No. 297—WHAT HANDFORTH SAW IN BELLTON WOOD!

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The lighted match revealed an uncanny likeness between the two men.

THE HOUSEMASTER'S DOUBLE

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The College House Mystery," "The Schoolboy Lightweight," "The Blackmailed Schoolboy," and many other Stirring Tales.

February 12, 1921.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A SPLIT IN STUDY D.

"THREE o'clock!" said Handforth firmly.

"Rats!" It's half-past two!" declared McClure.

Handforth glared.

"If you want a thick ear, Arnold McClure, you'd better say so," he roared. "If you contradict me again, I'll pulverise you! I say it's three o'clock!"

"And I repeat that it's half-past two——"

"You're both wrong!" interrupted Church, who had just entered Study D. "The exact time now is only just a quarter-to-two!"

Handforth gazed at Church pityingly.

"Who's talking about the exact time?" he demanded. "If you didn't butt in, Walter Church, you wouldn't make an ass of yourself! McClure says that the giddy circus starts at half-past-two—and I jolly well know that it doesn't start until three o'clock!"

"Oh, the circus!" said Church. "That's different, of course. As a matter of fact, McClure's right—it does start at half-past two—and we shall have to buck up, or we shall be late for the start."

McClure grinned.

"There you are!" he said triumphantly. "Now what have you got to say, Handy? Here's a witness to prove——"

"Piffle!" interrupted Handforth. "I've got a better witness than this fathead! Where's the local paper? There's an advert of the circus in there—and I'll soon prove to you chaps that your memories are in a state of decay!

The famous trio of Study D in the Ancient House at St. Frank's were indulging in one of their little arguments. Such scenes as this were of daily—almost hourly—occurrence. If Handforth and Co. ever agreed upon a point without a preliminary argument, it was something in the nature of a miracle.

"I'll soon show you!" said Handforth, seizing the "Bannington Gazette," and jerking over the pages. "Now, lemme see.—here we are! 'The World's Biggest Circus and Fair. Caistowe, Saturday—Two Performances—One at 2-30—and the other at 7.'"

"Now who's right?" roared Church and McClure in a single voice.

Handforth frowned.

"I'm right!" he said, obstinately.

"What!" shrieked Church. "You still say you're right—after seeing the announcement in the paper?"

Handforth nodded calmly.

"Certainly!" he said. "The printer must have made a bloomer in this issue—that's the only possible explanation."

"Well, my only hat!" gasped McClure.

Both he and Church knew well enough that Handforth's obstinacy was startling. But this fairly took the cake. For him.

to maintain he was right was sheer and absolute idiocy.

"Anyhow, we're not going to have a row about it!" went on Handforth, realising that it would be better for him to dismiss the subject as soon as possible. "These printers are silly fatheads at the best of times! I think we'd better be getting off—just to make sure."

"Rather!" said Church. "Come on!"

It was a Saturday half-holiday, and the juniors had made up their minds to run over to Caistowe on their bicycles in order to visit the circus. A number of other juniors were going, too, for this particular circus was reputed to be a very excellent one, and it was only due to remain in Caistowe for one day. There would be a crowd.

"I say, Handy, do buck up!" said McClure impatiently. "It's nearly two o'clock, and it takes us twenty minutes to get there on our jiggers. We shall find all the giddy seats gone——"

"Eh?" said Handforth absently. "Seats!"

"Yes, you ass—at the circus!"

"Circus?" repeated Handforth.

"Ain't we going to Caistowe?" roared Church.

"Caistowe?" said Handforth dreamily.

His chums glared at him.

"You—you giddy parrot!" howled McClure. "Can't you say anything else? What's the matter with you, Handy? You know jolly well we're all going to the circus in Caistowe, and we shall have to hurry up——"

"Oh!" said Handforth, with a start.

He seemed to come to earth, and he smiled.

"As a matter of fact, you chaps," he went on, "we're not going to the circus!"

"Not going!"

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "A circus is a kid's show—and we ain't kids. Just as if we want to go to see a silly, fatheaded circus. Don't stare at me like that, you asses! We ain't going to Caistowe—and there's an end to it!"

At times Handforth would be frightfully exasperating. He would change his mind without warning—and generally without reason. Church and McClure had an awful time with him, and their efforts to stroke him the right way were sometimes quite pathetic. But on this occasion they glared with great indignation.

"You—you blithering ass!" snapped Church. "Only yesterday you were full of enthusiasm for this circus——"

"So he was half an hour ago!" put in McClure.

Handforth nodded.

"Very likely—but my enthusiasm has vanished," he said calmly. "I've just seen an anouncement in the paper, and I've decided that we shall go to Bannington instead. There is something on at the Town Hall which beats the circus into fits. So we're going there, and we shall have to hurry up——"

"The Town Hall!" roared Church. "What is it?"

Handforth passed the paper across, and Church and McClure stared at the announcement. Their feelings can be better imagined than described when they read the following notice:

"TOWN HALL, BANNINGTON. On Saturday afternoon, at two-thirty sharp, Ex-Superintendent Browning, of Scotland Yard, will lecture personally on 'Crime Investigation, and Some Celebrated Criminal Cases.' Admission 1s 3d. and 2s 4d. (including tax.)"

Church looked up in a dazed kind of way.

"Is—is this a joke?" he asked faintly.

"Joke!" snorted Handforth. "Of course it ain't a joke, you ass! Fancy me not seeing this advert before. A real Scotland Yard man is to give a lecture on detective-work, and all that sort of thing! Why, it beats all your silly old circuses! So we're going straight off to Bannington."

Church and McClure turned red with wrath.

"Do—do you mean to tell me that you'd rather hear this mouldy old lecture than go to a circus?" shouted McClure. "It'll be as dull as ditchwater, Handy—all the chap will do will be to repeat some famous criminal cases——"

"Rats!" said Handforth obstinately. "He'll give a lot of tips about detective work—and you know how interested I am in all that sort of thing. It's a chance in a thousand; and I don't want any of your silly objections! The circus is off—and we're going straight to Bannington."

Handforth said this with an air of finality—as though there could be no possible argument about the question. As a rule, Church and McClure were

submissive. But, at times, they revolted—and this was one of those times. To give up the circus for the sake of a dry old lecture was altogether beyond the limit. But it was just like one of Handforth's usual cranky tricks. There was no telling what he would do next!

"If you want to go to the lecture—you can go!" said Church deliberately. "But if you think you're going to drag us with you—well, you've made a bloomer!"

"A large-sized one!" added McClure.

Handforth started.

"Do—do you mean to say that you'll let me go alone?" he asked darkly.

"Yes—if you want to be such a fathead!" said Church. "We fixed upon going to this circus, and we're going! There's an end of it!"

"Absolutely!" said McClure.

Handforth nearly choked.

"You—you rebellious rotters!" he roared. "Mutiny, by George!"

"No!" said Church. "Mutiny by McClure and me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled McClure.

But Handforth did not see the joke.

"I've often threatened to kick you out of this study, and now it's going to happen!" he said sulphurously. "You—you miserable bounders! You—you traitors! You—you blacklegs! You're going to get it in the neck, now——"

Smash!

Handforth's fist shot out, and it caught Church fully upon the nose. Church went over with a crash, howling. This was another of Handforth's fatheaded tricks—to attack his chums without warning. They were so accustomed to his fists that they generally dodged before he could touch them. So Handforth found it necessary to use strategy.

"Yarooooh!" howled Church. "You rotter! Ow!"

McClure dodged for the door, with Handforth in full pursuit. Somehow, the door stuck, and McClure was a shade too late. And Handforth very considerately assisted his chum through the doorway with the toe of his boot.

McClure rose into the air, and fell into the passage with a dull thud.

"Yow—ow—yaroooh!" he bellowed.

Before he could rise to his feet Church came out—upside down. He landed fairly upon McClure, his legs kicking wildly. One boot happened to catch Handforth in the neck, and Edward Oswald staggered back with a grunt.

"You—you vicious bounder!" he gasped unreasonably. "Do you call that playing the game—to kick a chap in the face?"

"Grooooh!" said Church.

"You're out now—you've been kicked out!" exclaimed Handforth. "And if you show your faces in this study again, I won't be answerable for what happens! I've finished with you—for good! Understand? For good!"

And Handforth retreated into the study, and slammed the door with so much force that one of the handles flew off—and shot into McClure's face as he sat up.

"Ow!" gasped McClure. "What the dickens——"

"Hallo—hallo!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, strolling out of Study E. "How many earthquakes have there been? I've counted five, but perhaps I've missed one or two! You chaps seem to have been having some fun!"

Church and McClure staggered to their feet.

"We've done with Handy—we've finished with him!" said McClure fiercely.

"Good!" said Pitt.

"Eh?"

"Perhaps we shall have some peace in the passage," went on Pitt. "You don't know what life is in my study. From morning till night all we can hear next door is yells, howls, thuds and crashes! If you chaps go along to some other study it might be better! This is the best news I've heard all the term!"

Handforth jerked out into the passage like a jack-in-the-box.

"And if you try to be funny, Reginald Pitt, I'll give you a dose!" he roared. "I'm just about fed-up——"

"That's one relief!" said Pitt. "If you're fed-up, perhaps you'll be content. I say, you chaps! Handforth has just gone off again—I suggest we take him out, and duck his head in the fountain—to cool him down! If we allow him to go about like this he'll bite somebody—and then there'll be an epidemic of hydrophobia!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of juniors had gathered round, listening.

"Are—are you calling me a dog?" bellowed Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you said it!" said Pitt. "By what I can see, you are displaying all the symptoms of rabies——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth didn't take any further time for arguments. He charged forward, with the express intention of knocking Reginald Pitt into the middle of the following week. But Pitt dodged nimbly, chuckling.

And Handforth was seized by many willing fists, and he was dragged to a standstill.

"Lemme go!" howled the leader of Study D. "You—you rotters! Lemme get at him!"

"Not just now, my son!" I grinned. "You mustn't get excited, Handy. This is a sheer waste of time. We're all going off to the circus in Caistowe, and we shall be late for the start, unless we hurry up!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "Blow your silly old circus! Rats to the circus! I'm not going to it—I wouldn't go if you paid me!"

"Oh, good!" said De Valerie. "Then it's pretty certain there won't be a riot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was expecting frightful trouble at the circus," went on De Valerie. "But if Handforth isn't going, then we needn't worry."

The excited Edward Oswald was led firmly, forcibly, out into the Triangle. I had a firm grip on him, Pitt had another, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were there, too. Handforth had no chance. He was run out into the centre of the Triangle, and then given a final shove, which sent him pitching forward. By the time he picked himself up, there was nobody on the spot to go for.

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth helplessly.

The next second he had to dodge for his life, for a great body of cyclists came whizzing across from the bicycle shed, straight towards him. He only just succeeded in getting clear in time, and he glared at the cyclists in speechless wrath. They waved their hand, and blew a few kisses towards him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly choked. Then an expression of contempt came over his face, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose they don't know any better—the burbling idiots!" he said witheringly. "Rats to 'em! They can go to their rotten circus! I'm going to spend my time in a better way!"

He strode to the bicycle shed, and his temper was not improved to any great extent when he found that his own cycle had been taken—probably by one of his chums—and the only rideable machine left was an old crock with one mudguard. Handforth didn't know who it belonged to, but he glared at it as though the machine had done him an injury. But it was the only one left, so he was obliged to take it.

"By George!" he muttered. "I'll make somebody pay for this later on."

He wheeled the bicycle out, jumped into the saddle, and rode off. He was accompanied by a series of creaks and rattles, and a group of Third Form fags who had collected near the gate, politely inquired if Handforth had any old iron for sale.

But for the fact that he was late already, Handforth would have got off his machine, and he would have proceeded to chastise the fags in the way they deserved. But Handforth had no time—he would have to peddle for all he was worth in order to get to Bannington by two-thirty. And he did not wish to lose one minute of that important lecture.

Meanwhile, Church and McClure and a crowd of other Remove fellows were speeding towards Caistowe. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were among them, for we were keen upon seeing the circus, too. We went at a good speed, and we arrived at the little seaside town in quite comfortable time; in fact, after we had stored our machines near the circus, we found that the time was just twenty minutes past two. This was quite good.

"Oh, we shall get good seats!" I said. "We're not going in the tanner part, anyhow—and the better seats never fill up so quickly."

We were just crossing the road towards the meadow where the circus was pitched, when Bob Christine, of the College House, nodded his head.

"That's old Foxey down there!" he remarked. "I wonder what he's doing in Caistowe? I hope he doesn't come to the circus! There's not much fun in having a Housemaster present!"

I looked down the road, and all the other fellows looked, too. And we saw the figure of Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House. Mr. Foxe saw us looking in his direction,

and then he behaved in rather a curious manner.

He was just near a little side turning, and, abruptly; he dodged up this turning, out of view. It certainly seemed as though Mr. Foxe had been extremely anxious to avoid observation. He had only caught sight of us at that moment, and it was quite clear to me that Mr. Foxe did not want us to catch sight of him. But we had already done so—his manœuvre was too late.

"That's queer!" remarked McClure. "I wonder why he's dodged out of sight like that?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church. "But housemasters have their funny little ways, just the same as anybody else. And, by all that I can understand, Mr. Foxe is a bit of a mystery—he does things that other housemasters never do. In any case, if he wants to dodge, let him—it's his business."

And very shortly afterwards all the juniors, including myself, entered the circus. But for some little time after we had taken our seats, I kept thinking of Mr. Smale Foxe. There had been no mistake—the figure we had seen was the College housemaster. Why had he attempted to avoid us? Why had he skipped into that little side turning, in the hope that we should not see him?

There was something rather queer about it, and I decided to bear it in mind.

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CHAPTER II.

NOTHING DOING.

