'm going to keep my jacket on; there's no reason why I should demean myself by taking it off in front of this crowd. I can deal with Lawrence in half a minute!"

Lawrence was getting ready. His jacket was already off, and his sleeves were rolled up. He looked quite businesslike, although very frail and small compared to Grayson.

Bob Christine was seeing to it that the thing was properly done, and a referee had already been appointed. This was another Fifth Form fellow, named Drake, and the referee now stepped forward with two pairs of boxing gloves. Grayson glared at him.

"We don't want those things!" he snapped. "We're using our bare fists!"

Drake shook his head.

"I don't think so!" he replied grimly.

"That sort of thing won't do, Grayson. You've got a fist like a leg of mutton, and I'm not going to see you smash into Lawrence without wearing the gloves. I suppose you'll do him quite enough

damage in any case."

"Oh, all right!" snapped Grayson. "But the whole thing is mad!"

He pulled his gloves on, and they were secured by Shaw. Meanwhile, Christine and Talmadge were attending to Lawrence, and Bob Christine gave the new boy a few words of fatherly advice.

"Of course, you're a silly young ass to challenge Grayson to fight!" said Christine. "But that can't be helped now, and you've got to go through the giddy mill. Take my advice, and don't get in too close—don't let Grayson land one of his rights. He's a terror, and he's got a long reach. Your best policy is to keep dodging about, and take as little punishment as you can. When you begin to get exhausted, the referee is going to stop the fight in Grayson's favour."

"Oh, is he?" said Lawrence quietly. "That's very interesting, Christine, but I think I can take care of myself, thanks, and I shall do my utmost not to disgrace the Remove!"

"Good egg!" said Talmadge. "That's the way to talk, my son. Of course, if you could wipe up Grayson, it would be a terrific victory for us—we all hate the cad. But you can't do it, so it's no good talking. Only, for goodness' sake, put up a good show. Don't let him floor you in the first few seconds!"

"I'll do my best," said Lawrence simply.

He stood there, looking remarkably self-possessed, and he was quite cool. Most of the fellows believed that the new boy had smacked Grayson's face in a fit of temper, and that he was now sorry for what he had done. But, personally, I saw no sign whatever in Lawrence's demeanour of nervousness or fright. He seemed ready for anything.

"Time!" said Drake sharply.

"Now, you little worm!" muttered Grayson.

He stepped forward, his face expressing clearly enough the fury which filled him. He was in an ugly temper, and, if Lawrence received one of his heavy blows, it would be hard for the Remove junior. And Grayson lost no time in lashing out.

Swish!

His fist shot through the air, directed straight at Lawrence's jaw; but, somehow or other, Lawrence's jaw wasn't there when it was required. It was fully

a foot away, and the next second Grayson was brought up with a jar, Lawrence having tapped him forcibly upon the chin.

"You—you infernal young rat!" said Grayson thickly.

He simply let himself go then, and lashed out right and left, with all his force and fury. If one of his blows had struck Lawrence, the junior would have been felled to the ground; but, curiously enough, not a single one of Grayson's thrusts found its mark.

He simply lashed out at the empty air, and Lawrence dodged about, using amazingly clever footwork, and, at regular intervals, he got in a blow—one on the chin, one on the nose, and then a heavy thud upon Grayson's chest. Lawrence's arms worked like lightning—they flashed in and out, and he kept clear of Grayson's clumsy thrusts with the greatest of ease. And then—

Lawrence's left came up unexpectedly, and caught Grayson under the chin with a crash which shook every tooth in his head. Grayson staggered back, fell over, and lay on the grass dazedly. And a roar went up from the spectators.

"Oh, well hit!"

"Good old Lawrence!"

"Keep it up, kid! Give him beans!" Grayson struggled to his feet, his face simply livid with rage.

"Time!" said Drake shortly.

Grayson went to his corner, and Shaw looked at him anxiously.

"I say, old man, you'll have to do better than that!" he exclaimed.

"Confound you!" snarled Grayson. "The kid's like an eel—I can't get at him! Every time I punched, he dodged."

"That's because you went at it too carelessly," said Shaw. "That sort of thing won't do, you know. The kid's got a bit of science—you'll have to use some, too!"

But this would be difficult, considering that Grayson knew no science. It was his plan to lash out with all his force, and to settle his opponents in as short a space of time as possible. This was about the first time that the bully of the Fifth had really engaged in a proper timed fight, and he had only consented to this because he had looked upon it as a foregone conclusion that he would smash Lawrence at once.

But Lawrence refused to be smashed up.

I was beginning to realise the truth. The new boy in the College House was a wonderful little boxer.

His science was astonishing, and he had all the confidence and composure of a professional. He was looking as cool as possible as he stood in his corner, being sponged down by Christine and Talmadge.

"Well done, kid!" said Christine. "Keep it up like that, and you'll soon make a good display. Of course, you'll get whacked in the end, but you ain't disgracing the Remove."

Lawrence smiled.

"I don't think I shall get whacked," he said. "Before the end of the third round, I imagine that Grayson will have had sufficient."

This rather sounded like boasting, but it was not—as the next round proved.

The crowd of fellows watched, absolutely enthralled. They followed every movement of the fight with excitement and intense interest. Grayson received hardly any attention, for all eyes were upon Ernest Lawrence.

The new boy in the College House treated us to one of the most perfect displays of boxing that we had ever seen. His science was astonishing, and he positively played with his big opponent. Try as he would, Grayson could do nothing whatever—Lawrence was too good for him every time.

And, rapidly, Grayson was being worn out. Blow after blow he received with clockwork regularity, and he could give nothing in exchange. So far, Lawrence was not touched, and Grayson was showing many signs that he was the worse for wear.

It was a wonderfully pretty exhibition, and the juniors were wild with excitement and joy now. For the opinion of the crowd had been reversed; it was generally acknowledged that Lawrence would be the winner. He had his man absolutely at his mercy, and there was not the slightest doubt that Lawrence was one of the finest boxers who had ever given a display at St. Frank's.

"It's positively astonishing!" I muttered to Sir Montie. "Why, I don't think I should care to face Lawrence in the ring. I rather pride myself on my boxing, but I fancy he could whack me!"

"Dear old boy, I think you are wrong there; but Lawrence is certainly an

amazin' boxer!" admitted Sir Montie. "Begad! Did you see that?"

I did. Lawrence had suddenly executed a clever feint, drawing Grayson on until the bully stood exactly where he was wanted. Then Lawrence delivered two sharp blows, which sent Grayson staggering back, helpless and done.

Only the calling of time saved him from defeat.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Lawrence!"

"Well done!"

Lawrence flushed slightly as he heard these cheering sounds. He had the crowd on his side now, and they were enthusiastic. As for Grayson, all his confidence was gone, and he was shaking with nervousness as Shaw rubbed down his face.

"Take your jacket off, you ass!" muttered Shaw. "The kid's too much for you—"

"Too much for me!" snarled Grayson. "It's not that—I'm not feeling in form to-day! Confound the young brat! I'll get him in the next round!"

But the next round was remarkably short. Lawrence apparently thought that there had been quite enough, and he finished up the fight in whirlwind fashion. Instead of playing with his opponent, he went in to work with a will, and Grayson was driven completely round the ring, blows showering upon him and confusing him to the point of distraction.

Then Lawrence finished the fight.

Bang! Crash! Flap! Three—four—five blows rained upon Grayson's face. The bully went down, groaning, and he lay there, blood streaming from his nose, and his lower lip being rather badly cut.

He couldn't rise, and he was counted out amid terrific cheering and uproar.

Lawrence of the Remove had won! It was almost staggering, and my opinion of Lawrence was fixed—he was the finest lightweight boxer I had ever seen.

CHAPTER II.

MR. SMALE FOXE IS VERY PLEASED!

BOB CHRISTINE seized Lawrence's hand in a warm grip.

"Jolly fine, my son!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "How

on earth did you manage to do it? You're a marvel!"

"Rather!" put in Handforth. "I'm a good judge of boxing, and I know what's what! Lawrence is a ripper, and no giddy mistake! Why, he knows as much science as I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lawrence has already forgotten all that you know about boxing!" grinned Reginald Pitt. "A good many chaps at St. Frank's can use their fists, but they are mere amateurs compared to Lawrence. The way he played about with Grayson was a sight for weary eyes!"

"Rather!"

"He upheld the honour of the Remove!" said Christine. "Jolly good luck to him! Grayson has been smashed for once, and I'll bet he won't be so jolly ready with his fists in future! He knows that there's somebody in the Remove who can lick him, and that'll make him cautious!"

Grayson had already slunk off, accompanied by Shaw. The Fifth Form bully, as a matter of fact, was still rather dazed and shaky. He could not quite realise that he had been knocked out, cleanly and fairly, by a Removeite, stones lighter than he was. It was indeed a humiliation for Master Grayson.

"I'd like to have a little chat with you later on, Lawrence," I said, tapping him on the shoulder. "What you don't know about boxing isn't worth learning, by all appearances!"

"I shall be only too pleased to have a talk, if you want it," said Lawrence obligingly; "but I don't want you fellows to make a fuss about this affair. It was nothing, after all."

"Nothing!" echoed Handforth, staring. "Nothing—to lick Grayson!"

"Well Grayson may be much larger than I am, but he knows nothing about boxing," said Lawrence. "He was just like a baby—all he could do was to hit out blindly, and to trust to luck. That won't do at all in a proper boxing contest."

"Who taught you how to use your fists?" inquired Christine curiously.

"My father!"

"Then all I can say is, you've got a ripping father!" said Christine. "He must know a good bit about the noble art, I should say."

"Yes, my father knows quite a lot," he said shortly.

"By the way," I broke in, "I was looking for you, Christine, when Grayson brought on this trouble."

"Well, you've found me now," said Bob. "What's the trouble?"

"No trouble. I was wondering if you could get up a scratch eleven for a match this afternoon," I said. "There's nothing doing in particular, and it's a lovely day. Why shouldn't we have a footer match—Fossils against Monks? It'll be a bit of sport, anyway."

Bob Christine nodded.

"Right you are," he said. "I'm game—I'll get up an eleven, if you like."

"Good!" I said. "Be on Littleaside in about twenty minutes' time. I'll go along and collect my men."

I went off, taking my chums with me, and a minute or so later, Christine and Co. were alone with Lawrence.

"Know anything about football?" inquired Christine, looking at the new boy curiously.

"Well, a bit," admitted Lawrence.

"As much as you do about boxing?"

"Oh, no!" said the new fellow quickly. "I can play a fairly decent game, I think. But that will be for you to decide, Christine—you're the skipper of the eleven. I've been waiting for a chance to play footer, but I've always understood that a new fellow mustn't put himself forward."

"That's quite right," said Bob. "You've got the right spirit, my son. A new fellow mustn't put himself forward—or he gets it in the neck. Where do you usually play?"

"Half-back," replied Lawrence. "I'm not particular which side."

"Half-back," replied Lawrence. "I'm 'We'll give you a trial this afternoon, if you like. It's only a scratch game, and it doesn't particularly matter which side wins—although, of course, it's a foregone conclusion that we shall wipe up the Fossils. Come along, my sons."

They were just about to move off, when a voice interrupted them.

"One moment, boys," it said pleasantly. "Just a word with you, if you don't mind!"

The juniors halted, and turned. And they saw the slim, well set up figure of Mr. Smale Foxe, the Master of the College House.

The juniors raised their caps respect-

fully, and waited for Mr. Foxe to speak. They did not know quite what to make of their new House Master. At first, at the very beginning of the term, he had seemed to be a decent sort, but, of late, he had changed—in a subtle, mysterious way. None of the juniors could understand this change. Grayson, and Shaw of the Fifth, knew even more about Mr. Foxe than the juniors did. For, only an evening or two ago, Mr. Foxe had entered Grayson's study, and had found a gambling party in progress. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, of the Ancient House, were there. And Mr. Foxe, to the boys' amazement, had actually joined in the game—losing money, and smoking some of Grayson's cigarettes! This was certainly startling, and beyond ordinary understanding.

This afternoon, Mr. Foxe appeared to be very pleasant. He regarded the boys with a smile upon his face. His nose looked even bigger when he smiled, and his eyes twinkled—but there was a certain look about them which Bob Christine did not quite like. However, Mr. Foxe was the House Master, and he had to be respected.