HANDFORTH arrived in Bannington, accompanied by an awful lot of mud, at exactly twenty-five minutes past two. He was not in the best of tempers, for he had been tearing through mud for a great part of the way, and a considerable portion of that mud had transferred itself on to his clothing, owing to the fact that the bicycle had only one guard.

However, Handforth was in time for the lecture, and that was the main point.

And a very curious thing happened to Handforth, although he did not know it at the time. For, just as Edward Oswald was dismounting from his machine in front of the town hall, at precisely twenty-five minutes past two, he caught sight of a figure on the other side of the road. And Handforth knew that figure at once.

It was Mr. Smale Foxe!

Yet how could this possibly be? At exactly that same moment, Church and McClure and the other juniors had seen Mr. Smale Fox in Caistowe—four and a half miles away. But Handforth knew that he had made no mistake. It was not very easy to make a mistake where Mr. Smale Foxe was concerned, for the Housemaster of the College was not an ordinary looking man; he was tall, slim, and he had an exceptionally long nose. His face was clean-shaven, and—as some of the College House fellows disrespectfully remarked—it was a face which could be recognised a mile off.

And Handforth was rather astonished because Mr. Foxe apparently did not wish to be seen! The Housemaster, upon catching sight of the junior, dodged immediately into the saloon bar of a public-house. Handforth stared, and then sniffed.

"It's a jolly good thing you ain't my Housemaster!" he exclaimed witheringly. "There's a fine example to set—going into pubs! The rotter ought to be reported to the Head!"

And, dismissing the matter from his mind, Handforth went into the town hall for his precious lecture.

Mr. Foxe did not remain long in the public-house; in fact, he was out within a minute, and he had kept his eye upon the window all the time—apparently greatly interested in the ironmonger's shop on the other side of the road.

A figure emerged from the ironmonger's—a junior figure. It was that of Ernest Lawrence, of the College House Remove. Lawrence had evidently been making a few purchases, for he had a small parcel with him.

The junior went along the pavement, in no particular hurry. He looked into the shop windows idly, and then suddenly he came to a halt, for he found himself confronting Mr. Smale Foxe.

"Good-afternoon, Lawrence!" said the Housemaster.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Lawrence. "I didn't know you were in the town."

"No?" said Mr. Foxe. "Well, as it happens, my boy, I am—and I should

like to have a few words with you, in private!"

Lawrence looked at the Housemaster sharply.

"I don't quite understand, sir!" he said.

"I think you do, Lawrence!" replied Mr. Foxe. "In fact, I am quite sure that you understand; and it will be advisable, my lad, if you fall in with my suggestion. I require a few words in private, and I do not think we can do better than to find a quiet spot in the Japanese Cafe, a little further along."

Lawrence nodded.

"Just as you like, sir," he said quietly. "You are my Housemaster, and I cannot very well refuse——"

"No, no!" interrupted the other. "I am not your Housemaster now, Lawrence. This is not school-time, and we are not at St. Frank's. There is no necessity whatever for you to regard me as a master. We will have a quiet little chat, and we will be on an equality with one another."

They walked along, and very soon came to the highly ornamental frontage of the Japanese Cafe. It was quite a nice restaurant, and exceedingly select; in fact, it was the best in Bannington.

They entered, and found the place nearly empty, which was only natural, considering the time. And the cafe was likely to remain partially deserted until about four o'clock, when seekers after tea would be crowding in.

Mr. Foxe led the way to a quiet corner table. The tables were arranged very cunningly in the Japanese Cafe; each one was divided off by curtains and partitions. Thus, it was quite possible to have a very private talk, if one desired to do so.

Mr. Foxe was smiling and pleasant, and he ordered the tea when the smart waitress came.

"Not much for me, sir!" said Lawrence. "We only had dinner just over an hour ago, you know."

Tea and cakes were brought, and then the pair were left completely to themselves.

Mr. Foxe poured out the tea, lit a cigarette, and then lay back in his seat.

"Now, Lawrence, for our little chat," he said pleasantly.

"Yes, sir," said Lawrence.

"It is natural that you should know what the subject of this chat is to be," went on the Housemaster. "To be quite blunt, I want some money from you, my boy."

"Some—some money?" inquired Lawrence, starting.

"Exactly!"

"But——"

"Please do not put on that surprised tone, Lawrence," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "You know as well as I do why I require this money—and I intend to have it!"

Lawrence set his jaws firmly.

"I can't let you have any, sir!" he declared. "I don't see any reason why you should demand it of me!"

It was certainly an extraordinary thing that a Housemaster should make a request of this nature to one of his own junior boys. What could it mean? What was the reason for this extraordinary behaviour on Mr. Foxe's part? Why was he demanding money from Lawrence, of the Remove?

"I will see what I can do to refresh your memory, Lawrence," said Mr. Foxe softly. "When you came to St. Frank's, you were just an ordinary junior, and I did not take much notice of you. Then one day, when I was in a somewhat freakish humour, I took you and Christine and one or two other boys out with me. We came to Bannington, and, among other things, we went into a boxing booth, run by a certain Mr. Gubbins——"

"Yes, I know all this, sir——"

"Do not interrupt me, Lawrence," said Mr. Foxe. "I intend to go over all the facts, for it is just as well, perhaps, that you should realise your true position. While we were in Mr. Gubbins' booth, we learned that a certain young gentleman, known as 'Lightning Left Ned,' was open to box anybody for the sum of twenty pounds. You took it into your head, Lawrence, to try for that prize, and in the evening you returned to Bannington, and you wore a mask. You entered the ring, you fought 'Lightning Left Ned,' and defeated him—you defeated him handsomely, and you fully deserved the reward, which Mr. Gubbins paid up like a man."

Lawrence looked grim.

"I didn't know you were watching me, sir," he said, with just a touch of contempt in his voice. "And, but for the fact that you took me to the boxing booth in the first place, I should have

known nothing about it. So it comes to this—you were really the cause of my visiting that place and beating 'Lightning Left Ned.'"

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"No doubt you are right, Lawrence," he agreed. "However, it was quite a different matter when you were with me. You returned to this booth alone, and you engaged in a prize fight. I think you know the Headmaster's views on such a matter. If the truth of that affair had come to his ears, your fate would have been swift and sudden. In short, Lawrence, you would have been expelled in disgrace, and without delay."

"But there was nothing dishonourable——"

"No, perhaps not; I certainly agree with you, Lawrence, that your conduct was quite in order," said Mr. Foxe. "But, unfortunately, Dr. Stafford is not of the same view, and, if he had known the truth, he would have dealt with you very promptly. I could have reported the matter, had I chosen; but I did not see why I should do so. I kept quiet, and allowed you to keep your secret."

"For the sum of ten pounds!" said Lawrence grimly. "For half the prize money I received!"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Foxe. "Was it not worth it to you, Lawrence?"

"That's hardly the way to look at it, sir!" said the junior. "All I know is that you blackmailed me——"

"You infernal young scamp!" rapped out Mr. Foxe. "You impudent rascal! How dare you use such a word!"

"Well, it's the truth!" blazed out Lawrence. "You did blackmail me—you can't get out of it, sir! You promised to keep quiet if I gave you the sum of ten pounds. What's that but blackmail? You can call it anything else you like, but I've only got one term for it!"

Mr. Foxe shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no necessity for you to get excited," he said, his voice becoming hard. "And you will please understand, Lawrence, that you are in my hands—I can do precisely as I like with you, if it pleases me, and I can have you expelled this very day."

"I don't think you can, sir!" said Lawrence. "And, in any case, it would be very bad for you if you did say anything to the Headmaster, for you could not expect me to keep silent."

"We will not discuss that matter now," said Mr. Foxe. "To continue. Not content with obtaining twenty pounds from Mr. Gubbins, you lost no time in arranging another fight, and this time you got in touch with a certain Mr. Norman Rook, of Helmford. Mr. Rook saw you beat 'Lightning Left Ned,' and he was doubtless impressed by your form, which, I will admit, is very wonderful. You are a marvellous young boxer, Lawrence. You have a great future before you, if you only choose to take it. Well, you fixed things up with Mr. Rook, and journeyed to Helmford on the following Wednesday."

"I don't see why you should repeat all this——"

"Never mind what you see, Lawrence; it pleases me to do so," said Mr. Foxe. "You journeyed to Helmford, and you entered the Ring Pavilion there, and faced a fairly well-known lightweight boxer, known as Jimmy Rhodes. The fight was for a purse of fifty pounds—thirty pounds going to the winner. Well, Lawrence, you won that fight, and you pocketed thirty pounds—to say nothing of an extra sum which Mr. Rook no doubt gave you. I fancy you came away from Helmford with something like sixty pounds in your pocket."

Ernest Lawrence was silent. As a matter of fact, he had left Helmford with eighty pounds in his pocket, for Mr. Rook had presented him with fifty pounds in addition to the prize money. Lawrence had put up a wonderful fight, and he had beaten Jimmy Rhodes, the professional, in a manner which had surprised the onlookers, for Lawrence, of the Remove, was a lightweight boxer of the most astounding ability.

"You see, Lawrence, I know all about it!" went on Mr. Foxe. "Unfortunately, somebody else knew about it, too, for a letter was written to Dr. Stafford, informing him of your conduct. The Head sent for you, and, without listening to your story, he sentenced you to expulsion. And it was here that I performed you a very excellent service, for I came forward, and provided you with an alibi. The result was that you were released, and no more questions were asked."

"Yes, I know that, sir," said Law-

rence. "It was very good of you, and I should have appreciated it highly if I had known that you had done it for the sake of kindness. But I soon learned that it was only a ruse on your part—a ruse to obtain more money from me. But, Mr. Foxe, I refuse to give you a penny! And it was quite impossible for you to report me to the Headmaster, because you would have found it necessary to contradict yourself, and admit yourself to be a—a——"

"A liar—why not say it?" said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "Quite so, Lawrence. You were very smart, and you certainly had the better of me. But you must not imagine that I am going to let the matter rest there. You received a great deal of money for that fight, and it is not good for you to have such a sum. I will be moderate, and demand twenty pounds. And, what is more, Lawrence, you must let me have that money to-night, by eight o'clock."

Lawrence laughed—he really could not help doing so. If Mr. Foxe hoped to receive the twenty pounds, that hope would be a vain one. For Lawrence did not possess anything beyond a few shillings. The money had gone—everything. It had been sent to his father, in London. For that was why Lawrence had engaged in these fights—for the sole purpose of obtaining the money, so that he could send it to his father, who was in a bad way. Mr. Lawrence had suffered a terribly severe blow in his business, owing to the failure of a big banking concern, and, although he was still struggling on, the crash might come at any moment. And so Lawrence had seized a chance to obtain money, and he had sent this money to his father, leaving the latter in ignorance as to the sender.

Exactly where Mr. Foxe was to get his twenty pounds from was a puzzle which Lawrence did not attempt to solve.

"Well, my boy, what do you say?" said the Housemaster.

"I don't think it's any good my speaking, sir," said Lawrence. "You won't get the money—you can't. I haven't got it——"

"What do you mean—you haven't got it?" snapped Mr. Foxe. "Sixty pounds! Where would you have spent so much money?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"You infernal young rascal!" said Mr. Foxe harshly. "Those lies will not deceive me! You have the money, practically every penny of it, and I intend to have my share. Do you understand? I will put up with no excuse, and you had better understand, once and for all, that I will not be frustrated."

"I can't let you have——"

"Silence!" said Mr. Foxe. "Let me finish, boy! If you do not supply me with the money I demand, then your life at St. Frank's will be a terrible one. I will make you pay dearly for your obstinacy, and, before many days have passed, I will see that you are expelled in disgrace! I can manage that quite easily, Lawrence, make no mistake! Perhaps at the present moment my tongue is tied, for I do not wish to get myself into trouble with the Headmaster because of you. But my time will come, and then you will suffer alone. Do you agree to this or not?"

"No, sir, I will not!" said Lawrence quietly.

"You—you——"

Mr. Foxe came to a halt, and he glared at Lawrence. Then without a word, he pushed the curtain aside and strode out of the restaurant. Again the Housemaster had been defied, but somehow Lawrence felt that sooner or later Mr. Foxe would gain the upper hand.

Lawrence sat in the restaurant for some little time, thinking deeply. He was worried, and he decided that it was very cruel of Fate to have allowed Mr. Smale Foxe to know his secret. Not another soul at St. Frank's knew about it, with the possible exception of Fullwood and Co. of Study A in the Ancient House. But Fullwood and Co. had been unable to say anything for fear of getting themselves into trouble.

Lawrence looked at his watch, after a while, and then started.

"My hat!" he muttered. "I shall have to be quick or I shall be too late!"

He paid the bill—Mr. Foxe had thoughtfully left this for Lawrence's attention—and then took his departure from the restaurant. He went straight along the High Street, and made his way to the railway-station, arriving just as a train was pulling up against the platform.

Lawrence waited, and within a minute or two a small, well-dressed figure approached him. It was the figure of

Mr. Norman Rook, and Mr. Rook was a clean-shaven man, with hair slightly turning grey, and with rugged but good-natured features.

"Ah, my boy! I am glad to see you!" he exclaimed heartily. "How are you feeling?"

"Splendid, sir!" said the junior.

"That's excellent!" exclaimed Mr. Rook. "I have been anxious to see you ever since your tussle with Jimmy Rhodes. I can tell you, my lad, that you have opened the eyes of the Helmford crowd! They never expected you to win; they were positively certain that Rhodes would wipe you up! It was a great victory for you!"

Lawrence smiled.

"Oh, I don't know, sir!" he said modestly. "Rhodes was a bit of a slogger, and he got excited. If he had not left me an opening, I could never have got in the knock-out——"

"Come, come!" protested Mr. Rook. "That won't do, Lawrence! You beat Jimmy simply because you are the cleverer boxer. In fact, without wishing to give you an attack of swelled head, I may say that you are the most wonderful little boxer I have ever met in all my experience!"