Mr. Foxe evidently saw no sign of the recent scuffling, for Lawrence was not even marked. He had one or two bruises, certainly, when Grayson had managed to tap him now and again. But his face was quite clear and untouched.

"Just a moment, boys," said Mr. Foxe genially. "It's a half-holiday to-day, and I am just off into Bannington."

"I hope you'll have a pleasant afternoon, sir," said Christine politely.

"Thank you, my lad," said Mr. Foxe. "I do enjoy an outing now and again, and I was thinking of taking you boys with me—just the four of you. What do you say?"

For some few moments the juniors did not reply. They hardly knew what to say, as a matter of fact. Mr. Foxe was the House Master, and it would be rather difficult to refuse him—and to earn his enmity, for we thought that unless we agreed with him he might probably get ratty.

Christine and Co. were certainly not at all anxious to go out with Mr. Smale Foxe. They would prefer to remain at St. Frank's, and enjoy the game of football against the Ancient House fellows. Going out with a House Master was

always an ordeal for juniors—they were compelled to walk very straight, they found it impossible to use slang, and they had to keep themselves well in check. There was about as much enjoyment in going out for an afternoon with the House Master as there was in the Form-room during lessons.

"It's—it's very kind of you, sir——" began Christine.

"Awfully decent!" said Talmadge. "But—but——"

"You—you see, sir, we're booked for football!" said Yorke. "There's a game arranged——"

"Between us and the College House chaps, sir!" put in Christine. "We'd like to come, sir——"

"Then you must come!" said Mr. Foxe briskly. "Surely you can let the football rest for once—you have football two or three times a week—but it is not often that you get the chance of coming out with me. Is this football match a recognised fixture?"

"Not—not exactly, sir," said Christine. "But—but the Ancient House fellows wanted a game, and we said that we'd get a team up——"

"Oh, then it is quite all right," interrupted the House Master. "There will be plenty of other boys to play in this football match. I am quite sure that the team can do quite excellently without your services, my boys. I want you to come with me—I intend to give you a treat. And don't forget—I stand all the expenses. I am going to give you a really enjoyable afternoon."

Bob Christine nearly groaned.

"It's awfully good of you, sir," he managed to say, with an effort.

"Frightfully decent!" said Yorke and Talmadge, in hollow tones.

They had done their best, but there was nothing else for it. They would be compelled to accompany Mr. Smale Foxe on this afternoon's "enjoyment." But all the juniors felt as though they had been sentenced to an afternoon of detention. Probably they would have preferred to remain in the class-room, doing lines! They felt that they were being treated very unjustly. But, of course, they couldn't dare to even hint at this.

"Now, hurry indoors and get your overcoats and hats on," said Mr. Foxe briskly. "We shall just be able to catch the early afternoon train if you hurry.

We don't want to walk all the way, do we?"

The juniors hurried indoors, and went to the cloakroom. There they gazed at one another.

"Rotten!" grunted Christine. "Why can't the ass go by himself? Absolutely mucked up the afternoon—that's what he's done! Just as if we want to go out on the spree with a giddy House Master!"

"Oh, I expect he'll take us up and down the High Street, show us the shops, and then trot us into a giddy restaurant—treat us to a cup of tea and a bun! That's about Foxe's mark!"

"Well, we can't get out of it, can we?" inquired Ernest Lawrence. "I suppose we must make the best of a bad job. I'm very disappointed myself, because I wanted to play in that football match."

All four juniors were feeling disgusted, and when they got out into the Triangle again they found Mr. Foxe waiting for them. Christine did not even have an opportunity of seeing me—to explain that he was compelled to abandon the football match. However, he needn't have worried—because when it was found that Christine and Co. had mysteriously disappeared, other juniors were forthcoming. So the match took place after all.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate quartette were going down the lane with Mr. Foxe, en route for the station. They were just in time to catch the local train to Bannington. And when they found themselves in a third-class smoking compartment, they felt that the game was really up. They were in for it now—there was no doubt about it.

Mr. Foxe produced a silver cigarette case, and opened it. He selected a cigarette, lit it, and then passed the case to the juniors. Christine gave a start as he saw the cigarette in front of him. Then he grinned.

"No thanks, sir," he said with a chuckle.

He naturally assumed—as the other juniors also assumed—that Mr. Foxe was attempting to be humorous.

"I'm not joking, my boy!" said Mr. Foxe. "Come along—have a cigarette—have one each. There's nobody to see, except me. And I shall not object."

"But—but——" gasped Christine. "You—you don't mean——"

"Of course I mean it!" said Mr. Foxe. "You've got to understand, my lad, that we are just a little party together—we are away from all other eyes. So why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves? I want you to regard me as one of your own set—not as your House Master. I don't believe in formalities on a half-holiday. Come along—light your cigarettes, and enjoy them."

"Great pip!" muttered Yorke, under his breath.

"My only topper!" murmured Talmadge.

Bob Christine shook his head, his eyes flashing with scorn.

"If you don't mind, sir, we'd rather not smoke," he said, with a note of contempt in his voice. "It's very kind of you to give us the chance—but we're not that sort. We don't smoke at all. We think it's a rotten habit for boys!"

Mr. Smale Foxe burst into a laugh.

"Come, come! You cannot tell me that!" he chuckled. "I know boys well enough—and I know that they enjoy a sly smoke now and again. Don't be shy—help yourselves."

"We don't smoke, sir," interrupted Christine. "I don't suppose you'll believe it, but it's the truth. Some juniors may think it rather clever to smoke, but we don't. We think it's a rotten habit."

Mr. Foxe shrugged his shoulders, and put his cigarette case away.

"Well, I'm not going to press you," he said lightly. "I wasn't aware that I had such good little boys to deal with. I am really afraid that you are self-conscious, and that you don't like to let yourselves go in my presence." Christine and Co., as a matter of fact, were feeling rather uncomfortable—and so was Lawrence. They did not like this kind of thing. And they were amazed. They were staggered that their House Master should even urge them to smoke. It was really the most astounding thing that could have happened. And Mr. Smale Foxe was certainly the limit in House Masters.

All the juniors were relieved when Bannington was reached. They passed out of the station, and very soon found themselves in the town.

They wondered what kind of amusement Mr. Foxe would treat them to. There was not much in Bannington on a Wednesday afternoon. There was a music-hall in the town—a very second-

rate place—and the boys never went there. In the afternoon there was not even a performance, in any case. The only other place of amusement was the cinema. And this place was considered to be out of bounds.

Towards the end of the previous term there had been a lot of trouble with this cinema and its proprietor—Mr. Stanley Webb. But Mr. Webb had now left, and he was spending a quiet time in a criminal lunatic asylum.

Meanwhile, a new cinema was being built—a magnificent super-palace—right in the middle of the High Street, on the site of the old Bannington Grange. This was being done by Mr. Isaac Levi—the enterprising father of Solomon Levi, the Jewish boy in the Remove.

As Mr. Foxe went down the High Street, accompanied by the four juniors, they soon came within sight of the new building. Erection had already started, and the place was already more than half up. Before many weeks had elapsed, according to Mr. Levi's plans, the picture theatre would be complete and ready for the public.

A big army of workmen was engaged upon the task, and they simply swarmed over the building, in large numbers, working hard. The enterprise was going forward at full speed.

"It won't be long before we shall have a ripping picture palace in Bannington," remarked Christine, as he watched the activity. "It'll be first-class to come here and enjoy the pictures."

"We don't want to see any pictures!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe. "I rather fancy something more exciting, personally. We'll walk along, boys, until we come to the outskirts of the town. It is quite pleasant now, and there is no reason why we should not enjoy ourselves thoroughly."

Mr. Foxe spoke as though they were enjoying themselves to a certain extent already. The juniors did not agree with this view. The House Master had already astonished them in the train—but he was going to astonish them still more before long.

They wandered out of Bannington along the road which led towards Helmsford. It was very quiet and peaceful out here, there being practically no traffic, and there were plenty of trees and open spaces.

They had not proceeded very far when they came to a neat little public-house which stood just back from the road, with a wide gravel stretch in front of it. It was a picturesque building, with a swinging sign outside, announcing to all and sundry that the house was known as the "Fox and Hounds." The House Master smiled as he observed that sign.

"Quite appropriate," he observed smoothly. "The Fox and Hounds, boys! I am the Fox, and you—No, I do not wish to insult you!"

He chuckled, and led the way towards the saloon bar of the public-house. Christine and Co., and Lawrence, were frankly dismayed. Was it possible that Mr. Foxe was about to enter this public-house? He surely knew that all public-houses were out of bounds for St. Frank's juniors. Not only that, but if any boy happened to be caught in such an establishment, it would certainly mean a flogging, and, possibly, expulsion. It all depended upon which public-house it was.

And yet Mr. Foxe was about to enter this place. Christine looked alarmed. Was it possible that the House Master did not know the rules and regulations of St. Frank's? He was a new-comer, certainly, but he surely knew better than this.

Christine pulled at his arm, just before they arrived at the door.

"Half a minute, sir," said Bob.

"Well, my boy, what is it?" inquired Mr. Foxe, turning.

"We—we mustn't go in there, sir," said Christine. "It's—it's against the rules, you know! All public-houses are out of bounds——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Foxe pleasantly. "We don't take any notice of those rules my lad! Who is there to see us, anyway? You may consider yourselves quite safe, since you are with me. Have no fear, boys—come along inside—and partake of a drink!"

And, before the juniors could say anything further, Mr. Foxe had entered the saloon bar. The juniors followed him in a very astonished condition. How could they refuse him—he was the House Master. And yet they knew well enough that this was wrong—and if the Head got to know of it, there would be ructions.

"Well, boys, what are you going to have?" inquired Mr. Foxe genially. "I

think I will partake of a whisky and soda. I should advise you boys to do the same—it is a most excellent drink."

"Whisky, sir!" gasped Talmadge. "But—but we mustn't have that!"

"Why not?"

"It—it's intoxicating, sir——"

"What if it is—it does you no harm!" said the House Master. "Come a'long—I will order five whiskies, including a double for myself——"

"No thanks, sir—we'd rather not!" put in Christine bluntly. "We'll all drink lemonade, or ginger beer. Nothing stronger!"

"Yes, that's it," said Lawrence. "I think I'd prefer lemonade, thank you."

Mr. Foxe did his utmost to persuade the boys to partake of whisky. But they were steadfast—they would not budge. They were more and more amazed. For a House Master to invite them to smoke was extraordinary enough—but for him to order whisky and soda for them was simply staggering. It was beyond their understanding. Entering the public-house was bad enough, but whisky——!

The juniors were heartily glad when they had got outside, and were once more upon the road. But they had no uneasy feelings. Even if the landlord of the public-house informed the Head of what had taken place, the boys would not suffer. For they had an excellent defence—they had been taken into the place by their own House Master. It was Mr. Foxe who would get called over the coals—not Christine and Co.

"Ah, I feel much better now, boys," said Mr. Foxe pleasantly. "A good whisky has a wonderful effect upon a man. It was very silly of you to drink that lemonade—it is gassy and most unpleasant. You would have found the whisky far more palatable."

The juniors hardly knew what to say, so they did not answer at all. And, presently, the little party came within sight of a tent, which was erected just within a field on the left hand side. A crowd of rough-looking men and youths stood about the tent, and another man, with a beery-looking countenance, was shouting, evidently inviting people to enter.

Christine and Co. knew what the place was at once.

It was a low-class boxing-booth, and a roughly painted board announced to the general public that the proprietor

was named Mr. Jake Gubbin. It was Mr. Jake Gubbin who was shouting, and he looked exactly what he was, every inch of him—an ex-pugilist of a low type.

"Now, gents, roll up!" Mr. Gubbin was shouting. "Only a tanner a time, and I can promise you a jolly good show. You always see good boxing in this 'ere booth of mine. First class matches, and nothing else. I've got a star man working wiv' me just now—'Lightning left Ned.' He's a regular terror, and he's worth yer money, without anybody else at all! Come along—a tanner a time!"

Christine and Co. wanted to hurry past, for they certainly had not the slightest inclination to enter this disreputable place. But Mr. Foxe halted, and smiled at the boys.

"Come along, youngsters!" he exclaimed. "This promises to be rather entertaining—eh?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Christine. "You—you don't mean to say that we're going in there, sir?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Foxe. "It is a public place of entertainment, and we have as much right there as anybody else, providing we pay our entrance-fees. Boxing is a manly sport, and it is always interesting to watch."