"It's very good of you to say that, sir——"

"Very good — fiddlesticks!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "You have the science; you have the training. By gad! If you weren't tied to St. Frank's, I could do wonders with you, my lad! But I am rather helpless now—my hands are bound. I only wish you could leave the school and place yourself entirely in my care."

"That's quite impossible, Mr. Rook!" interrupted Lawrence. "You see, father doesn't know a word about this boxing of mine, and he thinks that I am at St. Frank's living just the same as the other boys. I don't think it will be even possible for me to go in for another match."

"Absurd—positively absurd!" exclaimed Mr. Rook. "I won't hear of it, Lawrence, so don't talk such nonsense again. I am making the most elaborate plans for you, and they need to be elaborate, my boy. I must arrange my fights so that you can easily attend them, without anybody at St. Frank's knowing about it. I can tell you, it's a puzzle, but I think I shall be successful."

"It's very good of you, sir, but——"

"I will not hear any objections, my boy!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "I am fixing up a fight for you now, which, if you win, will finally establish your reputation. Even now some of the London sporting papers have mentioned you. And the purse for this next fight will be quite a considerable one—not a farthing under one hundred and fifty pounds."

"My goodness!" ejaculated Lawrence, starting.

"Ah, that makes you think, doesn't it?" smiled Mr. Rook. "You see what success brings you, my boy! And things will get better and better, make no mistake! This next fight I am arranging for you will be a splendid one, and I am quite certain that you will win, although you will have a harder man to deal with than Jimmy Rhodes."

"Who will it be, sir?" inquired Lawrence.

Mr. Rook shook his head.

"I don't quite know yet, my boy," he replied. "I have several irons in the fire, and I shall know definitely by Monday. But, if possible, I want to match you against a well-known man. And it isn't my policy to waste time over these fights. I'm not going to fix up things with you for a couple of months ahead. This next bout, if I can manage it, will take place within a fortnight."

"It's awfully good of you to take so much trouble over me, Mr. Rook," said Lawrence; "but I don't think that I shall be able to go in for another fight ——"

"Do you mean that you won't be fit?"

"Oh, no!" said the junior. "I'm fit enough now, if it comes to that!"

"Then don't let me hear any more of that talk!" interjected Mr. Rook grimly. "Why, boy, you don't seem to realise what this will mean to you! And it is simply a waste of breath for you to stand there, telling me that you won't fight any more. You will, and you know it as well as I do. It's rather a pity I can't tell you anything definite to-day—I wanted to, but I am in the hands of other people. Therefore, we must arrange another meeting for Monday evening."

"It might be difficult for me to get a pass, sir."

"That's quite all right," said Mr. Rook. "On Monday I will come to St. Frank's, so that you shall have no trouble."

Lawrence looked alarmed.

"But—but you mustn't do that!" he exclaimed quickly. "You mustn't be seen at St. Frank's, sir. It wouldn't do at all."

"You need have no fear," smiled Mr. Rook. "I shall not appear at St. Frank's; I shall not be seen by anybody except you. I fully realise the position, and I know that your Headmaster regards me as a kind of super-criminal. Therefore, I shall be careful. Now, isn't there some place near the school where we could meet in private—some outbuilding or other?"

Lawrence thought for a moment.

"Well, sir, there's a kind of barn right at the back of the school," he replied. "It's down at the bottom of the paddock, behind the Head's garden. That barn is always deserted after dark, I know, and I could easily slip over there at the given time and meet you. And I think it would be safe enough, too."

"Then that's good enough," said Mr. Rook. "We don't need to search for any other meeting-place. A barn at the bottom of the paddock, behind the Head's garden! Right you are, Lawrence; I will remember! And I will be there at seven o'clock to the minute. Will you promise to meet me?"

"Yes, sir—certainly!" said Lawrence. "But I can't promise to——"

"That's enough!" smiled the other. "At seven o'clock on Monday night, in the old barn at the back of the school. Until then, my boy, good-bye!"

And Mr. Rook shook hands with Ernest Lawrence, and a few minutes later they parted. The boxing-promoter would hear no refusal from the junior, and Lawrence felt somehow that he would be compelled to appear in this next match.

And when Lawrence thought of the purse, and when he thought of his father, he decided in his own mind that there could be only one course to take.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF MR. FOXE.

"JOLLY good!" said McClure cheerfully. "About the best circus I've ever seen in this district! What do you think, Churchy?"

Church nodded.

"Rather!" he said. "A ripping show! What an ass Handy was not to come with us! I'll bet he's sorry now, because he couldn't help being fed-up with that mouldy old lecture at Bannington!"

The two juniors had just entered Study D in the Remove Passage of the Ancient House. They had returned from the circus, and they were in high spirits. It was now just about tea-time, and Church and McClure were already making preparations. They had bought some extra special pastries from Caistowe with them, and they were intent upon having a swell tea.

The fire was made up, the kettle was put on, and other details received attention. Church and McClure bustled about with a will, totally ignoring the fact that they had been expelled from the study for good. Naturally, they took no notice of this. On the average, they were told to clear out of Study D about three times a week.

"I expect Handy will be coming in before long," said Church, as he cut the bread-and-butter. "And if he isn't in a shocking temper, I shall be surprised. Perhaps this grub will put him in a good humour; he's bound to be hungry, and I must say that the ham looks spiffing and the pastry is first-class. But if Handy starts any of his fat-headed tricks, we'll soon show him a thing or two!"

"You bet!" said the other junior. "The fact is, we're not firm enough with the ass. We let him have his own way too much, and the result is he thinks he's everybody. We ought to make him understand that we're all equal in this study. He's got no more right to——"

"Shush! He's coming, I think!"

Church and McClure kept quiet, and they bustled about even more vigorously than before. They were always talking about putting Handforth in his place, but when it came to it they never attempted the task, for they knew that it would be hopeless. Handforth was aggressive and pigheaded, but at the same time, he was one of the best. Both Church and McClure were always ready to admit this. In spite of Handy's faults, he was true blue. Otherwise Church and McClure would never have put up with him.

Crash!

The door burst open and Handforth entered. This was his usual method of coming in. He just delivered one kick, and cared nothing about locks or fasten-

ings. And, to the astonishment of Church and McClure, their leader was looking cheerful and good-humoured.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said genially. "Getting tea ready? Good! I'm famished! A jolly good spread, too, by the look of it. That's the style! Cycling always gives a fellow a ripping appetite."

Church and McClure exchanged glances. This was better than they had expected. By some extraordinary chance, Handforth had returned in a good temper. It really seemed that he had enjoyed his afternoon, after all.

Certainly he had quite forgotten the squabble which had taken place just after dinner. But Handforth's memory was always a short one, after he had recovered his good humour. He even forgot his clothing was muddy, and that he was going to slaughter somebody for leaving him an old crock instead of a bicycle.

"By the way," he said, as he sat down at the table, "what about that silly circus of yours? I bet it was rotten!"

"Well, you're wrong," said Church. "It was one of the best circuses I've ever seen, and if you'd had any sense, Handy, you would have come with us. You've missed a treat!"

"Rather!" said the other junior.

"Rats!" exclaimed Handforth. "I should have missed a bigger treat if I had come with you! What about this lecture I went to hear? Ex-Superintendent Browning, of Scotland Yard! By George, what a man! What a marvellous detective! Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake ain't in it with him!"

"Who told you he was a marvellous detective?" inquired Church.

"He did himself, of course!" said Handforth. "He told the audience all about his cases—how he had worked them out, step by step, and hunted the criminals down. It was ripping—absolutely great!"

"This Scotland Yard chap seems to think a lot of himself, anyhow," remarked McClure. "I don't call that very modest."

"If a chap is clever, there's no reason why he shouldn't let everybody know it," said Handforth. "What about me? I don't go about saying I'm a fool, do I? I'm not! And I don't go about saying that I'm clever——"

"Naturally you don't," said Church.

"Eh?"

"I—I mean——"

"Everybody knows it, so what's the good of saying it as well?" went on Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to boast, but I will say that my detective ability is rather out of the ordinary. But I've never had a chance to display it. All I require is a decent case, and then I shall make things hum!"

"I'll bet you will!" said Chuch, with conviction.

"What I want is a really good mystery—a complicated, intricate puzzle!" said Handforth. "Something worth unravelling, you know. A regular impenetrable mystery—that's the style of thing. Then I could show my worth. But what chance is there here at St. Frank's? Where is there a mystery? It's beastly hard on a chap who is simply dying to show his ability, and can't do it!"

Church and McClure, of course, had heard all this sort of thing before. It was stale to them. Handforth was never tired of talking about his detective abilities. At first, Church and McClure had howled about it, but they saw nothing funny in it now. Handforth was about the clumsiest ass on the face of the earth, and when it came to investigating mysteries, he invariably got on the wrong trail. This was one of his favourite dodges. But it was no good arguing; it was no good telling him that he was not cut out to be a detective. One might just as well have asked point-blank for a punch on the nose. A punch was delivered, in either case.

But Handforth was full of the lecture, and he was in very high spirits. He had enjoyed his afternoon immensely, and he did not care a rap about the circus. This was quite satisfactory. Church and McClure had spent their time well, and so had Handforth, and they were all content.

"Of course, there's a bit of a mystery about Mr. Foxe," went on Handforth thoughtfully. "There's something queer about the master of the College House. I should like to get at the bottom of it, if I could, but it's not mysterious enough for me. I want something bigger—something more important. Foxey is a queer chap, and I can't quite get to the bottom of him. I saw him this afternoon, just before I went in the town hall, and I'm blest if he didn't dodge into the saloon bar of a public-house! You might have thought that he was afraid of me seeing him!"

Church and McClure both looked up.

"You saw Mr. Foxe this afternoon?" inquired Church.

"Yes."

"Before you went into the town hall?"

"Didn't I just say so?" exclaimed Handforth.

"What time was it, then—exactly?" inquired McClure.

"Twenty-five minutes past two," said Handforth promptly. "I know that for a fact, because I was just outside the town hall, ready to go in, and I was five minutes before time. Mr. Foxe went into that little pub on the other side of the road."

"At twenty-five past two?" asked Church.

"Yes, you fathead!"

"Impossible!" said McClure.

"What?"

"Absolutely impossible!" repeated McClure. "It wasn't Mr. Foxe you saw!"

Handforth glared.

"Oh, wasn't it?" he said. "Who ought to know best—you or I? I saw him, and you were in Caistowe, so you might as well dry up!"

"Rats!" said Church. "There's no need to get wild about it, Handy. But I agree with McClure. You couldn't possibly have seen Mr. Foxe in Bannington at twenty-five minutes past two!"

"And why couldn't I?" demanded Handforth.

"Because Foxey was in Caistowe at that very moment!"

"Rubbish!"

"I tell you——"

"Piffle!" said Handforth. "Foxey in Caistowe at twenty-five minutes past two? Don't talk out of the back of your neck, you ass! Mr. Foxe was in Bannington at that time——"

"Oh, all right; have your own way!" said Church irritably. "You generally do. Sometimes you say that black is white, just so that you can have the last giddy word. But Church and I happened to see Foxey in Caistowe!"

"At twenty-five minutes past two?"

"Yes, at twenty-five minutes past two!" said Church. "Do you think we can mistake him? Not only that, but several other chaps saw him, too—Nipper, and Watson, and Tregellis-West, and Pitt—we all saw him. He dodged out of our way, as though he was afraid of us seeing him!"

Handforth stared.

"Oh, there's something queer about this!" he exclaimed. "I saw Foxey in Bannington—and he tried to dodge me, just as you say. You didn't see Foxe—that's a cert. You saw somebody else, and you must have mistaken——"

"We didn't mistake him, so you needn't continue the argument," interrupted McClure. "There are a dozen fellows who will be ready to swear that they saw Foxey in Caistowe at twenty-five minutes past two this afternoon. So you're knocked flat, Handy. The man you saw was somebody else——"

"I tell you it was Mr. Foxe!" roared Handforth. "Don't I know? Didn't I see him? What's the good of talking rot like that? I've got eyes, and Mr. Foxe ain't the kind of man you can mistake—with his long nose, and bushy eyebrows, and all the rest of it! It would be absolutely impossible to make a bloomer about Mr. Foxe!"

Church nodded.

"Quite right—it would!" he agreed. "And we didn't make any mistake, Handy; it was Mr. Foxe we saw in Caistowe!"

"Rot! I saw him in Bannington!"

"Oh, don't talk silly——"

"You fathead——"

"You idiot——"

"Oh, do dry up!" interrupted McClure. "There's no sense in squabbling about it, you asses! If you go on at this rate, you'll be fighting in a minute or two!"

"I'm going to punch Church in the eye!" declared Handforth warmly. "What does he take me for? Does he think that I can't see straight, or something? I saw Mr. Foxe in Bannington——"

"And I saw him in Caistowe!" protested Church. "And you can corroborate my story, McClure——"

"Of course I can," said McClure. "We certainly did see Foxe in Caistowe this afternoon, just before half-past two. That's the truth, Handy, and there's only one possible thing to conclude—you must have seen somebody who looks very much like Mr. Foxe."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I saw Mr. Foxe himself. The chap you saw was the somebody who looks like him!"

McClure nodded.

"All right; have it that way, if you like," he said. "It simply comes to this, then—there are two editions of Mr.

Smale Foxe walking about. Because it's absolutely impossible for a man to be in two places at one and the same time. You saw him in Bannington, and we saw him in Caistowe—at the same minute. That's obviously impossible, and so there must be two of 'em!"

"Two Mr. Foxe's?"

"Yes," said McClure. "That's the only way to account for it. So we'd better let the argument drop, and say no more about it."

Church, of course, was fully convinced that Handforth had made a mistake, and that the man he had seen was a total stranger. But McClure knew better than to argue, and his chief object now was to bring the discussion to a close. He could see ructions ahead, unless they were careful.

But Handforth took the thing in quite a different way to what McClure had expected. He suddenly jumped to his feet, his face flushing with excitement, and he paced up and down the study with short, restless strides.

"By George!" he ejaculated at last. "A mystery—a regular puzzle! It's just what I was on the look-out for—and here it is, thrown into my hands, ready to be unravelled!"

"Eh?" gasped McClure.

"What?" said Church faintly.

"A mystery—a real, impenetrable mystery!" said Handforth. "I'm going to investigate this, and I'm not going to lose any time about it! There are two Mr. Foxe's—two men exactly the same. The Housemaster of the College House has got a double!"

"Oh, my goodness!" said McClure.

"A double!" repeated Handforth firmly. "That's the only explanation. There are two men who look exactly alike in every detail, and I shouldn't be surprised if there's a conspiracy of some kind. Mr. Smale Foxe is a wrong 'un—he's two wrong 'uns, in fact!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Church. "He can't be two people——"

"Well, there are two editions of him, anyhow," said Handforth. "And I'm going to get to the bottom of the mystery. It's my chance—I'll beat Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake at their own giddy game! I'll even show Mr. Nelson Lee up!"

"You—you burbling idiot!" said McClure. "You must be mad!"

But Handforth was too excited to take any notice of the insult.

"I'm going to watch Mr. Foxe as a cat watches a mouse!" he went on keenly. "I'm going to watch him day and night—I'm going to be his shadow! And, sooner or later, I shall succeed in unravelling the knot!"

And Handforth, grabbing his cap, marched out of Study D, and banged the door after him. Church and McClure gazed at one another rather blankly.

"Well, I'm blest!" said Church. "Fancy the ass taking it like that!"

"Oh, there's no accounting for what he'll do!" said McClure. "Let him go. Thank goodness he didn't try to drag us with him! He'll cool off after a bit—after he's met with failure. It's no good trying to knock sense into his head—you might just as well talk to a coconut!"

Meanwhile, Handforth met with an extraordinary piece of luck.

As a general rule, if Handforth started any attempt at detective work, he met with dismal and absolute failure; but, on this occasion, by some trick of fate, he was permitted to find out something of the utmost importance. It was just an example of "fools' luck."

Handforth went straight out into the Triangle. He had no particular plan in mind, except that he was going to hang about the College House, in the hope of catching sight of Mr. Smale Foxe. And he certainly did think of approaching the Housemaster's window. But Handforth had not been out in the Triangle for more than three minutes before he gave a start.

A figure had just emerged from the lobby of the College House—a figure which Handforth knew at once. It was Mr. Foxe himself! The Housemaster was intent upon going out, for he was wearing a thick overcoat and a tweed cap.

"By George!" muttered Handforth. "This is ripping! I shall get on the track straight away!"

He quite overlooked the fact that Mr. Foxe was probably going down to the post-office, or on some innocent errand of that kind. But, as a matter of fact, Mr. Foxe was not setting off on such an innocent mission.

He walked across the Triangle, and then made his way down Bellton Lane in the direction of the village. And Handforth followed behind, at some little distance.

If Mr. Smale Foxe had been suspicious

—if he had suspected that somebody was shadowing him—Handforth would have had no chance. But Mr. Foxe did not even once glance backwards. He was quite satisfied, in fact, that he was alone, and that nobody was taking an interest in his movements.

And, after walking down the lane for some little way, Mr. Foxe came to a halt.

Handforth started, and crouched near the hedge. For he knew that the Housemaster had come to a stop just against the old stile which led into the depth of Bellton Wood. Mr. Foxe was intent upon going along the footpath! This, in itself, looked suspicious to Handforth's mind. Why should a respectable Housemaster want to go into the depth of a wood in the darkness of the evening?

Mr. Foxe stepped over the stile, and then completely vanished from view.

"My hat!" muttered Handforth, in alarm.

For he was afraid that he would lose his quarry. He ran lightly down the lane, slowing down somewhat as he approached the stile. And he did not risk going right up to the stile itself. Instead, he wormed his way through a gap in the hedge, which was situated about ten yards away. Handforth found himself in the wood, and he crouched still for a moment or two, and heard the crackling of twigs.

Inch by inch, Handforth went forward, and still he could hear the sound of twigs being broken under foot. And Handforth came to one conclusion—Mr. Foxe had not taken the footpath through the wood, but had stopped after penetrating a hundred yards. And now he was pacing up and down, killing time; in fact, Mr. Foxe was waiting for somebody! And this supposition was proved to be true almost at once, for, when Handforth had got somewhat closer, he came to a halt. Other footsteps were sounding, and they were coming from the direction of the lane. Then a dim figure loomed up, and came along the footpath. It passed on, and then Handforth heard a mutter of voices. He took this opportunity to worm his way nearer, creeping round trees, and avoiding the bushes. And at last he was in a position where he could see the two figures standing there in the lane, talking to one another in low voices. Handforth stood quite still, listening intently.

And he was somewhat discouraged and disappointed when he found it impossible to distinguish any of the words that were being said. He only knew that the voice was that of Mr. Foxe; in fact, both voices seemed to be the same! This may have been fancy, but Handforth was certain of it. To his chagrin, he could not distinguish any words that were being uttered, and it was absolutely impossible to go nearer without being heard and seen. So the amateur detective of the Ancient House remained where he was, crouching behind a tree.

Then a match was suddenly struck. It flared up, and Handforth fixed his gaze upon the heads and shoulders of the two men.

And what he saw fairly staggered him.

The men were facing one another, and each had a cigarette in his mouth. The match had obviously been struck for the purpose of lighting the cigarette. It was a wax vesta, and it blazed up quite brilliantly in the still air.

An ordinary match is not an excellent source of illumination, but, when the surroundings are pitchy black, and the match happens to burn steadily, it casts quite a good light for the moment. And it was so in this case. Handforth was permitted to see the faces of the two men with quite remarkable distinctness.

And it was impossible to tell one from the other. They were alike—absolutely alike in every detail!

It was almost beyond belief!

The man on the left was Mr. Smale Foxe—and the man on the right was Mr. Smale Foxe!

The thin features, the long nose, bushy eyebrows—everything, in fact! Both men possessed the same features in every tiny detail—one was the double of the other!

Handforth was more startled than he could say; his brain refused to work properly, and his mind was in a state of chaos. Was he seeing correctly, or was this some optical illusion? He had suspected something of the kind, after he had heard what Church and McClure had told him; but here was actual proof of it—positive, concrete proof!

And then the match went out, and only the faint glow of the two cigarettes remained. But Handforth had seen enough—he knew the truth. Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College

House, had a double. And Handforth now vaguely remembered one or two puzzling things which had occurred during the past week or so. Mr. Foxe had not been the same on all occasions. Sometimes he had been harsh and overbearing—at other times he had been quite decent.

Handforth formed the startling theory that there had been two Mr. Foxes at St. Frank's—not at the same time, but at different periods. One Mr. Foxe had presided over the College House for a certain time, and his place had then been taken by the other Mr. Foxe!

Handforth would have given a term's pocket-money if he could have heard what the pair were saying; but he could not catch even a single word. It was terribly galling. And then Mr. Foxe and his double commenced walking down the footpath. They were chatting together, and were just walking for the sake of something to do.

And Handforth was so full of his discovery that he decided not to wait. He wanted to dash back to St. Frank's, and tell his chums of his wonderful success. And so, as quietly as possible, he backed away, reached the hedge, and emerged into Bellton Lane. Then he raced away for the school.

He arrived in a breathless condition, and went rushing across the Triangle, and literally hurled himself into the Ancient House. He charged against Pitt and Gray and Solomon Levi, who happened to be in the lobby. Levi was sent flying, and Pitt staggered back, and sat down abruptly on the floor.

"You—you silly ass!" roared Pitt wrathfully.

But Handforth had gone, and he was now in the Remove passage. Just before he arrived at Study D he came to a halt, and paused for breath. The sound of laughter came to him through the door of his study.

"And now he's investigating!" McClure was saying. "He's going to get to the bottom of the mystery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's going to be Mr. Foxe's shadow!" said Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth clenched his fists, grabbed the door handle, and burst into the study. He found it occupied by his own chums — Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and myself. We were all grinning hugely.

"Oh, so this is the game, is it?" said Handforth warmly. "You traitors—you rotters! But I'll show you up—I'll prove that my investigations have turned out successfully! I'll show you whether I'm a good detective or not!"

"Good old Handy!" I chuckled. "Keep it up! One of these days you might discover something—there's no telling!"

Handforth sniffed.

"I've discovered something already!" he said. "I've——"

The door suddenly opened, and Pitt and Gray and Levi appeared.

"You—you silly idiot!" said Pitt. "What the dickens was the idea of bowling us over like that in the lobby?"

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" said Handforth impatiently. "I was in a hurry, and you shouldn't get in my way! I've got something of particular importance to say, so you'd better close that door, and listen. I know I can trust you chaps—you're all decent!"

"Oh, thanks awfully, dear old boy!" remarked Sir Montie. "It's frightfully good of you to say that, begad!"

Handforth looked round in a mysterious kind of way.

"I've made a discovery!" he said impressively.

"Go hon!"

"What is it?" inquired Pitt. "Have you found out that Foxe is a hound?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth frowned.

"If you're going to cackle all the time, I won't say anything!" he threatened. "I've made a discovery of the utmost importance, and I want you chaps to treat it in the right way. I'll tell you what's happened. I followed Mr. Foxe down the lane, not long ago, and he went into the wood!"

"The scoundrel!" said Pitt fiercely.

"Oh, I don't know," grinned Tommy Watson. "Foxes are often to be found in woods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to be funny, I won't say another word!" shouted Handforth, glaring round. "This is a serious business, and I've got on the track of something tremendously important. And all you can do is to grin, and make remarks that you call jokes!"

I looked round severely.

"Order in court!" I exclaimed. "This is a serious matter—Handforth

says so. And it's only right to give him a fair hearing, and to discover what he has done!"

"Go ahead, Handy!" chuckled Reginald Pitt.

"Awfully kind of you to give me permission!" said Handforth sarcastically. "If you fellows would only realise the importance of this affair, you wouldn't be so jolly funny! Mr. Foxe went into the wood, and I followed him. And after a bit he came to a stop, and paced up and down."

"Because he felt lonely?" inquired Pitt.

"No, you ass—because he was waiting for somebody!" said Handforth. "It was an appointment—with himself!"

"Eh?"

"With himself!" repeated Handforth mysteriously. "You don't understand that, do you? Well, I'll explain. He hadn't been there long before another man came—evidently from the village. They shook hands, and stood there talking."

"And you listened, I suppose?" asked Watson.

"Yes."

"Eavesdropper!"

"Oh, don't be dotty!" snapped Handforth. "I listened, but I couldn't hear anything—they spoke too low. In any case, a detective is permitted to listen while criminals make their plots—it ain't eavesdropping at all!"

"Are you calling Mr. Foxe a criminal?" asked Pitt.

"Well, I believe he's a wrong 'un," said Handforth grimly. "There's something fishy about him, anyhow. Well, to go on. Mr. Foxe struck a match, and he and the other man lit cigarettes. And while the match flared up, I made an extraordinary discovery!"

"The plot thickens!" murmured Pitt.

"What I saw was this!" said Handforth, in deep, impressive tones. "On the left stood Mr. Smale Foxe—and on the right stood Mr. Smale Foxe!"

"Eh?"

"Say that again!" exclaimed Watson. "If Mr. Foxe stood on the right, how the dickens could he stand on the left?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're getting a bit mixed, Handy!" I put in, smiling.

"I'm not mixed!" snapped Handforth. "I'm telling you exactly what I saw. On the left stood Mr. Foxe, and on the right stood Mr. Foxe—but I don't suppose your brains are capable of understanding exactly what I mean. I'll put it plainer. The man on the left was exactly the same as the man on the right—in short, they were both exactly the same!"

"My hat!"

"Draw it mild, Handy!"

"You don't expect us to believe this, surely?"

"It's the truth!" snorted Handforth. "Both the men were exactly the same—the same noses, the same eyes, the same features in every way. There were two Mr. Smale Foxes standing there!"

Pitt looked rather anxious.

"I say! You haven't been taking anything strong, I suppose?" he inquired. "Mrs. Hake's ginger beer is all right, as far as I know—it's never made me see two of anything——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you idiot!" roared Handforth. "I'm doing my best to tell you exactly what I've seen, and all you can do is to make jokes! I tell you that Mr. Smale Foxe has got a double, and that double met him in the wood to-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not quite good enough, Handy!" said Pitt. "You only saw the two men just for a moment, while that match flared up, and it's quite easy to make mistakes. It was your imagination, old son. You wanted to see two Mr. Foxes! You made a bloomer this afternoon, and made out that you saw Mr. Foxe in Bannington, while he was really in Caistowe. And now, to suit your own theory, you make two Mr. Foxes! We're not swallowing it, old son!"

"Rather not!"

"Begad! It's a bit too thick, dear old fellow!"