"But—but not boxing of this kind, sir!" protested Talmadge.

Mr. Foxe smiled more broadly than ever.

"But, my dear boys, why should you object?" he asked. "You seem to forget that I am with you, and that protects you completely. There is no danger while I, your Housemaster—"

"But—but it doesn't seem right, sir!" broke in Lawrence. "I know what these places are. We shall only see a brutal exhibition. It's not real boxing. I don't think we ought to go in, sir."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Foxe. "Come along!"

He led the way towards the entrance, and the rough crowd of men who were standing about looked at him rather astonished. The boys hung back only for a moment or two. They could not very well offend Mr. Foxe, for they knew that he could make things extremely unpleasant for them in the school, not only on this one day, but for weeks.

And so, after that short hesitation, they followed Mr. Foxe to the entrance, and found that he had paid for them. They all entered the boxing-booth, and picked their way down the forms right to the front. Mr. Foxe sat himself down upon a plank, and the juniors sat beside him. They felt most uncomfortable. All round, on every side, there were roughs—men and youths with chokers round their necks, many of them smoking strong pipes, and the whole place was filled with a most unpleasant odour. There are boxing-booths and boxing-booths; this one seemed to be one of the worst variety.

Certainly if the Head had seen these juniors there, there would have been a terrific row. Caught there alone, it would have meant instant expulsion from St. Frank's; but if they were caught in the company of Mr. Foxe, it would certainly mean that the Housemaster's duties at the school would terminate with considerable abruptness. But Mr. Foxe did not seem to fear that he would be exposed to the Head. It was quite probable that he would deny everything if any of the boys told the truth; and the story sounded so extraordinary that it was very doubtful if the Head would believe it. So Mr. Foxe was quite on the safe side.

But why was he doing this? Why was he leading these juniors into such places, and why was he attempting to get them into bad habits? It was very astonishing, and Christine and Co. could not understand the riddle.

They had not got much time for thought, because the "show" commenced almost at once. Mr. Jake Gubbin appeared in the ring, and he addressed the audience, after introducing his champion boxer—"Lightning Left" Ned. This individual was a beefy-looking young man, not particularly big, but extremely brutal in appearance. Indeed, he looked a young hooligan, and the juniors were not at all impressed.

"Now, gents, I'm going to make you a good offer!" said Mr. Gubbin. "I've just introduced to you a young feller wot has got a great future afore him. Mark my words, it won't be many months afore Ned will be in London, and I'll guarantee that within a couple o' years he'll be the champion of England!"

"I don't think!" muttered Lawrence, under his breath.

"You're now goin' to see a wonderful exhibition of boxing," went on Mr. Gubbin. "I'm a sportsman—I reckon everybody knows that—and I'll give the sum of twenty quid—twenty real currency notes—to the feller wot can knock out Ned in eight rounds. Mind yer, it's a stipulation that nobody is to come forward to beat Ned unless he's about the same weight. I don't mind a stone or two over, but not more. Now, who's coming forward? Twenty quid, don't forget—twenty quid for the feller who can box Ned out in eight rounds!"

Nobody took advantage of this magnificent offer. This was not at all surprising, for Ned looked a formidable customer to tackle. He was a professional "bruiser," and it was almost certain that he would not be content to stick to fair tactics. And it was equally certain that Mr. Gubbin had not made the offer until he had had a good look over the audience.

"Come along, one of you!" said Mr. Gubbin. "There ain't nothing to be afraid of. Ned won't hurt you if he finds you ain't equal to 'im. It's a box with the gloves on, don't forget. What about you, sir, or them boys? Don't you feel inclined to take a chance? There's twenty quid to think about, don't forget!"

Mr. Foxe shook his head and smiled.

"Thanks very much for the offer," he said, "but I don't fancy we can equal Mr. Ned's capabilities. We would much prefer to sit here and watch."

"Lightning Left!" Ned uttered a snort.

"This 'ere ain't no good, boss!" he exclaimed, in a rough voice. "We're only wasting time. There ain't a man there wot I couldn't knock out with one blow! And as for this cove in front here, I could swing him over with my little finger!"

Mr. Foxe did not appear to be very upset by this remark.

"And them boys," went on Ned. "Wot are they doing in here? We don't want 'em, boss. They ain't our sort. For two pins I'd get hold of the lot and chuck 'em all out!"

Christine jumped to his feet.

"You'd better come and try it on, then!" he said warmly. "I know your sort—you're all bluster and brag. If

you attempt to lay fingers on us, you rotter, we'll jolly soon deal with you!"

"Ho, yus!" said Ned sneeringly. "Four to one—that's just about your mark——"

"It's what you said yourself!" snapped Christine. "You said that you'd knock the four of us out, so you'd better try!"

"If you ain't blooming careful, I'll give you a swipe across the jaw!" roared Ned, losing his temper. "A lot of stuck-up prigs, that's what you are! You ain't wanted in 'ere, do yer 'ere? Clear out—clear out, afore I chuck you out!"

"Now, Ned—now! Keep your temper!" put in Mr. Gubbins. "Them young gents has paid their money——"

"I don't care what they've paid!" growled Ned. "I'm not going to stand here and be insulted! Just give me the word and out they go!"

"Rats!" said Christine. "You couldn't throw us out if you tried! And if you're not careful, we'll get up in the ring and pitch you out!"

"I'd like to see one of yer do it, that's all!" sneered the boxer.

"All right! I'll have a try, if you like!" said Lawrence, jumping to his feet. "I'll deal with you, my friend!"

The audience in the booth simply roared with laughter; and it certainly sounded rather funny, for this school-boy to talk of dealing with "Lightning Left" Ned.

Mr. Foxe calmed the boys down, and the proprietor lost no time in commencing the first bout. He wished to avoid all unpleasantness, and there was nothing to be gained by causing a row.

So the entertainment commenced. It was a very poor affair from start to finish. It merely consisted of several brutal bouts, and the juniors were heartily glad when they emerged into the open air just about an hour later. They felt completely sick of the whole place, and were determined to get away from Mr. Foxe as soon as they could.

And as they left the field and once more emerged upon the road, Bob Christine saw that Lawrence was looking very keen—and very thoughtful. The new junior seemed to have something on his mind.

Bob Christine would have been extremely startled if he could have known what that something was!

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW BOY'S DECISION!

MR. SMALE FOXE walked along with the boys for some little way without speaking. Then he called a halt, and faced the juniors.

"Now, look here, boys! I don't want you to say anything about our little adventures of this afternoon!" he exclaimed. "There is no reason why you should talk, and no reason why you should get into trouble. Because, if you do talk, it's quite likely that trouble will follow."

"I don't quite see that, sir," said Christine. "We've done nothing wrong of our own accord. You took us into the public-house, and you took us into the boxing-booth. We've got a perfect excuse——"

"Very well, we won't argue about the matter," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "You will do as you like, of course; I cannot seal your mouths. But it will be advisable, I can assure you, if you do not talk."

And very shortly afterwards Mr. Foxe left the boys and went his own way.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Christine, when they found themselves alone.

"He's the giddy limit! Pubs and boxing-booths! Why, if we'd been spotted in one of those places it would have meant the sack!"

"Not with Mr. Foxe," said Yorke. "I don't see how we can get into any trouble, in any case. But what kind of a Housemaster does he call himself—to take us into pubs, and all that kind of thing? It's absolutely amazing!"

"Well, I think we're safe enough," said Lawrence. "If anything does come to the Head's ears, we have got our case quite clear. We were taken by Mr. Foxe, and we couldn't help ourselves. He will get into trouble, not us!"

The other juniors were of the same opinion, and so they were not worried. But when they got back to St. Frank's, just before teatime, they did not consider they had spent a very enjoyable afternoon. The football match on Little-side was not yet over, so Christine and Co. lost no time in making their way there.

Ernest Lawrence, on the other hand, went straight to his study in the College

House. He shut himself in, and sank down in the one easy-chair it possessed. And there was that same thoughtful expression upon his open face. It was obvious that Lawrence had something of a rather deep nature in his mind.

And I found Lawrence in this abstracted mood when I entered his study very shortly afterwards. The new boy was laying back in his easy-chair, with a dreamy expression in his eyes. Just for a moment he did not notice me as I stood in the doorway. Then he started, half jumped up, and flushed.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "I—I did not know you were there, Nipper. Come in; you're quite welcome!"

"Thanks!" I said. "I just want a word with you while things are fairly quiet, Lawrence. The match is over, and it may interest you to know that your side was whacked by two clear goals."

Lawrence smiled.

"Oh, well, it was only a scratch game," he said, "and three of the best men were missing from the team! I expect Christine told you how we were hauled off to Bannington by Mr. Foxe?"

I nodded.

"Yes," I replied. "Mr. Foxe appears to be a genial kind of gentleman, although Christine didn't explain what he did with you all the afternoon. I just looked in, Lawrence, to congratulate you upon the wonderful exhibition of boxing you put up when you knocked Grayson out."

Lawrence shook his head.

"Oh, there was nothing particularly clever in that!" he protested. "Grayson doesn't know how to fight at all. He's got plenty of muscle and plenty of strength, but he doesn't use it properly. It required very little skill to get the better of Grayson."

"It required pluck, too," I said, "and we're all proud of the way you knocked that bully out, Lawrence. How did you learn all this science? I pride myself that I am fairly decent at boxing, but I'm sure that you could give me more than a few tips. Didn't you say that your father taught you?"

"Yes," replied Lawrence. "My father is the only trainer I ever had."

"He must know a good bit about boxing, then," I remarked. "I take off my hat to your father!"

Lawrence smiled.

"I'd like you to meet him, Nipper,"

he said quietly. "It's rather decent of you to come here and have a chat with me. None of the fellows in my own House have done that, and I felt a bit lonely. I hope I'm not keeping you —"

"Of course you're not, you ass!" I interrupted. "I came here for a chat."

I could see that Lawrence was lonely, and he was grateful to me for having come.

It was rather thoughtless of Christine and Co. to have left the new boy to himself for so long, without taking any notice of him. It would probably be different now, now that Lawrence had distinguished himself so notably. And, somehow or other, he seemed to take to me. There was a very serious expression on his face when he continued.

"You see, my father is Mr. Robert Ernest Lawrence," he said. "It's a good many years since he was in the ring, but I'm not ashamed to tell you, Nipper, that at one time of day my father was a professional boxer—a gentleman boxer, I mean."

"Ah, that explains it!" I smiled.

"I can tell you this, without any fear of it being spread about," went on Lawrence. "I know I can trust you, Nipper. There's nothing dishonourable about it, or anything of that kind, but quite a number of the fellows here would be only too glad to seize upon an opportunity to sneer at me. And they might sneer if they discovered that my father used to be a professional boxer. They don't know him, and you don't know him. He's one of the best dads a boy could possibly have! He's a brick!"

I looked rather thoughtful.

"You're quite right in what you say, Lawrence," I said slowly. "There are a certain number of fellows at St. Frank's here who would look down upon you and sneer if they got to know that your father used to be a professional boxer."

"But—but it doesn't make any difference to you, does it?" inquired Lawrence quickly.

"Not the slightest, old son!" I replied cheerfully. "I don't think I'm a snob. And your father is just as likely to be a good, honourable man as anybody else. I'm a plain chap, though, and I speak plainly. I can't quite understand how it is that you should be sent to St. Frank's, Lawrence. I'm not inquisitive,

and I'm not asking you to explain anything."

"Oh, that's all right!" interrupted Lawrence. "You see, my father left the boxing-ring for good about twelve years ago, when I was quite a little mite. I think he had saved up a good bit by then, and he bought a business. It was a large ironmongery store in Kensington. My dad sunk all his money in this, and things prospered with him, and my dad decided that he would send me to a decent school—that he would bring me up properly and try to make me a gentleman. That was his idea. So all the plans were made, and I was sent to a good preparatory school, and then, at the beginning of this term, I came to St. Frank's."

"But your father didn't neglect to teach you the noble art of self-defence," I smiled.

"Oh, no!" said Lawrence. "Father taught me boxing ever since I was a little kid. We've got a private gymnasium at home, and boxing is father's recreation—his chief pastime, in fact, even now. He took a great pride in me—goodness knows what for!—and he didn't want me to become a professional boxer."

"I reckon you'd cause a sensation, if you really went into it properly!" I smiled. "You're a wonder, Lawrence! The sport has lost a marvellous champion in you."