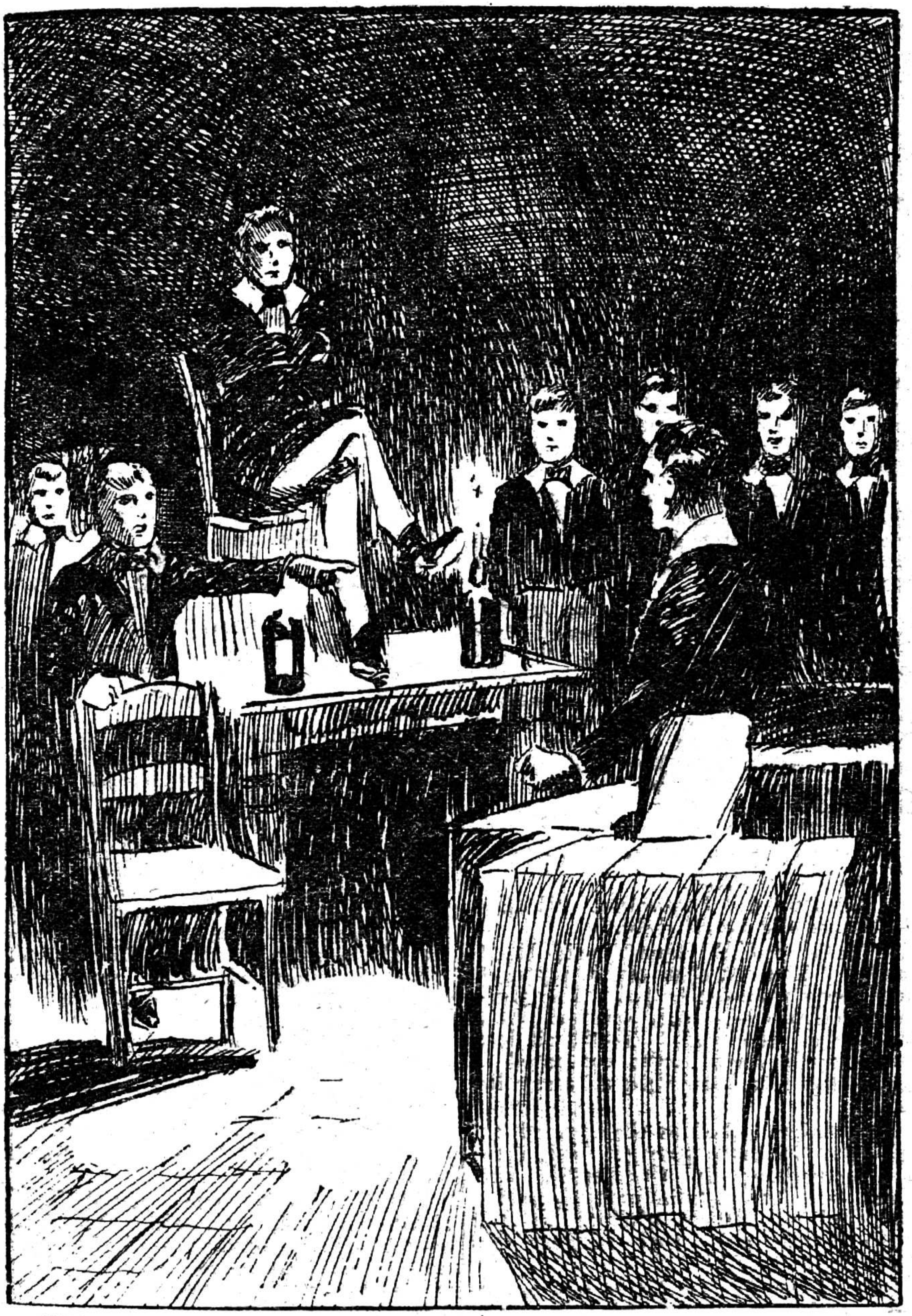
"You'd better try again, Handy!"

Handforth nearly choked as he gazed round at the grinning juniors.

"You—you disbelieving asses!" he roared. "Don't you believe me? Don't you believe that I'm telling the truth?"

"We think that you are sincere enough, Handy!" I said gently. "But everybody's liable to make mistakes—even the best detectives. And it's quite clear that you must have made a bloomer this time——"

"I didn't make a bloomer!" howled



"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly. "He admits every giddy thing. He's like a parrot—he can't say anything else but 'yes'! I call upon you, Gentlemen of the Jury, to pronounce your verdict."

Handforth. "I saw two editions of Mr. Foxe——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you——"

"You'll be the death of us one of these days, old son!" said Pitt, grinning. "Oh, my sainted aunt, what a yarn—what a wild and woolly one!"

"Too woolly to be swallowed!" grinned McClure.

"Rather!" said Church.

Handforth stormed and raved, but it was no good. His story wouldn't be believed—and this was particularly exasperating, seeing that it was true. This time Handforth had made a real discovery, and his feelings were certainly rather raw when he found that nobody would believe it! He was disgusted more than he could say.

At last he calmed down, very suddenly. This was one of his favourite tricks. He became icily cool, and his expression was one of withering contempt.

"All right, I'm not going to argue," he said curtly. "I'm disgusted with you—I'm fed up! Before long, I'll prove the truth of this story of mine—I'll bring complete evidence. All I ask is that you don't talk about it, because that would upset the apple cart. Just keep mum about what I've told you, and within a week I'll bring you the real evidence!"

"Good!" said Pitt. "That's the style, Handy. We won't say anything—will we, you chaps?"

"Not a word!" I promised. "I know the others will be all right."

"That's settled, then!" said Handforth. "You can clear out of my study now—good riddance to you! I'm going to investigate this case, and I'm going to get at the truth! You'll all look pretty small when you're compelled to admit that I've been right all along the line!"

The juniors yelled as they passed out into the Remove passage. But there was something in Handforth's tone which was just a little unusual, and I wondered to myself whether he had really struck an actual mystery this time.

Edward Oswald Handforth was generally supposed to be a duffer of the first water; but Handforth wasn't quite such a duffer as he generally seemed to be!

CHAPTER IV.

FURTHER DISCOVERIES!

SUNDAY was rather a blank day for the amateur detective of the Remove. He watched the College House constantly, but, unfortunately, Mr. Smale Foxe remained indoors all day long. He did not venture out once, and Handforth was disappointed.

But, when night came, Handforth's enthusiasm had by no means waned. He was still keenly determined to follow Mr. Foxe's trail, and, as he informed Church and McClure, he would not cease his efforts until he had fathomed the mystery.

On Monday, of course, there were lessons to do. This was a positive nuisance; but lessons were as inevitable as the sunrise, and they had to be attended. Handforth felt it a terrible waste of time, and he chafed all the morning as he sat in the Remove classroom.

Twice he got into trouble with Mr. Crowell, and he came within an inch of being detained for the evening. After that, Handforth paid more attention to his lessons.

During the dinner-hour, he kept his eyes well open, but there was nothing doing. When afternoon lessons came, then once more Handforth was plunged into a mood of feverish impatience. While he was wasting his time here, in the class-room, perhaps Mr. Foxe was going about, meeting his double: all sorts of things might be occurring, in fact. Handforth was losing opportunities all the time. It was terribly galling.

But all things come to an end, sooner or later—even lessons: and at last tea-time arrived. Handforth felt like a prisoner coming out of gaol, and his first move was across the Triangle towards the College House. He made one or two careless inquiries, and gained the information that Mr. Foxe was in his study, and had been indoors nearly all day.

"Well, that's one consolation!" Handforth told himself. "I don't expect he'll do anything until after dark now—that's his wheeze. But I'm going to watch him—I'm going to keep my eyes open all the time."

He noticed that Church and McClure were standing against the steps of the

Ancient House, and he moved over towards them.

"Coming in to tea, Handy?" inquired Church.

"Yes, I'm coming in now," said Handforth. "But McClure is going to stop out here."

"Eh?" said McClure.

"You're going to stop out here, my son."

"What the dickens for?" demanded McClure. "I want my tea as well as you do——"

"You can have your tea afterwards. At present you're going to remain here!" said Handforth grimly. "I don't want any objections or any insubordination. Don't forget that you chaps are my assistants!"

"Your which?" said Church, staring.

"My assistants!" replied Handforth. "At any time Mr. Foxe might come out, with the intention of going for a walk, or something—or to keep an appointment. If we all go in to tea, we shall probably miss him: therefore, you've got to remain out here on the watch, McClure. I'll have my tea as quickly as I can. If you see Mr. Foxe, buzz up to the study window, and tap upon it. It won't take me two minutes to dodge out and to get on the trail."

"Oh, my hat!" muttered McClure. "It's a dotty idea——"

"Are you going to do as I say, or will you take a punch on the nose?" said Handforth aggressively. "I'm not in a mood to stand any nonsense. You've got to obey orders—that's what you are for! If there's any insubordination, I shall put it down with a firm hand!"

McClure felt rather helpless. There was no way out of this difficulty; he would have to stop out here, in the Triangle, until Handforth had had his tea. But McClure felt rather cross.

"All right—go and get tea as quickly as you can!" he growled. "Don't keep me hanging about here for long!"

Handforth went off without another word, and McClure hung about the Triangle, feeling decidedly fed up. Of course, he saw no sign whatever of Mr. Smale Foxe; he would have been very surprised if he had done so, and, a quarter of an hour later, Handforth reappeared chewing the last mouthful of his meal.

"Well?" he asked in a low voice. "Anything to report?"

"Oh, a lot!" said McClure sarcastically. "Old Cuttle came out of his lodge, walked up and down for a bit, filled his pipe, and lit it. Then he looked up at the sky, shook his head gloomily, and went back into his lodge. Three fags came up and cheeked me, and I flipped one of them over the ear. Then Morrow came by, and wanted to know what I was hanging about for. Mr. Lee went over to the Head's house, and advised me to go indoors, because it's a bit cold——"

"There's no need to tell me all this rot!" interrupted Handforth. "I mean, is there anything to report about Foxey?"

"Oh, Foxey!" said McClure. "Anything to report? Of course there isn't, you ass! I haven't seen a sign of him—I never expected to!"

"All right—get indoors, and have some tea!" said Handforth briskly. "I'm afraid you don't appreciate the honour I have bestowed upon you. As one of my assistants, you ought to feel proud!"

McClure couldn't think of a fitting answer, so he went indoors without saying anything. He went to Study D, and partook of tea with Church, and the two juniors discussed Handforth until the meal was over. Then they cleared away, and strolled out into the Triangle. They found Handforth still there, prowling about in the gloom under the old chestnut trees. By this time Handforth himself was beginning to feel somewhat fed up.

"Anything to report?" inquired McClure, as he came up.

Handforth glared.

"I don't want any of your rot!" he said grimly. "No, there's nothing to report! Foxey hasn't come out—confound him!"

"Most inconsiderate!" said Church. "I think something ought to be done about it, Handy! You're out here, waiting in the cold—waiting to follow Mr. Foxe when he comes out, and the chap sticks indoors the whole time. He hasn't got an atom of consideration for you!"

Handforth ignored this attempt at humour.

"What's the time?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, half-past six!" said Church. "A little over, in fact. It must be nearly twenty minutes to seven."

"It's no good hanging about here, Handy!" put in McClure. "The best thing you can do is to come indoors, and do your prep.——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Handforth. "Look! There he is, now—he's just coming out! My patience is rewarded!"

Church and McClure looked at Mr. Smale Foxe without very much interest. The master of the College House had just appeared, and he came down into the Triangle, and walked about for some few moments, evidently taking the air. It was impossible for him to see the three juniors, for they were completely hidden in the darkness under the old chestnut trees. And it probably seemed to Mr. Foxe that the Triangle was quite deserted.

At all events, he proceeded to do something rather curious.

He went over to the school wall, not far from the gate, to a spot where he could find concealment behind some tree trunks. And he stayed there—he placed himself flat against the wall, and did not move.

"Well, I'm blest!" muttered Church. "What's the idea of that, I wonder?"

"He's watching—he's waiting for something!" said Handforth. "Didn't I tell you that he's a wrong 'un? No ordinary Housemaster would crouch against the wall like that, and try to hide himself! By George, I believe we're going to get on the track!"

The school clock chimed, announcing to one and all that the time was now a quarter to seven—and still Mr. Foxe remained there. Now and again fellows would come out of the College House, and pass across to the gymnasium or to the Ancient House. Seniors and juniors were in and out all the time, and Mr. Foxe remained secure in his place of concealment. And Handforth and Co. did not show themselves; even Church and McClure were greatly interested now, and rather puzzled. Why was Mr. Foxe acting in this peculiar way?

At ten minutes to seven a junior came out of the College House. Handforth and Co. recognised him as Ernest Lawrence. The Removite was wearing his overcoat and cap, and, contrary to the expectations of the three Ancient House juniors, he did not walk towards the gate at all. Instead, he went right across the Triangle, and vanished in the direction of the playing fields. Then, to the astonishment of Handforth and Co., Mr. Foxe left his place of concealment, and followed Lawrence!

"My hat!" muttered Church. "What's the idea of that?"

"I don't know—but we're going to find out!" said Handforth. "I don't think I ought to let you fellows come, as a matter of fact—you'll only mess things up. I'm going to follow Foxey, and you can follow me, Church, if you like—and McClure can come on behind. But don't get too close—it's no good having amateur detectives on a job like this!"

"Great Scott!" said McClure. "What do you call yourself, then?"

Handforth did not reply, and crept away on the track of Mr. Foxe. Church and McClure, after a short consultation, followed their leader. They were both curious to see where this little adventure would end.

Handforth was very puzzled when he saw that Lawrence had turned into the big paddock, Mr. Foxe, too, closely following the College House junior. But it was so dark that Lawrence had no indication that he was being shadowed.

Seven o'clock was just chiming out when Lawrence reached the barn, which stood at the bottom of the paddock, and entered by means of the old ramshackle door. A figure moved out from the shadows, and came towards him.

"Is that you, Lawrence?" inquired the voice of Mr. Norman Rook.

"Yes, sir," said the junior. "You're here, then?"

"I've been here for ten minutes," replied Mr. Rook. "And you are here prompt to the minute. Excellent! It will not be necessary for me to detain you long, my lad—this interview can be over within five minutes."

Outside crouched Mr. Smale Foxe. The master had found it impossible to get to the door—without being detected, for Lawrence and Mr. Rook were standing quite close. But the walls of this old building were made of wood, and there were many cracks to be seen. Mr. Foxe was standing against one of these—and it was easily possible for him to overhear every word that was being said.

As for Handforth and Co., they were rather helpless. Handforth crept as near as he could, and Church and McClure came up to him. But it was quite out of the question for them to get near enough to know exactly what was going

on within the barn. All they could do was to crouch there, waiting and watching—and decidedly impatient.

In the barn, Mr. Rook and Lawrence were talking.

"I have to be extremely careful to keep everything secret," Mr. Rook was saying. "There is not a soul who knows that 'Young Ern' is really a junior schoolboy of St. Frank's. I don't suppose the public would believe it, even if the statement was made."

"It's most important that it should be kept quiet, sir," said Lawrence.

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Rook. "And it will be kept quiet, my boy. Well, look here—we cannot waste our time by discussing these matters. We must get to business. I have been successful in arranging for a fight for the Wednesday evening of next week. Do you think you will be fit enough then to enter the ring?"

"Oh, I'm fit enough, sir—even now!" replied Lawrence. "But I don't know whether it will be safe——"

"It must be safe—everything depends upon this bout," said Mr. Rook. "It will take place at the Ring Pavilion, Helmford—where you met Jimmy Rhodes. And this fight is being organised well, Lawrence. All the seats are being booked up rapidly—at double prices. You see, great interest in boxing is taken at Helmford, and you have made a name for yourself already. You will fight a twenty round contest with Mike Connor."

"Oh!" said Lawrence. "I've heard of him."

"I'm not at all surprised to hear you say that," said the boxing promotor. "Mike Connor is an Irish-American boxer of some renown—and he will be a hard nut for you to crack, but I am confident, Lawrence, that you will be able to pull the fight off. I have infinite faith in you, and I do not think you will disappoint. At the same time, you must realise that this contest will be a very severe tax upon your ingenuity and skill. You must use every effort, and you must put in all your spare moments at practice and training."

"I will, sir," said Lawrence. "But I shall have to be careful, or the fellows might get wondering why I'm doing so much boxing."

"I think I can trust you to take every precaution," smiled Mr. Rook. "The purse, as I indicated before, will be a large one—for the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds. If you win, you will receive one hundred pounds—and if you lose, you will receive fifty pounds."

Lawrence's eyes sparkled.

"It's a big prize, Mr. Rook!" he exclaimed eagerly. "My goodness! It's—it's worth thinking about!"

Lawrence thought even then. He remembered his father, struggling hard in London to keep his business going. Mr. Lawrence had met with a big disaster, for he had lost all his money in a bank crash. If Lawrence could only win this hundred pounds, and send it to his father, it would be a wonderful achievement. And the junior did not hesitate a moment in accepting the offer—he decided to fight Mike Connor in the Ring Pavilion on the Wednesday of the following week.

Mr. Rook was very pleased, and he did not waste much time. He continued talking only for a short while longer, and then he shook hands with Lawrence, and took his departure. He had fixed things up—and that was sufficient.

Lawrence emerged from the barn, and made his way back across the paddock slowly and thoughtfully. And then, quite abruptly, a form appeared before him—a form which he recognised almost at once as that of Mr. Smale Foxe! The junior caught his breath in sharply, and stared at the Housemaster in alarm and anger.

"One moment, Lawrence—one moment!" said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "I would like a little chat with you!"

"A—a chat!" echoed Lawrence. "What for, sir? You've been following me—you've been spying——"

"That is rather a nasty word to use, my lad," interrupted Mr. Foxe grimly. "I have certainly overheard your conversation with Mr. Rook—if that is what you mean. And I am greatly interested by your little plans. So you intend to go to Helmford on Wednesday week, and it is your plan to fight Mike Connor at the Ring Pavilion for a purse of a hundred-and-fifty pounds?"

"Well, what are you going to do, sir?" asked Lawrence hotly. "You evidently mean mischief, or you wouldn't have taken the trouble to follow me, and listen to my conversation with Mr. Rook!"

"Look here, Lawrence, I do not wish to be hard on you," said the House-

master. "When you fought Lightning Left Ned, in Mr. Gubbins' boxing booth, I said nothing—I held my tongue——"

"On condition that I gave you ten pounds!" cut in Lawrence bitterly.

"We will not go into details!" said Mr. Foxe. "Then you had a big fight with a person named Jimmy Rhodes at the Ring Pavilion in Helmford—and you pocketed the sum of sixty pounds, being the winner. You managed to get out of that scrape fairly easily, my lad. But, in this instance, you will find it a more difficult matter. Personally, I have no objection to make regarding your plans—they have my entire approval. But, if you wish to keep your engagement, you will promise to pay me half the prize-money, after you receive it. That is, if you win, I shall expect fifty pounds. If you lose, I must be content with twenty-five."

Lawrence's eyes blazed.

"Why should I give you anything?" he demanded angrily. "If I fight this man, and beat him, I shall earn the money. It's not fair, Mr. Foxe—you have no right——"

"We are not discussing rights or fairness," interrupted Mr. Foxe grimly. "It so happens that I have you in the hollow of my hand—and I shall do precisely as I please. And it will please me to reveal the fact that 'Young Ern', the new lightweight boxer, is none other than Lawrence of the College House at St. Frank's. It will give me great pleasure to reveal the fact—unless you comply with my suggestion. If you do not give me your promise, Lawrence, I shall see that Dr. Stafford is present at this fight. If you appear, it will be the end of your career at St. Frank's."

"But—but——"

"You had better realise your position now, and without any further delay," went on the Housemaster curtly. "You cannot defy me, Lawrence——"

"I do defy you!" interrupted the junior hotly. "You can do your worst! I know well enough that you won't carry out your threat! And I'm not going to be scared, Mr. Foxe."

The Housemaster gritted his teeth. Again he was finding out that Ernest Lawrence was a match for him. It was a galling discovery, for he had tried to make himself believe that Lawrence would knuckle under. But the junior refused to be frightened.

They talked for some time—Mr. Foxe argued, and went over all the events which had taken place—he discussed Lawrence's earlier fight, and the junior was thoroughly wearied.

"You will please remember, Lawrence, that my threats are not idle," said Mr. Foxe, finally. "I will give you until Wednesday evening to make up your mind. You must come to me then, and give me your answer. And, if you are still obstinate—well, it will be very bad for you."

And Mr. Smale Foxe turned on his heel and walked away—leaving Ernest Lawrence standing there, apparently quite alone, with clenched fists, and frowning brow. He was furious at the thought that this man should have him in his power.

And neither Mr. Foxe nor Lawrence had the slightest idea that their whole conversation had been overheard. Three juniors had listened to every word—and these three juniors were Handforth and Church and McClure. The heroes of Study D were concealed in the grass, lying flat on the ground.

Handforth, in his efforts to get on the track of the Foxe mystery, had hit upon something quite different—and he was rather startled, and certainly amazed.

As for Church and McClure, they were staggered.

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CHAPTER V.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

"A PRIZE-FIGHTER!" said Handforth huskily.

"A pugilist!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

Church and McClure stared at their leader in blank amazement. They were all sitting up in the grass now—for Ernest Lawrence had gone. He had walked away in the direction of the Triangle, and had been lost to view. The three chums of Study D were now doing their best to gather their wits together. Handforth rose to his feet, and his chums followed his example. And they stared at one another blankly.

"I—I can't believe it, you know!" exclaimed Church. "Lawrence, of the College House—a Remove chap! And

he's a prize-fighter! Oh, it's mad! There must be some——"

"Rubbish!" said Handforth. "It's true enough—it's bound to be true——"

"And Foxe!" put in McClure. "A Housemaster! He knows all about it, and instead of reporting the thing to the Head, he means to drag some money out of Lawrence! The awful rotter—the criminal! Well, we've found something out, Handy!"

Handforth glared.

"We?" he repeated grimly. "I like that! A fat lot you've done! If it hadn't been for me, nothing would have been known!"

"Well, we needn't argue about that," said Church. "You can take all the credit, if you like, Handy—the main thing is, what are we going to do? What action shall we take?"

"Action?" repeated Handforth. "Why, we're going to smash Lawrence to bits!"

"Eh?"

"Wipe him up!" declared Handforth. "The awful bounder! A prize-fighter—a chap who goes to the Ring Pavilion, and fights with common, low-down bruisers! Why, it's the limit—it's—it's absolutely disgraceful."

"Rather!" said McClure. "But I can hardly believe it, you know! Lawrence doesn't seem to be that kind of chap at all. He's always struck me as being decent."

Handforth shook his head.

"You can't tell what a chap is by his looks," he said wisely. "And I've been rather suspicious of Lawrence for some time past—he's acted jolly mysteriously. If it hadn't been for this case connected with Foxey, I should have given my attention to Lawrence long ago!"

"You ass!" said Church. "You only started this affair about Foxe to-day!"

"Well, I'm not going to argue," said Handforth. "The fact remains that Lawrence is up to some pretty rotten tricks—and he's a disgrace to the form. Thank goodness he's in the College House!"

"But, hang it all, it's impossible for a Remove chap to be mixed up in professional prize-fights!" said Church. "He couldn't stand it—he couldn't enter a proper boxing ring and win——"

"What do you mean—he couldn't?" demanded Handforth. "Haven't we had proof of it? Haven't we overheard the whole thing? Lawrence has fixed up another fight for Wednesday week, and if he wins he'll get a hundred quid."

"Great Scott!"

"But—but, I've heard of that chap—Mike Connor!" said McClure. "He's a well-known boxer. I saw his name in the paper not long ago, connected with a case of drunkenness, or something. It's mad to think that Lawrence could fight a chap like that!"

"Well, it's a fact, anyhow," said Handforth. "I don't suppose this chap Connor, was drunk. Professional boxers don't drink, as a rule—at least, not when they're training. We know that Lawrence can fight. Don't you remember the way he smashed Grayson to bits? Grayson of the Fifth."

"Yes, he did make a mess of Grayson," admitted Church. "And it might be right, I suppose—we overheard everything. But what a disgrace—what an awful thing! Fighting for money under a false name!"

Handforth nodded.

"Of course, this fight ain't coming off," he said. "We'll see to that! And, what's more, I'm going to find Lawrence now, and I'm going to give him the hiding of his life—just to make him realise that he mustn't do these rotten things."

"You're going to give him a hiding?" repeated Church, staring.

"I am—I'll lick him until he can't see straight!"

"You ass!" said McClure.

"Eh?"

"You silly idiot——"

"Look here, my son, if you want a thick ear——" began Handforth.

"Oh, don't start rotting now," interrupted McClure. "You're pretty lively with your fists, Handy, and you've got a decent punch. But if you think that you can give Lawrence a hiding, you've made a bloomer."

"Oh, have I?" roared Handforth. "I know what I can do——"

"But, my dear chap, just consider!" protested Church. "Lawrence fought a professional in Helmford, and whacked him. A professional, mind you! If he can do that, it stands to reason that he could wipe you up with one hand."

Handforth was thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he admitted. "Lawrence does seem to be a bit of a terror. I don't forget the

way he smashed Grayson to bits. Well, we've got to do something, and I suggest that we all three collar him, and shove him through the mill."

Church shook his head.

"It would be a lot better to tell Nipper," he said. "I suggest that we all go along to Study C at once, see Nipper, and tell him all about it. It's too big for us to deal with alone. That's my opinion, Handy."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was going to suggest something of the same sort," said Handforth.

This was a stock phrase of his, and he always trotted it out when one of his chums happened to make a good suggestion. Handforth never liked to admit that Church and McClure had thought of something which he himself had overlooked.

So, without any further discussion, the three juniors went back to the Triangle, entered the Ancient House, and made their way straight to Study C. They came marching in just as Watson and Tregellis-West and I were finishing our prep.

"Sorry—too busy to attend to you now!" I said briskly. "Come again in five minutes, and you shall have our full attention. We're just putting the finishing touches to our prep.——"

"Blow your prep.!" said Handforth. "I've got something important to tell you—something vital. Close that door, Church. And don't forget, we've got to speak in whispers!" he added mysteriously.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"Begad! In whispers?" he repeated. "Dear old boy, why is it necessary to be so frightfully cautious? What shockin' secret are you about to disclose?"

"It's about Lawrence!" said Handforth, bending over the table. "I've made a discovery. Lawrence is a prize fighter! He's been in the habit of going over to Helmford to fight professionals in the Ring Pavilion——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Montie and Tommy and I yelled.

"That's rather a good one, Handy," I said pleasantly. "Got any more like it?"

Handforth glared.

"You—you ass!" he roared. "Don't you believe me?"

"No!" I grinned. "You can't spoof us with that yarn, old son——"

"Yarn!" howled Handforth. "It's the truth! And, what's more, Mr. Foxe, of the College House, has been blackmailing Lawrence, and extracting some of the prize money out of him. And old Foxey demands fifty quid if Lawrence wins the fight next week."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad!" exclaimed Montie. "This is frightfully amusing—it is, really! I thought the first one was tall, but Handforth is beating his own record, begad!"

"You've come to the wrong place, Handy," I said sweetly. "It's no good telling these yarns to us."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I should advise you to go to the marines——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly bubbled over. He raved, he roared, and he shouted—in spite of the fact that he had distinctly stated that only whispers were to be exchanged. And we listened patiently until he had exhausted the flow.

"Now then, what is it all about?" I inquired at length, turning to Church. "What's this precious fable that Handforth's been trotting out?"

"Well, I'm blessed if I know what to say!" exclaimed Church. "I can't quite believe the yarn myself; but I believe it's true."

"Begad! That's rather contradictory."