Lawrence shook his head.

"Oh, don't rot!" he said modestly. "I'm nothing particular—and everything I know is because dad taught me."

He looked down at his clothing somewhat shamefacedly.

"I—I dare say you've noticed that I'm—I'm shabby?" he went on, in a low voice.

"It's none of my business——" I began.

"I know it isn't, but I'm telling you this myself," said Lawrence. "That row with Grayson was because he sneered at my clothing. It's not my fault, Nipper. You see, my father had all his money in Scarbrook's Bank, and, as you know, that went smash just six months ago. It was a terrible blow to dad—he lost everything."

"Hard lines!" I said sympathetically.

"Somehow or other, father managed to keep the business going, but he's terribly in debt, and he's struggling along,

fighting every inch of his way," said Lawrence. "He wants money all the time—every penny he can obtain. And I don't suppose I should ever have come to St. Frank's, only the first term's fees were paid, and dad said that I might as well come. I don't know whether I shall be here for another term—I hope I shall be, but if the dad isn't in any better position, I sha'n't let him spend a penny. He—he couldn't afford to get me a new rig-out before I came, and—and I had to make do on what I had. I—I hope I don't look very conspicuous!"

I smiled.

"My dear chap, nobody takes any notice of that sort of thing here, except the snobs and cads," I exclaimed. "You mustn't take any notice of Grayson, and fellows of his calibre. They're rotters—every one of them. I'm glad you've told me this, Lawrence, because it makes things better for you. You can trust me—I sha'n't say a word to anybody, unless you want me to. And you mustn't worry—your father seems to be the kind of man who will pull round, if he's given time. Everything will come out all right in the end!"

Lawrence looked at me with a grateful expression in his eyes.

"It's jolly decent of you to say this, Nipper!" he exclaimed quietly. "You've cheered me up wonderfully, and I hardly know what to say."

"That's all right!" I put in. "Don't say anything, my son. Your position at St. Frank's is much better than it was yesterday. Your exhibition of boxing prowess has put you into a fine position in the Remove. You won't find yourself being chipped and bullied and sneered at. A fellow who can fight like you can is generally highly respected!"

Ernest Lawrence smiled.

"I—I was going to tell you something, Nipper," he said; "in fact, I wanted to—to ask your advice. I hope you won't think it a cheek on my part——"

Lawrence hesitated, and seemed to be uncertain whether he should continue or not. And just at that moment the matter was decided for him. For there was a clatter of footsteps in the passage, and the door of Study T opened, and Christine and Talmadge and Yorke marched in.

"Hallo! A giddy Fossil!" exclaimed

Bob Christine. "What are you doing here, Nipper? Don't you know that you're in the enemy's domain? If you ain't careful, my son, you'll get scragged——"

"Oh, draw it mild!" I interrupted. "I came over here to have a word with Lawrence about his boxing. I'm allowed to do that, I suppose?"

Christine grinned.

"All right—we'll let you off this time!" he said cheerfully. "I'd like to congratulate Lawrence, too. My son, it was a wonderful exhibition!" he went on, addressing the new boy. "We're proud to have you in the Remove, and——"

"Oh, do dry up!" protested Lawrence. "You've said all this before, Christine. There was nothing much in what I did——"

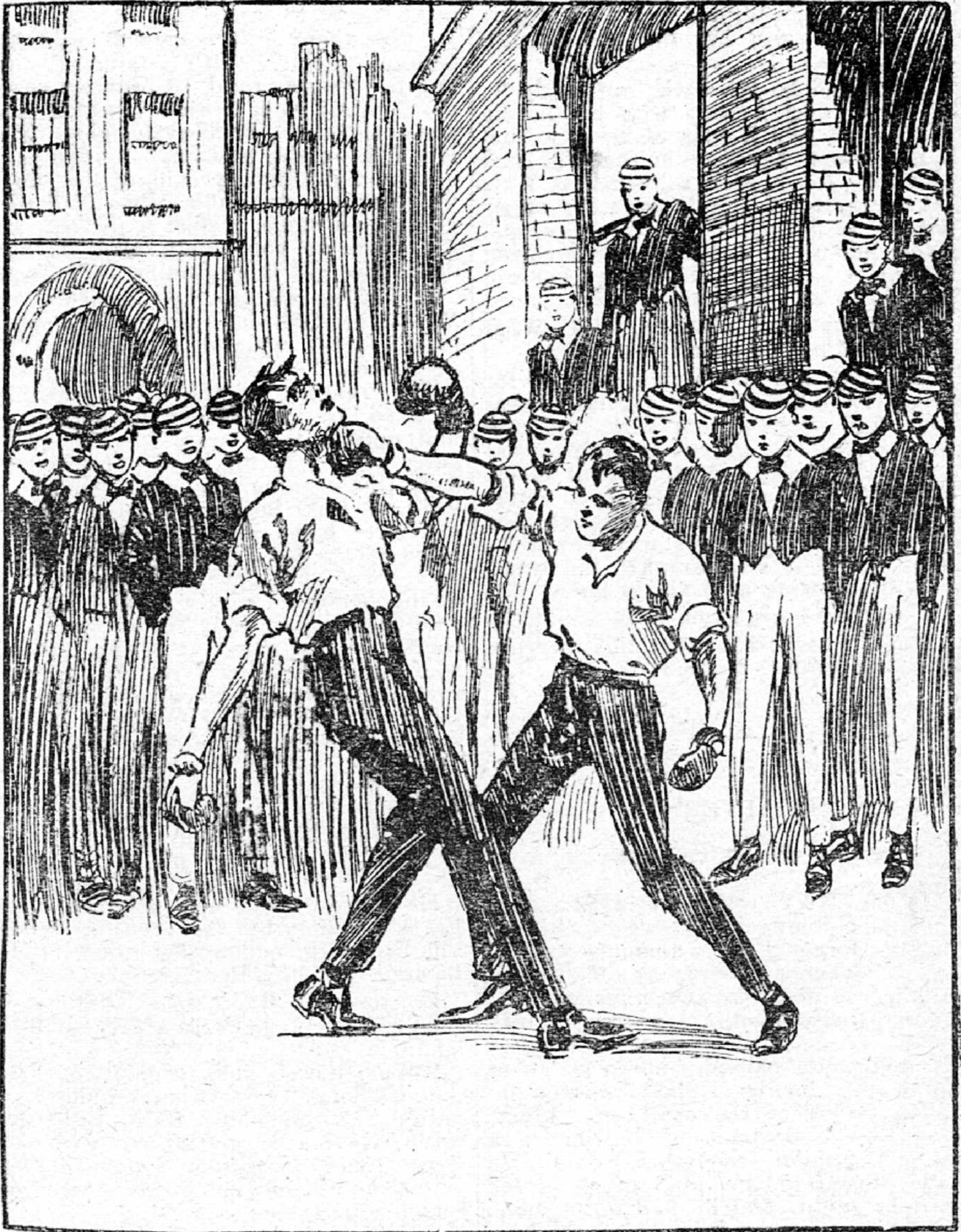
I thought it just as well that I should retire, so I gracefully took my departure, leaving Christine and Co. with the new boy. I knew that Lawrence had wanted to say something to me—something further regarding his father; but he could not very well talk then, after Christine and Co. had butted in. So I decided to leave it until a more opportune moment, when we should meet in the Triangle, perhaps.

It was not long before Christine and Co. took their departure from Study T, and once more Lawrence was left to himself. He sat for some little time in his easy chair, and there was a very thoughtful expression upon his good-looking, open face.

Presently he got up from the chair, and paced up and down the study. There was a thoughtful expression on his brow still, and he was rather puzzled. He seemed to be uncertain—he did not know precisely what to do. However, at last he came to a decision—a very momentous decision, it appeared later.

"Yes," he muttered resolutely, "I'll do it! Why shouldn't I? There's no disgrace in it—and every penny counts. And nobody will know—nobody at St. Frank's. Besides, I needn't say who I am. By gum, I've got a pretty good idea!"

Lawrence was keener than ever, and presently he left the study and went along to the domestic quarters of the building. It did not take him long to find the House matron, and from her he managed to obtain a needle and some cotton, to say nothing of an old piece



Instead of playing with his opponent, Lawrence went to work with a will. Bang! Crash! Flap! Three—four—five blows rained upon the bully's face.

of black silk, an oddment which the matron managed to find. Lawrence explained that he wanted it for some purpose of his own, but did not go into details.

And when he got back into Study T, he set to work briskly with the needle and cotton and a pair of scissors, and by the time he had finished he had fashioned for himself a very neat little silk mask, fitted closely over the upper portion of his face. It was very well made, and when Lawrence was wearing this black silk mask it was almost impossible to recognise him.

But why had he done this? What could that mask be for?

Lawrence did not remain indoors for long after tea. While the Triangle was quiet and deserted and dark, the new boy stepped out, attired in his overcoat and a tweed cap. And, without allowing himself to be seen, he slipped across the Triangle, went out through the gateway, and made his way down the lane. He left St. Frank's in secret, without allowing anybody to know.

What could his game be?

Where was he off to, in this unobtrusive, surreptitious fashion?

CHAPTER IV.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE!

"**T**WENTY quid!" said Mr. Jake Gubbin impressively. "Don't forget the amount, gents. There's twenty quid waitin' for the fust man that comes forward and beats my champion, 'Lightning Left Ned!'"

Mr. Gubbin paused, and looked over the boxing booth. Nobody seemed inclined to accept the challenge. Lightning Left Ned stood in the ring in a careless fashion, somewhat bored. He had listened to this kind of thing for many a night, and he had quite made up his mind that nobody would ever come forward.

"It's an open challenge, don't forget!" went on Mr. Gubbin. "Anybody can come forward, and they'll be treated fair. Naturally, there are one or two stipulations——"

"I thought there was a bloomin' catch in it!" came a voice from the audience.

"No, there isn't a catch!" said Mr. Gubbin quickly. "It's a fair challenge, this is. Twenty quid, to beat my champion. Mind you, I ain't acceptin' professional boxers or heavyweights. Ned is a lightweight, and anybody can come up and fight him, providing he don't weigh over a stone more than Ned. I'll give you a stone, just as a present, and it'll prove to you, gents, what a confidence I've got in Lightning Left Ned!"

It was the evening "performance" at Mr. Jake Gubbin's booth. The place looked more squalid and disreputable than ever.

The interior of the booth was illuminated by flaring, smelly oil lamps, and outside there were two or three flares blazing in the wind. It was very dark this evening, and very chilly. In spite of this, however, quite a good audience had collected—good in the sense of numbers. Otherwise, the audience was perhaps questionable. It mainly consisted of rough and undesirable characters; but there were, of course, several members of the audience who were of a better type. In the front row, for example, sat a man who was fairly well dressed, and who looked rather out of place. And on that same front row, but at the very end, sat a slight form—the figure of a boy. He was attired in a shabby Norfolk suit, underneath his overcoat, and a tweed cap—the latter being pulled well over his eyes.

He certainly did not look like a St. Frank's junior; but, as a matter of fact, this boy was none other than Ernest Lawrence, of the Remove.

Lawrence had a specific object in coming once again to Mr. Gubbin's booth.

"Well, there's nobody goin' to accept the challenge for twenty quid?" inquired Mr. Gubbin, from the ring. "We'd better be gettin' on with the show, gents. Lightning Left will show you some of his fancy work with his sparring partners——"

"Hold on!" exclaimed a clear voice—a voice which trembled slightly. "I will accept the challenge!"

Everybody stared, including Mr. Jake Gubbin. The proprietor of the booth moved a rank cigar from between his teeth, and glared at the end of the front

row. He saw a youthful figure standing upright there—a boy of about fifteen. The lad was fingering his cap, and—and this was the most remarkable thing of all—the other part of his face was completely concealed by a close-fitting black silk mask!

"Damn my skin!" exclaimed Mr. Gubbin. "Wot's this 'ere? Wot's the game, youngster?"

"You have just made a challenge for the sum of twenty pounds!" said Lawrence quietly. "I am willing to try my skill against Lightning Left Ned. If I win, I shall expect the sum of twenty pounds."

"Oh, you'll get the twenty quid all right, if you win!" said Mr. Gubbin, with a grin. "But what's the idea, kid? Is this a joke?"

"No: I am quite serious."

"Yah! Sit down!" yelled one of the audience. "We don't want none o' these bloomin' games!"