"Well, you know what I mean," said Church. "It seems too dotty to believe, and yet I can't do anything else."

And, with the able assistance of McClure, and with various sulphuric interjections from Handforth, Church proceeded to tell us the whole story. He explained how they had followed Mr. Foxe, and how they had overheard the conversation between the Housemaster and Lawrence.

We listened with great interest and full attention. I knew well enough that Church was hard-headed, and not likely to be spoofed. And I was serious when he had come to the end of his story. It was convincing.

"Well, it's a jolly queer kind of affair," I said at last. "You're quite certain that this is all true, Church? You really did overhear Foxey——"

"Oh, yes, it's all true!" said Church.

"That's why it's so extraordinary. To think that Lawrence should be a prize fighter!"

I thought for a minute or two, and then came to a decision. In my opinion, there was only one thing to be done.

"Well, strictly speaking, this isn't our affair," I said. "Lawrence may be a Remove chap, but he belongs to the College House. Therefore, it's up to Christine, as skipper on the other side, to decide what course shall be taken. I suggest that we all go over into the College House, and heard Christine in his den."

"Good!" said Church. "That's a ripping idea."

And, a few minutes later, we were all marching into the lobby of the College House—the six of us. We had only got about halfway across, when a crowd of Removites came charging out of the passages.

"Fossils!" yelled somebody. "Collar them——"

"Pax!" I exclaimed. "Can't you see this?"

I was waving a handkerchief, as a kind of flag of truce, and the juniors were unable to interfere with us. They were compelled to respect the white flag.

And so we marched on to Study Q, and arrived just as Christine and Co. were about to come out. They met us, in fact, in the passage just outside the door.

"Hallo!" said Bob Christine. "What's the idea of this? Why the invasion?"

"We've got something serious to talk about—something concerning one of the chaps on this side. Come into the study, Bob."

Christine and Co. were rather puzzled, but not for long. For it took only a short time for me to acquaint them with the facts. At first Christine and Yorke and Talmadge were sceptical; but at last we convinced them.

"Now I come to think of it, it must be true," said Christine. "We know that Foxey is a rotter. He took us to that boxing booth with Lawrence, and I was there when the proprietor offered twenty quid to anybody who could beat 'Lightning Left Ned.' Lawrence must have gone back in the evening, and accepted the challenge."

"By Jingo!" said Talmadge. "I wish I'd been there—it would have been a sheer delight to see that ugly bounder knocked out!"

Christine frowned.

"Perhaps so; but we can't look upon this with a lenient eye," he said. "It's a very serious matter, and Lawrence will have to be called to account. We've got to put our private opinions aside, and think of the honour of the school. Supposing this came out. How would it look in the papers? A St. Frank's junior, masquerading under a false name, fighting in low-class dens for money! Why, it's awful! You chaps wait here, and I'll fetch Lawrence in."

Christine went at once, but returned within three minutes. And he was accompanied by Ernest Lawrence, who was looking rather mystified.

"Shut the door, Yorke!" said Christine, when they were in the study. "We don't want anybody to overhear this little conversation—we'll keep it as private as possible. Now, Lawrence, I've got a few questions to ask."

"What about?" asked Lawrence, vaguely suspecting that trouble was coming.

Christine made no bones about the matter. In cold, blunt language, he told Lawrence of what had been discovered, and asked him for his own version. Lawrence turned very pale at first, and his jaws set grimly. I watched him with interest, and was quite convinced that the story was true in every detail.

"Well, out with it!" said Christine, at length. "What have you got to say, Lawrence?"

The new boy looked round calmly.

"Nothing!" he replied.

"Do you deny that you have been prize fighting?"

"No."

"Do you admit it, then?"

"No," said Lawrence steadily. "I admit nothing, and I deny nothing. I prefer to say as little as possible. Anything else?"

"Yes, you rotter!" roared Handforth. "If you don't admit——"

"Hold on, Handy!" interrupted Christine. "I'm conducting this affair, I believe, and there's only one way to deal with the matter. Personally, I believe that Lawrence is guilty—he's proved it by his very actions and words. But I believe in fairness, and we're going to give him a trial."

"A trial?" repeated Church curiously.

"Exactly," said Christine. "We'll form a select committee of chaps who can be relied upon to keep mum. Then we'll put Lawrence on trial—we'll have a jury and everything. I'll be the judge."

"Oh, good!" said Handforth. "That's a ripping idea. Considering that I discovered everything, I'll be the prosecuting counsel. I don't mean any offence to you, Lawrence, and I'm not really against you. But this is a purely legal matter, and it's necessary for me to prosecute. If you're found guilty, after being subjected to a fair trial, your punishment will be terrific."

Lawrence looked round, perfectly calm.

"And when is this interesting event to take place?" he inquired.

"Now, as soon as possible," replied Bob Christine. "But we'll give you half an hour for you to prepare your defence, Lawrence—that is, if you have a defence to prepare. Two warders of the court will call for you at eight o'clock precisely. Until then you will please consider yourself a prisoner in your cell—that is, Study T. You can buzz off!"

Lawrence left, and Bob Christine gave some brisk orders. He had complete charge of this affair, and I did not see any reason why I should interfere. It was a Form matter, of course, but mainly connected with the College House.

The jury was arranged for—Talmadge, Yorke, Church, McClure, Page, and De Valerie. A jury of six was considered sufficient. Other juniors who were to be included in the hearing were Reginald Pitt, Grey, Clapson, Oldfield, and two or three others. Only those fellows who could be absolutely relied upon were included.

And the court for this occasion was to be the old vault beneath the monastery ruins. We should be absolutely private down there, and Ernest Lawrence would be given a fair and just trial.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VERDICT!

THE judge adjusted his wig with an air of great solemnity.

"Place the prisoner in the dock!" he said, in a deep voice.

The court was sitting.

It was quite an impressive affair. The old vault beneath the monastery ruin was rather brilliantly illuminated by means of about a dozen candles. These were stuck in various places round the walls. Of furniture there was a great scarcity. The judge, for example, tried to look extremely dignified—and failed—seated upon a pair of rickety old steps, which had been carried down for his especial benefit. He was in an elevated position, at all events, and that was the main thing. At the same time, his lordship felt very insecure and precarious.

The prisoner was quite calm and collected as he stood in the dock. In other words, he stood in a chalked square, which represented the dock. The jury were all safely esconced in the jury-box—which, of course, was purely imaginary. Actually, they were all standing up in a group, and they were talking in loud voices, in a most unjurylike manner. They were discussing the case quite openly, even before any evidence had been called. This, of course, was against all regulations.

"Silence!" ordered the judge sharply. "Is there to be no order in this court?"

He gave his wig another pull, for it was not exactly comfortable. It had been borrowed for the occasion from the Remove Dramatic Society's props. Handforth was also wearing a wig—one which was, unfortunately, decidedly too large for him, and there was hardly any Handforth to be seen. But, as some of the juniors remarked, this was a blessing. Handforth's voice was quite sufficient—they could easily dispense with a sight of his face.

The witness-box, which stood opposite the dock, was rather more pretentious, for it consisted of an old sugar box with one side knocked out. The preparations, in fact, had been very hurried, or there might have been a more elaborate show.

"Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty, or not guilty?" demanded Bob Christine, in a deep, hollow voice.

"I don't plead anything!" said Lawrence.

"Rot!" shouted the prosecuting counsel. "You've got to plead, you silly ass! A prisoner can't stand in the dock and say nothing. Are you guilty, or not guilty?"

"That's for the jury to decide!" said Lawrence.

"Why, you—you burbling ass——"

"Please remember, Mr. Handforth, that you are in a court of justice," interrupted the judge severely. "It is not fitting for counsel to use such terms, even to the prisoner. Kindly remember where you are."

"Why, you silly ass——" began the prosecuting counsel.

"Order—order!" said one of the jurymen. "You mustn't speak to the judge like that, you silly fathead!"

"And you mustn't speak to the prosecuting counsel——"

"Oh, my hat!" said the judge. "Are we going to get on with this case, or are we going to listen to your inane jabber all the time? Ahem! I—I mean, let the evidence proceed. In other words, get busy!"

"But this silly ass of a prisoner refuses to plead," roared Handforth wrathfully.

"All right—let him refuse!" said the judge. "Cut the cackle, and get to the hosses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in court!" said the usher—who happened to be Tommy Watson.

"Well, gentlemen of the jury, I have a very serious case to put before you," said the prosecuting counsel. "This wretched criminal, who now stands in the dock, trembling like the scoundrel he is, is charged with a very serious offence. To be exact, the rotter has been fighting professional boxers, using an assumed name in order to do so, and he has been getting tin for doing it!"

"Tin?" repeated the judge politely.

"Brass!" explained the prosecuting counsel. "Spondulicks—the ready—in other words, money! He has been getting quids and quids for fighting. It's disgraceful, and I call upon you, gentlemen of the jury, to pronounce him guilty. Do your duty!"

The judge grinned—and then remembered himself.

"Ahem!" he said. "This—this is somewhat irregular, I believe. It is customary to submit evidence to the jury before requesting them to give their verdict."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Evidence?" repeated the prosecuting counsel. "What rot! We all know it——"

"That," said the judge, "is an insignificant detail. What's the witness-box for, if we're not going to use it? And, by the way, who's been appointed counsel for the defence?"

Handforth smiled pityingly.

"You burbling ass!" he said. "Who wants a counsel for the defence? This chap is going to be found guilty, and no defence is necessary!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I greatly regret that this unseemly laughter should mar the proceedings of the court," said the judge, frowning, and whisking a curl of wig out of his eye. "I am afraid that my learned friend, the prosecuting counsel, is mainly responsible for the hilarity. I must request you, Mr. Handforth, to refrain from making fatheaded remarks. You must realise that a court of justice is a serious place!"

"If you want a thick ear——" began the prosecuting counsel.

"Oh, dry up, and get on with the evidence!" roared the judge. "If you ain't jolly quick, we'll kick you out, and appoint somebody else. Call your witnesses."

Handforth swallowed hard, and decided not to reply, for the jury was looking at him in grim manner, and would not have hesitated long before falling upon him and treating him in a manner most disrespectful, and contradictory to all court procedure.

"I call upon Arnold McClure!" said Handforth thickly.

McClure stepped forward briskly, and entered the witness box. He did so rather too hurriedly, for his shin caught against the edge of the box, and he went flying. Unfortunately, the witness box itself was demolished in the process, and was therefore kicked out of the way as being of no further use.

"When you've done messing about there!" said Handforth severely.

"You—you ass!" howled McClure. "I've got a splinter in my hand!"

"You shouldn't stroke your hair!" snapped Handforth nastily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

McClure glared.

"If you're suggesting that my head's made of wood——"

"Order!" bellowed the judge. "Great pip! This is becoming a farce! We're supposed to give Lawrence a fair trial, and all you chaps can do is to mess the thing up. You've smashed up the witness box already—and I'm expecting to collapse any minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Court became somewhat sober, and the evidence proceeded.

McClure, standing on the spot where the witness box ought to have been, proceeded to tell his story. He explained what he had overheard. He went into all the details, and the jury listened with considerable boredom—for they had heard it all before.

"There can be no question about the matter," said McClure. "Lawrence went to Helmford last Wednesday, and he fought a fellow named Jimmy Rhodes ——"

"One moment!" I interrupted, stepping forward. "How do you know that Lawrence went to Helmford last Wednesday?"

"Why—I—I heard it," said the witness.

"That's no proof—that's not evidence ——"

"What the dickens are you butting in for?" demanded Handforth, glaring at me. "Who do you think you are?"

"I'm the counsel for the defence," I explained.

"Eh?"

"I think it's necessary," I went on. "The prosecution is being conducted in such a way that it's only fair that Lawrence should have somebody to defend him. I might just as well do it as stand here, listening to all this piffle."

"You—you ass——"

"What about this visit of the prisoner's to Helmford," I went on, addressing the witness. "You maintain he went to Helmford. What proof have you to offer that such was actually the case?"

"I heard Mr. Foxe talking to Lawrence——"

"Which is quite sufficient proof!" interrupted the prosecuting counsel. "We can't very well call Mr. Foxe, but we've got Lawrence here—and I intend to put him in the witness box in a minute or two, and I'm going to cross examine him."

"Good!" said two or three of the jurymen. "We're fed-up with this!"

"One moment!" I interrupted. "Perhaps Lawrence does not want to go into the witness box. He must be consulted."

Handforth glared.

"I maintain that the prisoner has no say in the matter," he exclaimed. "If I like to put him in the witness box, he's got to go. What rot! Just as if the prisoner can do what he wants to do! What's the good of a prisoner if he's not ordered about?"

"I must inform you, my learned friend, that the prisoner has not been proved guilty," said the Judge. "Therefore, he has privileges. We must ask him if he desires to go into the witness box or not. It is his only chance of defence."

Lawrence stood quite still. For some little time he had been thinking hard. He knew that all these fellows could be trusted—he regarded us all as decent chaps, and he knew that we should respect his secret. The truth was out now, so there was nothing to be gained by maintaining silence. And things looked rather bad. It was in Lawrence's power to tell the full, complete truth—and he decided to do so.

"Do you want to go in the witness box or not?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"I do," said the prisoner.

"Oh, good!" said counsel. "Buzz across, then."

Lawrence took up his stand on the other side of the vault.

"Now, prisoner at the bar—or, I should say, prisoner in the witness box—I have a few questions to put to you," said Handforth grimly. "Did you, or did you not engage in a brutal fight with one James Rhodes on the evening of Wednesday last at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford?"

"I did!" said the prisoner.

"You admit it?"

"Yes," said Lawrence quietly.

"Oh! That's all right, then!" said the counsel for the prosecution. "You hear that, you chaps. He admits it! Now, Lawrence, did you fight in a boxing booth in Bannington?"

"Yes."

"And you have arranged to fight a chap named Connor—at the Ring Pavilion again—on the Wednesday evening of next week?"

"Yes."

"And if you win you'll get a hundred quid?"

"Yes."

"And if you lose you'll get fifty?"

"Yes."

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly. "He admits every giddy thing. He's like a parrot—he can't say anything else but 'yes'! I call upon you, Gentlemen of the Jury, to pronounce your verdict."

One of the jurymen stepped forward.

"We find the prisoner——"

"Hold on!" I broke in. "I want to cross-examine the prisoner first.

"Now, Lawrence, just a few questions," I said. "You have admitted that you were engaged in these fights?"

"Yes."

"Tell the jury how you came to start this practice."

"It was quite by accident," said the prisoner. "I was with Christine and Yorke and Talmadge when Mr. Foxe took us to Bannington. Mr. Foxe went into this boxing booth with us, and while we were there the proprietor offered the sum of twenty pounds to anybody who could beat a hulking young rotter who called himself Lightning Left Ned. During the evening I went back to Bannington, and entered the ring."

"And you beat this prize-fighter?"

"Yes—I knocked him clean out."

"Good!" murmured the judge. "He deserved— Ahem! Disgraceful!"

"You knocked this fellow out, and, I presume, you got into communication with somebody connected with the Ring Pavilion?" I asked.

"Yes."

"How did that happen?"

"Quite by chance—again," said the prisoner. "A man came up to me just after the fight, and told me that he was Mr. Rook. He suggested that I should help him out of a difficulty by fighting Jimmy Rhodes—because his man had met with an accident. I didn't like it at first, but at last I agreed."

"And so you went to Helmford, and appeared at the Ring Pavilion as 'Young Ern?'"

"Yes—and I won!"

"How much money did you get?"

"Thirty pounds," replied Lawrence.

"Thirty quid!"

"That was my share of the purse," said Lawrence. "But Mr. Rook gave me a further fifty pounds on the top of that, because he was so pleased that I won."

"Great pip!" said the prosecuting counsel. "Eighty quid! It's—it's unbelievable. And he hasn't been rolling in tin, either. What the dickens could he have done with the money?"

"What did you do with the money?" I asked, turning to Lawrence.

"I sent it all away."

"If you don't wish to answer this question, you are at liberty to refuse!" I said. "But are you prepared to tell the Court where the money went to?"

"Yes—I sent it to my father."

"You sent this money to your father?" exclaimed Handforth grimly. "So he knows all about it—he's a confederate."

"My father knows nothing," said Lawrence quietly. "Not long ago he met with a terrible financial disaster. All his capital was swallowed up and lost when Scarbrook's bank went smash. My fees for this term at St. Frank's were paid before then—or I shouldn't be here. I thought if I could go in for these fights on the quiet, and win the money, it would be very helpful to my pater. That's all. I've sent him every penny I've received—although he doesn't know where it came from."

"Do you mean you sent it anonymously?"

"Yes," said Lawrence.

"And you didn't keep a penny of this money for yourself?"

"Not a penny."

"Gentlemen of the Jury, I have concluded my cross-examination," I said. "I don't think it is necessary for any more speeches to be uttered, or for the judge to sum-up. Please pronounce your verdict."

"Not guilty!" said the six jurymen, in one voice.

"Good!" declared Handforth, grabbing Lawrence's fist. "If they'd found you guilty, my son, I'd have wiped 'em all up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Court broke up amid much enthusiasm. Ernest Lawrence was not guilty, and he had gained the support of all the best fellows in the Remove. And, before so very long, he was to find that support very useful indeed.

THE END.

Start To-day This Grand New Australian Serial!

AUSTRALIAN TALE OF ADVENTURE BY AN AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION.

The Barracuda, an old sea tub, is battling against a nasty bit of weather in the Arafura Sea and Torres Straits. Jim Harding and Jack Maxwell, the only two passengers aboard the tramp, are told by the captain that there is little chance of the ship getting through the storm. The engines break down, and the ship crashes on to a reef, cutting her in two. Harding and Maxwell are imprisoned in the cabin. They hack their way out, only to find that they are the sole survivors of the wreck. A raft is made from a table, and with this frail craft they prepare to battle against the shark infested waters between them and the shore.

(Now read on.)

Attacked by Sharks.

"THE sooner we're off the better. There's more wind over there," said Maxwell, and at once set to work by clearing away everything that might hinder the passage of the table-raft to the water.

While he was still at it, Harding appeared, walking with difficulty.

"I feel rotten about the pins," he confessed. "But I guess I can do my whack."

"Stand back! I'm going to launch her!" cried Jack, and sent the raft sliding down the floor towards the gap in the bulkhead.

He was almost too successful, for only by grabbing the tail of the thing as it shot into the shallow pool did he prevent it from sailing out on to the water beyond, where the sharks cruised. However, stop it he did, and made it fast with a rope while he turned back for an armload of the bottles.

Harding slid down, and squatting in the pool, began to thrust the bottle necks into the holes prepared for them. Slowly the raft, which had floated nearly awash, began to rise in the water, and slowly the tide began to rise once more.

Maxwell ran to and fro, fetching more and more bottles, till he had the lot placed handy, when he fell to helping Jim. There was need of haste. The line of cloud to windward was climbing the sky, very slowly, but very steadily, and another breeze would almost certainly dislodge all that was left of the Barracuda.

At length the job was done. The raft floated high. Maxwell fetched the two trunks, an armful of blankets, their scanty provisions, and the wickered jar containing the water, then fixed the yard, on which he had fastened a sheet, by way of sail, to the mast, made of a curtain-pole. All was ready.

"Steer with this," said Maxwell, passing Harding a bit of planking from his bunk front, roughly shaped to a paddle. "Right? Then here goes!"

And he loosed the rope that had held them to the wreck.

The sail caught the slow breeze, and the raft moved away, while the sharks, puzzled, doubtless, by the oddest craft that had ever cruised those waters, sheered off. As she cleared the lee of the reef, the raft moved a little faster, but still her speed did not exceed a couple of knots.

"It will be a race between us and the storm," declared Harding, glancing back at the ominous cloud.

Maxwell nodded. He was busily shaping another paddle. Presently he had finished it, and the pair moved to either side of the raft and paddled steadily. The breeze grew a little stronger.

"I reckon we've made about half the distance," said Harding, when something over an hour had passed. "Dashed hot work! Look at that brute! He's followed us from the wreck, and brought all his relatives with him. I hope he don't want to pay a call. Jennings told me a frightful yarn of how they snatched at the oars of a boat and upset her, somewhere along this coast."

"We'd be hard to upset, but if they went underneath and broke any of the bottles we'd soon be at their mercy," said Maxwell. "They're coming too close. I'm going to try a shot at one."

He laid in his paddle, drew his pistol, and waited. The big shark, which seemed to be a sort of leader, swam nearer, his huge body

almost awash. Maxwell aimed, and let drive. There was a tremendous splash as the shark threw itself half out of the water before it dived and sped away, followed by all its brethren, leaving a ruddy trail.

But soon it was headed off, and, turning, came tearing back past the raft, hotly pursued. For a while the castaways could follow the chase, then the sharks either dived into deep water or passed beyond eye range.

The breeze was freshening, and now the ominous cloud had climbed nearly to the zenith. But the raft was nearing the shore. Less than half a mile separated it from the line of foam along a low beach.

Maxwell stood up, steadying himself against Jim's shoulder, and looked ahead. He saw one or two jagged rocks surrounded by patches of white water, but, fortunately, none of them were directly in their path.

"I think we'll do it all right," he reported, and began to paddle again.

Suddenly they were in shadow. The great cloud had at last reached and blotted out the sun. The sea, which had been blue and sparkling, became grey and threatening, the waves were rising, and, worst of all, the sharks had returned. Whetted, but not appeased, by the meal they had made of their wounded brother, they ranged up on either side of the raft.

They seemed to understand that their prey was likely to escape them, for they grew bolder. One fellow came alongside, and slipped beneath the frail craft. They felt his back rasp against the bottles which supported them. Several broke at the shock, and one corner of the raft settled down a little.

"This won't do!" ejaculated Maxwell, and as the brute turned and came back, possibly to repeat the manœuvre, he fired, and hit.

The creature darted away, followed by the rest; but the chase was a short one, for here the water was shallow, and the wounded fish could not elude pursuit for long. He was soon torn to pieces, and once again the man-eaters returned.

The raft was a bare hundred yards from the beach, on which the sea was breaking, not heavily, yet still with force enough for the undertow to drag them back into the deeper water, if they should be overset.

"Paddle like blazes, and hop ashore as soon as we touch, Jim!" yelled Maxwell. "I'll look after the raft. Jiminy! Oh, you infernal brute!"

A shark had risen alongside, the paddle he was wielding was snatched from his hands, and at the same instant the raft was nearly upset, as the creature passed under it, working havoc with its bottle buoys. It sagged down aft, the water washed over the planking. But a little more, and it would be so low that the cannibal fish would be able to drag their prey from it.

"You take your side, Jim, and blaze away; then chuck your pistol ashore!" cried Maxwell, and fired again and again.

Harding did the like. Both scored, but they had no time to note what happened. Another ferocious monster butted full tilt into the frail structure, the water surged over their feet, and then they were hoisted on high by a long roller, which had swept in unnoticed, the harbinger of the coming storm, swung dizzily on the crest for a moment, then dumped far up the beach, amidst a tremendous crashing of broken glass!

Maxwell dragged Harding clear, flinging his pistol high up the sands as he did so, grabbed at the trunks and the provender, and dragged them up even as the wave receded. Crippled though Harding was, he lent a hand valiantly, and, together, the two drew their scanty belongings to a safe distance from the water. Then, spent and breathless, they dropped on the sands and mopped their streaming foreheads.

"Ugh! A close call that!" ejaculated Harding. "One of those confounded sharks actually rubbed shoulders with me. I felt the rasp of his skin."

Maxwell said nothing for a minute, but sat letting a handful of the white sand trickle through his fingers. Then he rose stiffly.

"Well, here we are in Australia, at last," he said slowly. "A trifle different from the sort of landing we expected, isn't it?"

"We're lucky to be here at all," grunted Jim. "What do we do now? Make a camp and look for water, I suppose?"

He got painfully to his feet, helped by Jack; then, arm in arm, they went slowly up the shelving beach towards a group of trees.

The Man On the Beach.

FOR two days the storm had raged. During that time the castaways had sheltered in the bush behind the beach. They had found a stream, and made camp beside it, but their attempts to get food had been in vain. Once they had sighted some ducks, and fired at them, but service revolvers are of little use for such purposes, and they bagged nothing.

The morning of the third day after their arrival dawned bright and clear. The sea was going down, the wind had died, and, although the sun had but just risen, it was already hot as the pair stepped out of camp down to the beach. Slowly they searched the horizon for smoke, but saw nothing. Then they turned their eyes along the beach, achingly white in the sunshine.

A long spit of sand jutted into the sea a mile or so away, hiding the further trend of the coast. Since they had not so far gone that way, the couple turned their steps thither. Harding had recovered the use of his legs, but he still ached a bit, so they did not go fast.

Once something moved in the bush fringing the beach, and went off with long bounds. From the glimpse they had of it, they concluded that it must be some sort of small kangaroo, but so swiftly did it move that there was no time for a shot.

At last they reached the promontory and saw before them a great curving bay. In the distance something gleamed in the sun amidst a clump of white and bluish-grey. Even though they did not know the country they had no difficulty in recognising a bush hamlet, all white-washed weather-boarding and corrugated-iron roofs.

"That's all right!" exclaimed Maxwell, with a sigh of relief. "We can do it by mid-day. But—— What the dickens! Look there!"

He pointed. A man had risen from the shelter of a clump and stood regarding them. He seemed undecided whether to come forward or retreat into the bush, but as the castaways waved and shouted he moved towards them, walking with a slight limp. As he came nearer they could see that he was young, somewhere about their own age, and saw, too, that his face was scarred with several small gashes down one cheek, while the hair that showed under one side of his broad-brimmed hat was patched with grey. The signs were unmistakable to men who could read them.

"That chap's been through the hoop. Shrapped, I'll bet! How do, matey? We've been wrecked. Where are we?"

The newcomer halted before them.

"Wrecked?" he repeated. "Hard luck! That's Wurra-Wurra down along there. English, I suppose? Any more of you?"

Maxwell shook his head.

"We're the sole survivors of the Barracuda, London to Rockhampton, general cargo. Main shaft broke, ship was driven before the wind until she piled up on a reef away out yonder." He pointed seawards. "We were below at the time. She must have broken in two almost as she struck, and Captain Jennings and all the crew went. We built a raft of sorts and got ashore just in time before the last blow started. We've been camping along the beach there. This is Jim Harding and I'm Jack Maxwell. We couldn't move before because Jim's legs were sore from the grip of an octopus that visited us on the wreck. I suppose our baggage will be all right in the bush till we can fetch it? It isn't much, but such as it is it's all we have left. The rest of our stuff went with the ship, of course."

"It depends where you left it. I'll go back along with you, if you like. Got any grub?"

"Sweet biscuits. We had a tongue, but we finished that last night."

"I've got something in my camp back there. You can have a meal as you come back."

As he walked he continually cast searching glances behind him towards the distant township, but nothing stirred on the beach. He seemed very uneasy until they had turned the bend and were out of sight of the place.

"I see you were over the water with the rest of us," remarked Harding.

The young man grunted something about Gallipoli, but said no more till they had reached their camp. He threw up his hands with a gesture of horror when he saw how near to the stream it was.

"Lord! There must have been a providence looking after you!" he exclaimed. "It's a wonder you weren't nipped in the night. There's one near now. Lend me your gat. D'you smell anything?"

(To be continued.)

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