"Chuck the kid out!"

"'Old on!" said Mr. Gubbin. "I want to see what this thing is—I want to find out whether the kid is genuine or not. Fust of all, what's the idea of wearin' that there mask?"

Lawrence stepped forward, until he was near the ropes.

"I am willing to fight Lightning Left Ned!" he said quietly. "And I shall do my utmost to beat him. I do not wish to be known, and so I am wearing this mask. It is open to me to be incognito, I suppose?"

"It's open to you to be which?" asked Mr. Gubbin, staring.

"Well, I don't want to be recognised," explained Lawrence. "This challenge of yours is open to everybody, and I want to see what I can do."

Mr. Gubbin laughed.

"Young man, I can see that you ain't a professional—and I don't reckon you're a stone heavier than Ned," he said pleasantly. "I reckon you're about two stone lighter, as a matter of fact. But I shouldn't advise you to be foolish, kid. You'll only get floored in the fust round—and it won't do you no good. Ned's left is a terror—he brings it round like lightning, and he has his man over afore you could say mice!"

"I'm willing to take the risk," said Lawrence quietly.

"Nobody ain't asked me anythin'!" said Ned, with a sneer. "I ain't sure

that I'm goin' to bemean myself by boxing with a kid like this. It won't be no match at all—it'll be a farce! I'll have him flat on his back within ten seconds. And he'll be so knocked out that he won't know where he is for half an hour!"

Mr. Gubbin turned to his champion.

"There ain't no call for you to object. Ned!" he said gruffly. "If this kid likes to act the fool, it's his business. Your job is to show him the horror of his ways. Well, come along, young man, if you're so set on it. It won't do you no harm to have a good lesson!"

"Thank you!" said Lawrence calmly.

He stepped up into the ring, and proceeded to shed his overcoat and Norfolk jacket. His collar and tie followed, then he stood in the ring, attired only in his nether garments and his shirt.

The audience by this time was in quite a good humour, and they wanted to see something rather funny. There was much comment and a good deal of laughter. The difference between the two figures in the ring was rather astonishing.

The comparison, indeed, was an unhappy one. Lawrence looked alarmingly frail. His appearance was very boyish, and his skin was fresh and clear, and his limbs clean.

Ned, on the other hand, was big and burly and bairy. He was dark, and it seemed as though he would be able to defeat his frail opponent in less than ten seconds.

But it would be a case of brains against brawn. Lawrence knew well enough that Ned had very little science. Lawrence had witnessed the performance in the afternoon, and he had seen nothing but an exhibition of slogging. Lightning Left Ned possessed a couple of fists which were like ham. One blow would be sufficient to put an opponent to sleep, and Lawrence knew well enough that he would have to steer clear of those fists if he wanted to win.

There was practically no time wasted on preliminaries. The patrons of Mr. Gubbin's boxing booth were not patient gentlemen, and they did not feel inclined to wait long. All they wanted to see was the fight—with as much gore as possible. And they were rather keen to see this ridiculous young fellow wiped out of existence for his errors. At the same time, there were quite a good few

members of the audience who admired the lad for his pluck. There were some sportsmen even among these low types.

Lawrence had no difficulty in obtaining two seconds; there were quite a lot of volunteers, in fact. And as he sat in his corner of the ring, waiting for the gong to sound, the boy was quite calm and collected. He knew that he had a very serious task in front of him, and also that all the odds were against him. But he was game, he was willing to make the attempt, for there was a prize of twenty pounds to be won, and that prize would be valuable. For Lawrence was determined to win it, if possible, and to send every penny of it to his father. It was a noble effort on the junior's part, and he would be worthy of the highest praise if he won. All his natural instincts were against this affair—he hated the booth, and he detested himself for being there. But it was for his father's sake, and he did not mind.

The gong sounded, cracked and harsh. Lightning Left Ned rose out of his chair, and advanced with outstretched glove. But he had hardly touched Lawrence's before he side-stepped, and then lunged forward with all his strength.

But Lawrence was prepared for this. He had been expecting something of the kind, and he dodged the blow with the greatest of ease. That swing of Ned's carried him forward, and he almost went off his feet. He probably would have staggered, only he was prevented from doing so by a considerate action on Lawrence's part. The junior assisted Ned to regain his balance by giving him a straight punch between the eyes, which brought him up with a sudden jarring jerk.

"By thunder!" muttered Mr. Gubbin, who was watching closely.

Lightning Left was more surprised than hurt. He could take heavy blows without noticing them much—he was all brawn and muscle. But that blow between the eyes had shaken him up a bit, and it had told him that he could not afford to be careless. And the fact which surprised him more than anything else was the pressure behind his opponent's punch. He had looked upon the junior as a weakling, but this evidently was not the case. That punch had contained a terrific amount of "ginger."

Ned made up his mind to finish the

fight as quickly as possible—without any fancy work. And so he went charging in like a young elephant. Ned knew—far better than the audience—that this cool young fellow would not be so easily beaten.

Lawrence was not particularly keen upon getting to close quarters. Ned game would be to tire his big opponent out—just as a preliminary.

And so, with this object in view, he used all his knowledge of ring-craft. He ducked, he side-stepped, and he gained the disapproval of the audience. For these men did not know much about science, and they were not anxious to see an exhibition of this sort. They wanted slogging—they wanted an exchange of blows—as many blows as possible. They had come to see gore.

Lawrence knew well enough that he would have to put all he knew into this fight. It was not that Ned knew a great deal. The boxer, in fact, was merely a slogger, and his science was of an elementary type. But it was only necessary for him to get one square blow in, and Lawrence would be knocked flat.

And Lightning Left thought that his chance came just before the end of the round. It seemed to him that Lawrence's guard was too low, and out swung Ned's left. But with amazing judgment, Lawrence jerked his head aside, and the blow went harmlessly over his shoulder. At the same second, Lawrence lashed out with a glorious swing. It struck Ned upon the point of the jaw, and he staggered back, more surprised than hurt.

And just then the round came to an end. Ned was looking rather surprised and puzzled. He had expected that he would defeat his slim opponent in no time. And yet, as a matter of fact, it had been Ned who had received most of the punishment in the first round. Lawrence, to tell the truth, was not even touched.

"Look here, Ned, this won't do!" muttered Mr. Gubbin darkly. "Why don't you floor the kid? It ain't no good playing about! There's twenty quid at stake——"

"Oh, shut it!" snapped Ned. "Ain't I doing my best? It's luck—that's wot it is, guv'nor—just luck. There won't be no third round—you mark my words! I'll have the kid sat on his back and fast asleep afore the

second round is half through! His luck can't last for long!"

"Well, don't you make no mistake about it!" said Mr. Gubbin. "I can't afford to lose twenty quid—"

"You won't lose no twenty quid—you won't lose nothin'!" snapped Ned. "Don't you think I can't knock this kid out?"

The next round started, and it was quite obvious to Mr. Gubbin, and to Lawrence as well, that Ned was now going all out to deliver a smashing blow—a blow which would put an end to the contest.

But Lawrence was already aware of one fact. His opponent was badly poised. His balance was by no means secure, and it could be disturbed without much trouble. And before Ned knew what was happening, Lawrence shuffled about, changing his feet, then he feinted with his right, and sent in a left swing which caught Lightning Left fairly in the ribs.

Thud!

It was not such a severe blow, and if Ned had been perfectly balanced, it would only have caused him a small inconvenience. But the "bruiser" had not been anticipating such an attack, and it took him completely by surprise. He staggered, and then, blundered forward blindly. The next moment the pair had fallen into a clinch, and Lightning Left Ned received a left hook which sent his head back with a terrific jerk.

He staggered away drunkenly.

"Bust my button!" muttered Mr. Gubbin anxiously.

The audience was beginning to appreciate the position. They were seeing, in fact, that this slim, fair boy was not such a duffer, after all. And that he was giving his burly opponent quite a hot time.

"Go it, kid!"

"Keep it up—and you'll win the prize!"

"You've got him beat already, youngster—keep it up!"

Lawrence heard these cries only faintly—all his attention was centred upon the work in hand. He could not afford to relax his vigil for one second—for, during that second, it was quite likely that Ned would seize his opportunity, and get that one blow in which would finish the fight in his favour. Never for a minute did Lawrence allow

his gaze to wander. His wits were on the alert, and he was alive to every opportunity.

By the time the third round commenced, even Mr. Gubbin was beginning to have doubts as to his champion. Ned was being provided with a hard fight—and he had expected a walk over. For this boy in the silk mask to have lasted so long was astonishing enough. And it really seemed that he was game to last for eight or nine rounds. So far he had not been touched. His footwork was so wonderful—his time so complete—that it seemed impossible for Ned to get anywhere near him. His guard was perfection itself.

And now it was noticed that Ned was fighting on the defensive. It was almost pathetic the way he dodged round the ring, attempting to avoid the blows which were showered upon him. Lawrence had seen at once that Ned's body was practically unguarded, and again and again, Lawrence drove hard for the mark.

Lightning Left could not get anywhere thing for a little while, but he shook all over as blow after blow caught him. He fought blindly, lashing out at random. And one of these blind thrusts managed to catch Lawrence on the jaw.

If the boy had received the full force of that blow, he would have gone down with a crash; and he would have laid down until he was counted out. But Lawrence only received the latter portion of the punch—just the sting. And this was quite bad enough. It jarred him considerably, and his teeth and gums were filled with acute agony for a moment or two.

Lightning Left was quick to seize upon this opportunity. He came forward, fiercely and aggressively. But Lawrence swerved, side-stepped, and acted completely on the defensive.

It was the finest piece of work that had ever been seen in Mr. Gubbin's boxing booth.

Lightning Left could not get anywhere near his opponent. It was a wonderful exhibition of defensive boxing.

And sitting in the front row, a well-dressed man looked on with great interest. At first he had only been bored, but then, as the fight proceeded, he became more and more intent, until now—almost into the third round—he

was sitting forward on the bench, gazing intently at the combatants. His eyes were gleaming, and most of his attention was devoted to Ernest Lawrence.

"Wonderful—wonderful!" he muttered. "By thunder! This young fellow is a marvel—a wonder! I have never seen such boxing in my life—with the exception of Jimmy Wilde. This boy bids fair to beat Jimmy at his own game!"

That unexpected blow had put Lawrence on his mettle. He was more careful after that, and he was determined to have his revenge. And abruptly, he changed his tactics. He delivered a left punch which caught Ned squarely upon the jaw. The man's head went back with a jerk and he gasped. And still using his left, Lawrence delivered a perfect hail of left hand blows that enthralled the on-lookers.

Slam!

Crash!

Slam!

Ned was quite bewildered by that hail of left hand blows. He did not know what to do—he dodged, he ducked—all in vain.

And then, without any sign, that he was about to change his tactics, Lawrence stepped forward and put all his force into a hooking right which caught Ned upon the chin. The man went down with a crash which shook the very ground.

"Darn my old hide!" said Mr. Gubbin huskily.

The audience sat there dumb, for a moment. They were amazed—they were staggered. This boy—this slim, frail-looking youth—had managed to send Lightning Left Ned crashing to the floor.

"One—two—three—four—"

Ned was still upon the flat of his back, and he was being urged by a dozen voices to pull himself together. But at the sound of "eight," he made no sign. But then, he raised himself upon his elbow, sat up, and looked about him rather dazedly.

"Get up, you fool!" snapped Mr. Gubbin fiercely. "Get up, hang you!"

A moment later Lightning Left Ned was upon his feet. And he was only just in time, for the referee was about to say "out."

Ned was very dazed, and Lawrence did not see why he should not finish the fight now—if it possibly could be managed.

The St. Frank's junior sent in an upper-cut which would have caused havoc had it landed upon Ned's jaw. But the fellow saw what was coming, and in sheer desperation, he hurled himself forward and clinched.

And he clinched quite close to Lawrence—so close, indeed, that the junior could not get in any powerful blows. There was only one punch which he could deliver, and that was a kidney punch. And Ernest's father had always told the youngster what he thought of the kidney punch. And then, the gong sounded for the end of the round.

"Delightful boxing!" muttered the man in the front row. "The boy is amazingly clean, too! He could have kidney punched then, and the fight would have been over—and the twenty pounds his."

The next round started with the audience in a rather unsettled frame of mind. They did not know which man would win; but a good many bets were made, and most of these bets favoured Lawrence, of the Remove.

The boy's footwork was wonderful. He was far superior to Ned in all the finer points of the sport. He kept his man on the go all the time, without giving him a single breathing space.

It was a wonderful exhibition.

Again and again Ned was pressed back on to the ropes. And at times, Lawrence drove him right round the ring.

The junior brought in an upper-cut that made Lightning Left stagger, and again he tried to clinch. Lawrence, however, was too rapid for him, and he dodged away as Ned was hurling himself forward.

But, even as he dodged, he managed to get in a left hook, and Ned went swaying away to the ropes again.

And then some slogging commenced.

Ned was desperate now, and he simply went at it for all he was worth, taking all the punishment that came to him. He believed that if he could only stand this punishment for a little time, he would be able to deliver a blow which would send Lawrence crashing to the floor. And Lightning Left Ned was quite certain that he had met his

match, and that luck alone would allow him to win.

He cared nothing now—he flung all caution aside, and went into the attack with his head down, and with his shoulders hunched. His arms worked like mill-sails, and he smashed blow after blow in Lawrence's direction.

It was not boxing at all, and Lawrence soon found this out and gave up the task. He clenched his fists, stood his ground, and punched away for all he was worth.

It was a magnificent exhibition. The manner in which Lawrence dodged his opponent's blows was startling. He seemed to know exactly where they were coming, and only a slight movement was necessary in order to evade the thrusts. And all the time he was delivering punches.

At last Ned could stand no more of it. He was almost exhausted, and before long the round would be at an end.

Lawrence stepped away quite unexpectedly. It almost seemed as though he were afraid, and Ned snarled out an exclamation and rushed to the attack. He hurled himself forward—only to meet an upper-cut which was delivered with every morsel of Lawrence's strength.

Thud!

Lightning Left Ned was lifted completely off his feet. He floundered over backwards and lay in the centre of the ring groaning. He was done.

And Ernest Lawrence stood over him, breathing heavily and quivering in every limb. He was feeling the effects of the fight—he was feeling weak and limp, and everything seemed faint and far away.

But the timekeeper was already counting, and Lightning Left Ned did not rise when "out" was spoken. He had been beaten—he had been smashed—by this unknown youngster in the silk mask!

Lawrence of the Remove had won!

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOLBOY LIGHTWEIGHT.

EXACTLY ten minutes later Lawrence was feeling much better. Sponged down, and with his clothing on again, he felt more like himself. Lightning Left Ned,

too, had recovered, and he had vanished—probably feeling that it would not be wise on his part to face the audience just then. And he was feeling rather knocked out, too.

The audience was enthusiastic. Several men had charged forward at the conclusion of the fight. They had seized Lawrence, and they had "chaired" him. And, during that demonstration, the lad's mask had slipped off. But not for long—Lawrence had soon pulled the silk into position again. But during that brief space, a man who was standing at the rear of the booth smiled to himself. And he stepped quietly out, and went away into the darkness.

And now, Ernest Lawrence was ready to take his departure. He was standing near the rope, and Mr. Jake Gubbin was there, too—looking very uncomfortable.

"Yes, kid, you did well," said the proprietor of the booth. "I must admit that you're a wonder!"

"I would like the twenty pounds, please," said Lawrence quietly.

Mr. Gubbin started.

"The twenty quid!" he repeated. "Oh, yes! Fancy me forgetting that! The fact of the matter is, young gent, I ain't very flush, and I was thinking that perhaps five quid——"

"Yah! None o' that!" roared some of the audience.

"Pay up, Gubbin!"

"It was a fair challenge, and the kid has beaten Ned!"

"Pay up, and do it smilin'!"

"I am goin' to pay up!" said Mr. Gubbin, who after all, was something of a sportsman. "It'll make me a bit short, but I shall have to stand that. The kid has won, and he deserves his money. Nobody don't say that Jake Gubbin don't pay up when he loses—just wait here arf-a-minute, young gent, and you shall have the money."

Mr. Gubbin, with a sigh, left the ring and disappeared. But he returned again very shortly afterwards, and in his hand he held twenty crisp currency notes. He counted them out to Lawrence with some show of sensation—so that all the audience could see.

"That's correct, ain't it?" inquired the proprietor.

"Quite correct, thank you," said Lawrence. "I hope everything is all

right, Mr. Gubbin. You made the offer, and I——"

"That's all right, you don't need to say nothin' more," said Mr. Gubbin. "It was a fair hoffer, and it's up to me to pay out. It's the fust time I've paid for twenty years, so I don't reckon I've been so unlucky, arter all! The best thing you can do, young man, is to clear off—and be quick about it. And you'd best run!" he added in a whisper. "There's men outside as wouldn't hesitate to hold you up—don't give them no chance, kid. Good night to you, and good luck to you."

"Good-night!" said Lawrence warmly.

He stepped out and made his way rapidly to the dark road, but he had hardly got there before a figure loomed up out of the gloom and confronted him. Lawrence remembered Mr. Gubbin's words.

"Just a moment, my lad!" said a quiet voice.

"I'm sorry, but I'm in a hurry!" said Lawrence, attempting to dodge.

But a hand shot out and seized his sleeve.

"It's all right—I'm not after that money of yours!" said the voice, in a slightly amused tone. "I am not one of the ruffians, my lad. My name is Rook—Mr. Norman Rook—and I come from Helmford. You must pardon me for introducing myself in this fashion, but I am rather anxious to have a little chat with you."

Lawrence was surprised, and he wondered what this man could want. He was smallish, well dressed, and he had a pleasant voice. He was about fifty years of age, as near as Lawrence could judge, and he was clean-shaven.

"What do you wish to speak to me about?" asked Lawrence quietly. "I am really in a hurry——"

"What I wish to say will not take me long," interrupted the other. "I will be brief. I am interested in a big boxing concern in Helmford—a large hall, where there are many excellent boxing contests held. At this present moment I am promoting a match which is due to come off next week. It is a light-weight, and providing quite a lot of interest in Helmford."

"I see," said Lawrence. "But how does this affect me——"

"I will explain," interrupted Mr. Rook. "My own man met with an acci-

dent yesterday, and I am now at my wits' end to know what to do. I dropped into Gubbin's place to-night, in the faint hope that I should be able to hear of something—I never dreamed that I should see such an exhibition as I actually witnessed. Let me tell you, my boy, your boxing is marvellous. You have a mastery of the game which is positively staggering."

"But—but——"

"Wait!" interrupted Mr. Rook again. "What I want you to do is this: I want you to come over to Helmford next week, and to box my opponent's champion. I can assure you that it will be a comparatively simple task for a young man of your art and quality. It will be a victory for you, my boy, and it will mean thirty pounds. There is a purse of fifty pounds attached to this contest—thirty for the winner, and twenty for the loser. And so, in either event, you will be well in pocket."

"I see!" said Lawrence, his heart beating fast. "Thirty pounds if I win, and twenty—even if I lose!"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Rook quickly. "Furthermore, I may mention that I have a private bet on this match—and I may have a few other wagers, too. If you win for me, I shall not hesitate to make you a very handsome present—a present which will be even bigger than the purse. You will oblige me greatly by falling in with this suggestion——"

"Do—do you really mean it?" inquired Lawrence.

"Yes, I really mean it."

"I—I can't very well discuss the matter with you now," said Lawrence. "I've got to—to—— You don't know who I am, or anything!"

"I am hoping that you will reveal your identity to me," said Mr. Rook.

Just for a moment Lawrence hesitated, and then he made up his mind.

"I will come over to Helmford on Saturday afternoon," he said quickly. "If you can tell me some place where we can meet, Mr. Rook, I will be there."

"Good enough!" said the other. "I will meet you at Helmford Station, just outside the booking-office, under the main clock. Be there at exactly three-thirty, and I will meet you."

"That will do splendidly!" said Lawrence. "I'll be there, Mr. Rook, and then I shall be able to explain things

better to you. I'm in an awful hurry now, and I cannot stop."

And before Mr. Rook could say anything further, the junior had departed up the road. He was excited—he was elated. He had never dreamed of such success as this. It was amazing—and Lawrence felt almost dazed, and dizzy, and intoxicated.

It was too wonderful to be true!

Twenty pounds—he actually had twenty pounds in his pocket! And he would be able to send this to his father on the morrow. And the following week he would receive more money—another twenty pounds at the very least, and probably double that amount. It was altogether too wonderful to be true!

Lawrence could hardly believe his own senses.

The events of the past hour or so seemed unreal to him now, and as he walked along he found himself astounded by his own thoughts. Was it really possible that he had defeated Lightning Left Ned in such a thorough manner? Was it really true that he had Mr. Gubbin's twenty pounds in his pocket?

It certainly was true, for Lawrence had his fingers upon the money, and the aches and pains which racked his frame proved only too well that he had passed through the ordeal. For, although Lawrence had not received many blows, he was, nevertheless, severely strained. Towards the end, every punch had been agony to him, but he had not thought of it at the time. His one idea had been to beat Ned, and win the money. He had done so, and now he did not care a toss for his aches and pains. He was healthy, and they would soon pass over.

The junior had a full realisation of what he had done. He had left St. Frank's, and he had come to Bannington to take part in a boxing match in a common booth. If any word of this ever got to the ears of a master—particularly to the ears of the Head—the consequences would be serious—indeed. Lawrence was practically certain that he would be expelled on the spot.

But he had done it, nevertheless—he had taken the chance.

He was quite certain that he had not been recognised—and, even so, who was there to report the matter to any of the St. Frank's masters? Lawrence was a new boy at the school, and he had only been in Bannington once before. It was

practically impossible that any member in the audience at that booth could say who he was, and where he had come from. Lawrence considered that he was quite safe.

And he did not feel in any way lowered by what he had done.

The whole affair had been distasteful to him in the extreme; but he had the twenty pounds, and his sole object in going to Mr. Gubbin's booth had been to obtain the money, so that he could send it to his father. It was a small enough amount, in comparison to the sum that Mr. Lawrence required—but every little helped.

And, as Ernest walked along, he began to have dreams—he could see himself winning fight after fight, and gaining money every time—and the purses were larger and larger, as each success followed success. The boy saw himself coming to his father's rescue in earnest.

And then Ernest was brought to himself with a jar, for he had arrived at Bannington Station, and he smiled rather wistfully to himself. He knew that he had only been dreaming, and he had very little hope that those dreams would ever come true.

But it seemed quite certain, at all events, that he would get some more money on the following week. For it struck him that Mr. Norman Rook was genuine. There was nothing of the swaggering blusterer in Mr. Rook. He had put the thing plainly and clearly, and, on the Saturday, he and Lawrence would have a chat—things would be fixed up for certain. Lawrence himself felt a thrill at the prospect of another fight—it was in his blood, and he could not help himself.

His father had decided that he should not be a boxer—that he should have nothing whatever to do with the ring. But the blood was in his veins, and the very thought of being in a proper ring, where everything was in perfect order, made the boy flush with excitement. This affair in Mr. Gubbin's booth had been a very paltry business, but it seemed that something better was to follow. It would all depend upon Mr. Rook.

Lawrence got into the local train for Bellton, and he soon arrived at the station. Then he walked briskly up to the school, only to find that the gates were locked. It was not late in the

evening, but Mr. Cuttle, the porter, had already locked up. It was therefore necessary for Lawrence to climb over the wall.

This was the first time he had done so, and he did not exactly know the ropes, like the older hands in the Remove.

He went to a portion in the wall which seemed easy to climb, and he swarmed up. Arriving at the parapet, he remained there for a moment or two, and then dropped lightly into the Triangle. Everything was quiet, and the Triangle seemed to be deserted. The lights gleamed out from many windows in the College House and the Ancient House.

And Lawrence made his way silently and quickly across the open space in the direction of the College House door. But he had not covered half the distance before he was aware of the fact that a figure had appeared. And this figure was coming towards him with rapid strides. Lawrence halted, feeling that it was quite useless to run. He instinctively knew that the other figure belonged to a master.

The master came up, and tapped Lawrence firmly on the arm.

"One moment, my lad!" he said grimly.

The master was Mr. Smale-Foxe—Lawrence's own Housemaster.

"It's all right, sir!" said Lawrence. "I won't try to run away——"

"I will make quite certain of that, my lad," said Mr. Foxe grimly. "You just came over the wall, unless I am mistaken. Is that so, or not?"

"Yes, sir."

"In other words, you are late," said Mr. Foxe. "I suppose you are quite aware of the fact, Lawrence, that this is against all regulations? I must punish you severely for this breach, and you will follow me to my study at once!"

"Yes, sir!" said Lawrence quietly.

And he followed Mr. Foxe into the College House. He could not quite understand why this should be necessary. He had supposed that Mr. Foxe would give him two or three hundred lines, and let him go; but, apparently, Mr. Foxe was not inclined to treat the new boy leniently.

If Ernest Lawrence had only known the truth, he would not have accom-

panied his Housemaster so confidently!

For the schoolboy lightweight was destined to receive a stunning shock within the next ten minutes!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACKMAILER.

MR. FOXE suddenly came to a halt.

He and Lawrence were still some little distance from the College House doorway, and it seemed that the Housemaster had changed his mind, for he looked at Lawrence, and then nodded to himself.

"After all, I do not think it necessary for us to enter the house," he said, in a low voice. "What I have to say to you, Lawrence, may just as well be said out here. Come—we will seek the shelter of these old chestnut trees. We are quite alone here, I am sure."

Lawrence was rather surprised; but he followed his Housemaster to the old chestnut trees, which grew in a clump in the Triangle. And, once there, Mr. Foxe faced the junior, and looked at him grimly.

"Now, Lawrence, I wish to have the truth from you!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been to this evening?"

"I—I have been out, sir!" said Lawrence.

"I am well aware of that fact, my boy!" said the Housemaster. "I want to know where you have been. You must tell me at once!"

"I—I am sorry, sir, but I can't tell you," said Lawrence quietly. "I—I can only say that I went into Bannington——"

"That won't do, my lad!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "You have been to Bannington—yes. But where did you go in Bannington? And why are you late?"

"I—I couldn't get back in time, sir." Mr. Foxe snapped his fingers.

"These answers are very unsatisfactory, Lawrence!" he exclaimed harshly. "They will not suit me, I can assure you."

"I don't see why you should cross-examine me, sir!" said Lawrence stoutly. "I am late for calling over,

and I know it—I admit my guilt in that direction. And I am ready to take any punishment that you like to inflict—I must do that, sir."

"I am glad you realise so much, at all events," said Mr. Foxe. "To put it bluntly, you refuse to tell me where you have been?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"Very well, Lawrence," said Mr. Foxe. "Perhaps I shall be able to jog your memory. You went to Bannington, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not, by any chance, enter Mr. Gubbin's boxing booth again?"

Lawrence started.

"I—I—" The boy caught his breath in, and then looked at the Housemaster defiantly. "Yes, sir, I did go to that boxing booth!" he went on. "I don't see why I should tell any lies, or evade your questions. You took me there this afternoon, with Christine and the others, so I don't see how you can say much now—"

"It doesn't matter to me what you can see, and what you cannot see!" interrupted Mr. Foxe unpleasantly. "The fact remains, Lawrence, that you entered this boxing booth alone. I suppose you are fully aware of the fact that very severe punishment would follow if the truth reached the Headmaster's ears?"

"I don't see how you can threaten anything like that, sir," replied Lawrence quickly. "You introduced me to the booth to begin with, and—"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Do not talk such nonsense, my boy! Do you assume for one moment that Dr. Stafford would believe your word against mine—even if it was supported by Christine and the others? I did not go to that booth this afternoon—I did not take you! Do you understand?"

Lawrence did understand—and he felt suddenly disgusted. It was clear that if any of the truth came out—if the story reached the ears of Dr. Stafford—Mr. Foxe would deny that he had been in Bannington; he would point blank deny all knowledge of the actual facts. And, of course, the Head would take Mr. Foxe's word—he would be compelled to do so. The Housemaster knew this, and he was taking advantage of the fact.

"However, we do not wish to have any unpleasantness," went on Mr. Foxe.

"I do not intend to take you to the

Headmaster, Lawrence—if you prove reasonable. Let me tell you one other thing. You went to this booth, and, not content with being a spectator, you actually went into the ring, and actually engaged in a prize fight—a most degrading and disgraceful exhibition!"

Lawrence started violently.

So Mr. Foxe knew the exact truth! He knew that Lawrence had battled with Lightning Left Ned. This was indeed appalling! How had the Housemaster discovered the truth—how did he know? Quite suddenly Lawrence felt himself to be unsafe—and he was appalled by his position.

For he knew well enough that he would be expelled in dire and utter disgrace if only the Headmaster got to know of this—and Mr. Foxe could easily get Lawrence expelled if he wanted to do so. The junior was entirely in the hands of the Housemaster, and he felt alarmed.

He had not reckoned upon anything like this. He had worn that silken mask, and he had told himself that he was quite secure. But it was now obvious to him that Mr. Foxe must have been in the booth during the fight—and he had recognised the boy by his voice, and by his figure, perhaps.

Lawrence was numbed by his own thoughts.

Supposing, for one moment he was expelled from St. Frank's? How would he be able to face his father—how would he be able to go home? For Mr. Lawrence to get his son back from St. Frank's under such conditions would break him up—it would be a blow from which he would never recover.

Lawrence was appalled by the thought, and he clenched his fists almost desperately.

"Please—please don't say anything to the Head, sir," he ploded. "I—I—"

"It is absolutely useless for you to adopt this attitude, Lawrence," said Mr. Foxe sternly. "You have committed a grave breach of the school regulations, and I am compelled to report the whole matter to the Headmaster. I may as well tell you at once that it will mean instant expulsion—and, in all probability, a public flogging beforehand. Your disgrace will be absolute, Lawrence."

"But—but—"

"Whatever you say will make no

difference!" interrupted the Housemaster. "You were engaged in a disgraceful prize fight, and you will now suffer the consequences. Come with me!"

And Mr. Foxe proceeded to drag Lawrence across the Triangle in the direction of the Headmaster's own private quarters. The junior was desperate—he was wild with anxiety. But there was no help for it. It would be utterly hopeless to resist Mr. Foxe's efforts. There was nothing that he could do—absolutely nothing, and rather suddenly he felt sick at heart. He felt that he would like the ground to open up and swallow him.

And then Mr. Foxe came to a halt—as though a thought had suddenly crossed his mind.

"One moment!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "There is one chance for you, Lawrence."

The junior gave a jump.

"A—a chance, sir?" he exclaimed huskily.

"Yes!" said Mr. Foxe.

"How—how do you mean, sir?"

Mr. Foxe led Lawrence back to the chestnuts, and stood for a moment or two in silence. Then he looked at the junior squarely in the face.

"How much money did you receive from Mr. Gubbin?" he inquired abruptly.

"How—how much money, sir?"

"That is what I said."

"Gubbin offered twenty pounds if anybody could beat that man of his," said Lawrence. "I accepted the challenge, sir—and I won!"

"In other words, you came away with twenty pounds in your pocket?"

"Ye—yes, sir."

"Quite so—we are getting to the truth now!" said Mr. Foxe. "You pocketed twenty pounds, Lawrence, and that money is now on your person?"

"Yes, sir!" said the junior weakly.

The Housemaster rubbed his hands together softly.

"Well, my boy, I do not wish to be harsh with you!" he exclaimed in a soft voice. "It is not my way to be unkind and unreasonable. You went to this booth, and you accepted this challenge—a really sporting affair. And, what is more, you won. That is quite excellent, Lawrence! You did well. You did exceedingly well, young man. To beat Lightning Left Ned is

indeed an achievement. I may as well inform you that I witnessed part of the fight, and you impressed me greatly. It was splendid, Lawrence—it thrilled me through and through."

Lawrence was astonished—he could not understand the Housemaster's attitude. Only a minute or two before he had been harsh and stern—now he was actually commending the fight! Mr. Smale Foxe was certainly an enigma.

"At the same time, this is all wrong," went on Mr. Foxe. "I may be able to appreciate the position, Lawrence—but I am afraid the Head would not. He would misunderstand everything. Dr. Stafford would not realise that you had done something praiseworthy in defeating that blustering young rascal. Taking everything into consideration, I have come to a decision—and I shall not report this matter to the Headmaster."

Lawrence gulped.

"Oh, oh, thank you, sir," he panted. "It's ripping of you, sir!"

"It is my habit to be kind-hearted," said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "I do not like being unpleasant to any of my boys. Providing you agree to what I propose, I will say nothing whatever to a soul, and you will be able to escape the punishment which is rightly yours."

"You're—you're a brick, sir!" said Lawrence fervently. "I—I thought it was all up with me—because I know the Head wouldn't understand. There was nothing disgraceful in the matter, really—boxing is a manly sport. And just because it happened to be in that booth—"

"You must not make excuses for yourself, Lawrence," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "As I said before, I will say nothing providing you agree to what I propose."

"To—to what you propose, sir?"

"Precisely!"

"I—I don't understand, sir!" said Lawrence.

"You will understand in a moment," he said softly. "You have twenty pounds in your pocket—prize money received from Mr. Gubbin. I will not be so harsh as to confiscate the whole amount—but you must hand me ten pounds."

"I—I must give you—ten—ten pounds?" stammered Lawrence amazedly.

"Yes!"

"But—but—"

"It is your only chance, Lawrence!" said Mr. Foxe curtly. "If you refuse to do this, I shall take you before the Headmaster at once, and report the occurrence. If, on the other hand, you agree to my proposal, everything will be well—I will keep your secret."

Lawrence could not find any words—he was so staggered that he could only stand there and stare.

Mr. Foxe—the Housemaster of the College House was actually demanding hush money! For this is what it amounted to.

Mr. Foxe, indeed, was descending to blackmail! If he received half the prize money he would hold his tongue—but if Lawrence refused to give any money, he would go straight to the Headmaster, and relate all the facts.

The junior hardly believed his own ears—he could not realise that it was the truth.

Blackmail!

And from a Housemaster! Lawrence had known for some days past that Mr. Foxe was a mysterious kind of individual. There were other juniors—some of them in the Ancient House—who had suspicions about Mr. Smale Foxe. But nobody had ever dreamed that he would descend to such vile and revolting villainy as blackmail. There is no criminal so loathsome and so utterly degraded as the blackmailer. The average burglar is quite a gentleman compared to the man who extorts money from a victim so that he shall keep his mouth shut.

"Well, Lawrence, I am still waiting," said Mr. Foxe curtly. "You will please understand that I cannot wait for long—and this offer of mine is only open for the next fifteen seconds. Unless you comply at once, therefore, there will be no alternative. You will be taken straight before the Headmaster, and be publicly expelled in the morning."

Ernest Lawrence found his voice again.

"But—but you're—you're joking, sir!" he panted. "You can't be serious—"

"I am not joking!" interrupted the Housemaster. "You are no doubt astonished that I should take this step? Let me assure you, Lawrence, that I am doing this for your sake alone. I am a kind-hearted man by nature, and I can see that you are greatly distressed at the thought of being expelled. That is only natural. I do not intend to let you off

completely, and, therefore, I think you will be punished quite adequately if you are deprived of half your prize money. I will not take the whole lot—I will not confiscate the twenty—because that would be rather too unkind. You must say 'yes' or 'no'—at once."

"Of—of course, sir—I'll pay you the ten pounds," said Lawrence quickly. "It's the only thing I can do. And you'll—you'll keep quiet, sir, won't you?"

Lawrence pulled out his bundle of currency notes, and counted out ten, and handed them across to the Housemaster. Mr. Foxe checked them, and stowed them away in his hip pocket.

"You can be quite certain, Lawrence, that I shall keep your secret," he said. "That is all, I think—you may go in!"

"Thank—thank you, sir!" stammered Lawrence.

The junior was in no way deceived by the Housemaster's bland sentences. There was no kind-heartedness about this—Mr. Foxe had forced the money out of Lawrence just as any ordinary common blackmailer forces hush-money from his victim. There was no difference whatever.

And Ernest Lawrence went into the College House, and went to Study T. in a maze of chaotic thought. He did not know where he was, or what he was doing. And when he arrived in his study, he closed the door, and sat down in his easy chair. And then he thought over all the facts.

Lawrence was furious—and he was filled with indignation. For Mr. Foxe to have acted in such a way was staggering—startling. And the contemptible nature of the Housemaster's trick was positively revolting.

Lawrence now only had ten pounds to send to his father—a mere insignificant trifle. Twenty would not have been so bad. But what on earth was the use of ten? Of course, he would send the money—it would be better than nothing. But it filled the junior with righteous indignation to think that the other money should have gone into the pocket of Mr. Smale Foxe. He—Lawrence—had earned that money—he had fought the battle, and he had won. It was his—every penny of it! Mr. Foxe was an intruder—a blackmailer—a scoundrel!

And yet Lawrence felt so helpless.

What could he do? Nothing! He could not say a word to a soul—he would have to keep his secret. He knew it—and, he knew, also, that Mr. Foxe was aware of the facts. The Housemaster was such a spy that the junior could do nothing. And Lawrence was shocked at the very thought that a Housemaster of St. Frank's could descend to such a low level. He had the boy in his clutches—and, before very long, Lawrence was to know this even better than he knew it now.

Meanwhile, Mr. Foxe remained in the Triangle. He smiled to himself, and seemed extremely pleased. Then, after a few moments, he walked across the Triangle, and entered the College House.

And Mr. Smale Foxe was totally unaware of the fact that another figure commenced walking across the Triangle almost immediately afterwards; but this figure went in the direction of the

Ancient House. It was the figure of Mr. Nelson Lee.

And Nelson Lee had a very grim light in his eyes as he went towards his study. Arriving there, he took out a small pocket-book, and proceeded to make a few entries. They were brief, but they were to the point. And then Nelson Lee closed the pocket-book with a snap, and he lay back in his chair. The Housemaster detective closed his eyes, and nodded.

"The case of Mr. Smale Foxe is turning out to be of great interest!" he murmured. "It is developing quite satisfactorily!"

Evidently, Nelson Lee had been keeping his eyes very wide open.

And, before many days had passed, other exciting and thrilling incidents were destined to occur—incidents closely connected with Ernest Lawrence of the Remove, and Mr. Smale Foxe—the mysterious Housemaster.

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Last week I alluded to our new Australian serial as "The Secret of the Sands," but I have since decided to alter the title to "Beyond the Desert." Though there is a secret in this enthralling story of the Australian desert, the chief interest lies in the strange new country which our adventurers discover after many miles of weary travelling over the burning sands. The author is an Australian, and knows his country well.

Boxing enthusiasts will be delighted with our new character, Ernest Lawrence, who wins fresh laurels next week in another splendid St. Frank's story.

THE EDITOR.

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The Opening Chapter of our Grand New Serial Appears Below!



A MAGNIFICENT STORY OF ADVENTURE IN AUSTRALIA

The End of the Barracuda.

THRUMP! Squee! Then a prolonged howl as of some demon in horrible torture, was followed by the crash of a great wave bursting on the ship's quarter. The little old Barracuda was wrestling with a nasty bit of weather such as the Arafura Sea and Torres Straits can always provide.

She pitched and tossed, whined and groaned, and when sometimes she hung for an instant suspended on the crests of two short seas, complained in every plate and rivet.

"It's a marvel to me that the little beast can stand it all," said Jack Maxwell, the elder of the two by a year or so. "Hark to that! It sounds as though she'd broken in two. Reminds one of Jerry sendin' over coal-boxes, eh?"

Jim Harding nodded. Four years of the Western Front had hardened the pair, left them indifferent to any sort of risk; but in that tiny den, under a skylight which had been covered with tarpaulin and battens, with no fresh air save what filtered through the cracks in the bulkheads, they might have been excused for feeling apprehensive.

"I'll be glad to get ashore," continued Jack. "Too confoundedly confined here for — What in thunder has happened now?"

A terrific racket underfoot drowned his voice. Iron shrieked and clattered, there was a loud report—and then the sound that had been the constant accompaniment of all the hours and weeks they had spent on board the little tramp ceased. The screw had stopped working!

"Jiminy Christmas! I believe the shaft's gone!" exclaimed Jim Harding, springing to his feet, only to be hurled crashing against the cabin wall as the ship rolled over. "Wow!" he gasped. "Let's get up on deck! We—"

Another roll, even deeper than the first, flung him back to the table, where he clung panting for breath.

"Better sit still," replied Jack calmly.

"We can do no good up there, and we'd only be in the way. We're dry here at least.

Better keep dry as long as we can. We'll be wet enough before long."

They sat for a while, half stunned by the turmoil about them. Tremendous seas thundered on the decks as the Barracuda tossed helplessly, the plaything of the waves. Once or twice they heard the bellow of a human voice in the lulls, and the tramp of heavy feet on the deck overhead. Then at last the ship steadied and seemed to ride more easily, though she still pitched terribly. The regular clanging of a pump had replaced the throb of the propeller.

The door of the companion was thrust back, admitting a gust of keen, damp air, and a whirl of spray, slid back, and a man clattered down the stairs and stood blinking in the light of the wildly-swinging cabin lamp. His oilskins streamed water, his red face shone wet under the flickering beams.

"Lor', we've had a time!" he exclaimed. "I tell you, gemmen, I've never had a time like it, no never in all my natural. And lemme tell you we haven't done wi' it yet, not by a long chalk. You heard the shaft go, eh?"

"Couldn't help hearing it, captain," replied Jack Maxwell. "Well, I suppose we're in great danger, eh? What are the chances?"

"Well, seeing as you ain't sailor men, you do take it pretty good," replied Captain Jennings, taking advantage of a momentary pause in the ship's plunging to dive into a seat. "I'll tell you. First, half the crew's gone. They went as we fell off, when the shaft bust. The sea made a clean sweep of everything forrard, and most things aft. Called up the black brigade, I did, those of 'em that was left. Engine-room's a holy poppy show, I'm told, and some of 'em was copped when the cranks busted before they could shut off steam. We got out a sea anchor and now, with that keeping us head to wind'ard, we don't stand so much chance o' being swept again. But we're going to lee'ard as fast as the wind can take us. I tell you straight no one as knows would buy our chance of getting through for a bad potato."

"Um!" muttered Harding thoughtfully.

"That's cheering! But where are we drifting to, anyhow?"

"How in Hades should I know?" growled the skipper. "Down the gulf—the Gulf of Carpentaria—but where we'll fetch up the Lord only knows. It's all a regular blooming graveyard, anyhow. When we do stop, we'll stop sudden, and it'll be good luck and no management if any of us gets through. We're making water, but the pumps can handle it so far. Only this here straining is working the rivets loose, and it'll be coming in faster all the time. This time to-morrow at latest will see the finish of us if we don't pile on something beforehand."

"What about boats?" inquired Maxwell.

"Boats!" sneered the skipper. "Boats! Firstly, we ain't got any. They were took wi' the first sea that swept us. Secondly, if we 'ad 'em, they wouldn't be any manner o' use in the sea that's running. You wait a moment till I ha' a drink, then come and take a squint."

He rose and made a staggering run to a locker, filled himself a stiff peg and tipped it off, then turned.

"You come along and look. Put on them them oilskins over there. You'll need em!"

The pair obeyed in silence, then followed the captain up the narrow stairs.

"Hang on for all you're worth!" he warned them, and sliding back the companion-door, drew them out into the tempest and slammed it behind them.

For a minute they could do nothing but cling desperately to the hatch-top while their eyes became accustomed to the gloom. It was not dark, for the sea seemed luminous, and, moreover, dawn was near; presently they were able to look forward between narrowed lids.

The sea was a raging cauldron of chilly white foam writhing under the wind; but it was not on this that they looked first, but on the ship's deck. It was unfamiliar. The funnel, and the heavy iron bridge through which it thrust, still remained in place; but the bridge-house and wheel, the stumpy foremast with its derrick booms, the donkey-engine, rails, and stanchions, and the little galley forward, had all disappeared.

A stout hawser, secured to the stump of the mast, led forward through the bitts, and dipped into the sea. Ahead, rising and falling, sometimes disappearing under the foam for a minute or so, was a dark object to which the cable was fastened.

"That's all we got to depend on!" bawled Jennings, thrusting his face close to Maxwell's to make himself heard. "That is the sea anchor. Spare booms and what we could grab of the mast, likewise one or two other things. If it breaks up, or the hawser gives, it's good-bye!"

A man who had been crouching on the deck clinging to a ring-bolt, rose up, pointing and yelling. They heard his voice very faintly, but caught the words.

"Wind slackening!"

"That's something!" bellowed Jennings. "There ain't anything to do but hang on

and trust to luck. You go below, and take a snooze. I'll call you if anything is going to turn up. It's near day."

He pulled back the door, thrust the two young men through, and closed it after them. They stumbled back to the cabin and stood a moment irresolute, then gripped hands.

"It looks pretty fierce, eh?" said Maxwell. "But I guess we might as well sleep while we can. There's nothing else to do."

They made for their cabin, and climbing into their bunks, were soon asleep, despite the wild movements of the ship. Hours passed, and still the Barracuda plunged on. The hurricane had moderated, but the sea was still in wild turmoil, and, though day had come, the air was so full of spray and scud that it was impossible to see for any distance.

Jack Maxwell, wedged crossways in his narrow bunk, dreamt that he was back again in Flanders. The battery was under heavy fire. He seemed to hear the incessant boom of the guns, the louder crash of exploding shells. Then came a terrible explosion.

"Crump!" he exclaimed, and awoke as he fell, to find himself on the floor of the little cabin, rolling over something that squirmed and kicked.

"Hi! Jack! Jack!"

It was the voice of Harding. Harding was the man wriggling below him. Abruptly Maxwell came to himself. Below, above, all round, was wild tumult of noise. The floor was heaving and sagging, rending plates gave a sound like the sharpening of some enormous saw, there were booms like field-pieces fired at close range, and through all the pounding beat and smash of heavy waves.

"Jim! We're ashore! Quick! We're trapped in here! Up man, and burst the door!" He tried it as he spoke, and found it jammed by the twisted frame. "Ugh!"

The ship seemed to slide forward and settle with a bump that sent them reeling. They threw themselves at the door, but only to recoil bruised, for it was soundly made and firmly held. The noise of rending iron redoubled itself, then ceased, drowned by the lashing of the waves.

"We're fixed on a rock. We're steady at last, anyhow," grunted Maxwell. "See! It's daylight!"

A wave heaved across the porthole and dropped away. Before another came they had a blurred glimpse of grey, low-hanging sky. The sight seemed to give them renewed energy.

"First thing is to get out of here," said Harding; "that door's jammed. We'll have to cut our way out." He dived below his bunk, and, hauling out a trunk, opened it and rummaged in its depths, producing a service revolver. "Make a hole with this to start with, eh?"

Maxwell nodded, and thrusting a hand into his pocket drew out a large jack knife with one strong, serviceable blade.

(Continued on page iv. of cover.)

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"Go ahead. Put one or two along the middle of that panel. That's it!"

Harding placed the muzzle of his weapon close to the woodwork and fired, blowing a hole in it, then repeated the dose higher up. A thrust from his shoulder and the weakened panel split down the middle and was speedily broken away, allowing a view of the cabin beyond.

Harding thrust out his head and withdrew it after one glance, his face pale under the tan.

"Look!" he said hoarsely. "The—the ship! She—she's broken in two!"

Maxwell took one long glance. It revealed

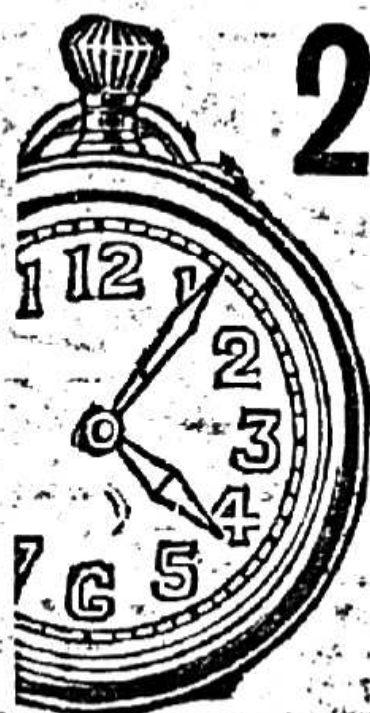
a gap in the forward bulkhead, and through it he could see—nothing!—Nothing, that is, except a mass of greyish-white rock over which the sea broke, and a grey blur beyond, nearly hidden by the curtain of spray. The ship had been cut in two, and the forward part of her, the two-thirds which contained the engines and the bulk of the cargo, had vanished!

For a minute or two they hung over the splintered remnants of the panel gazing dumbly and listening for any sound of life, while with every wave licked up the sloping cabin floor almost to the door.

(To be continued.)

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