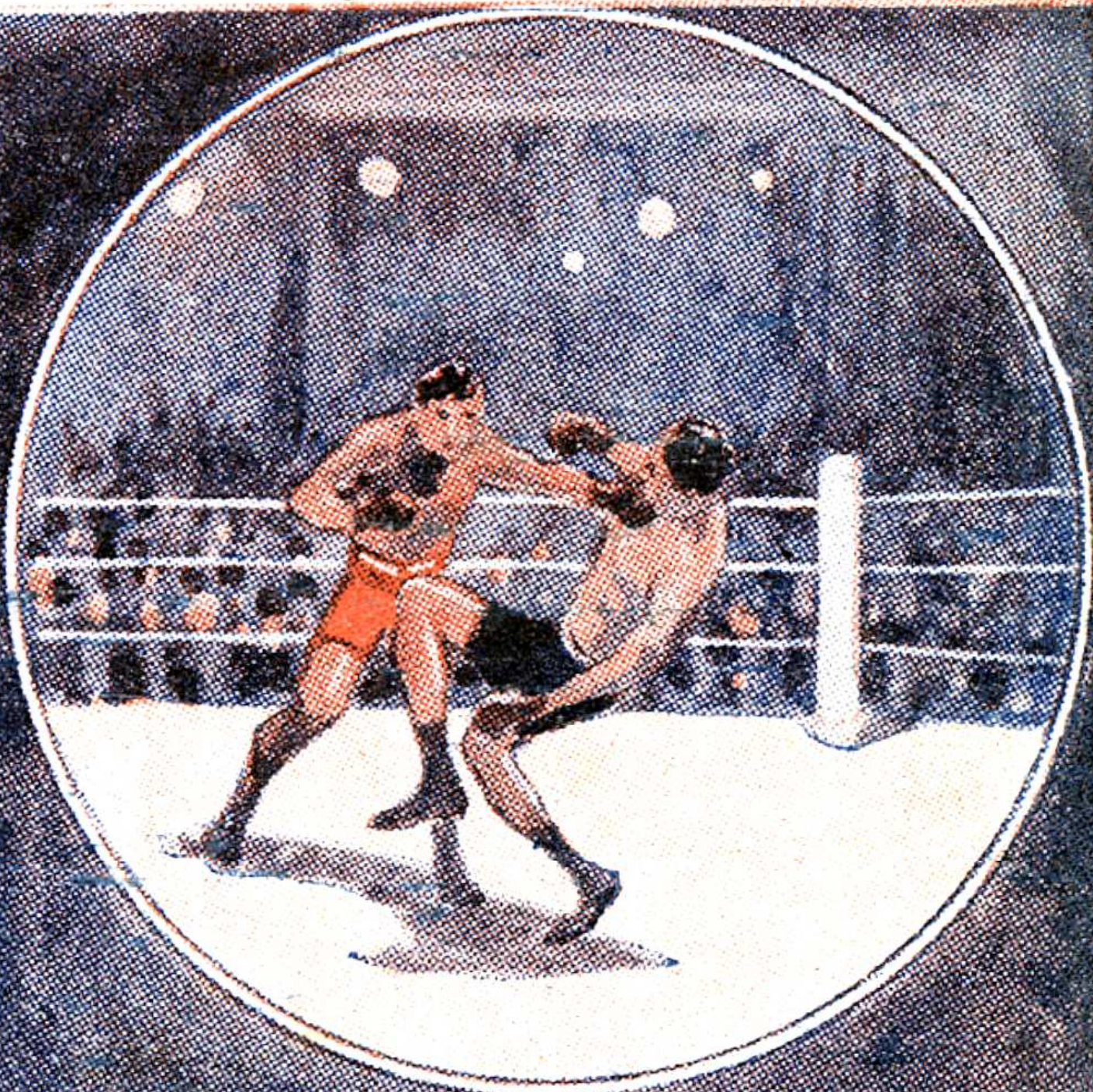


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"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe. "What—what is the meaning of this? I say, boy! How dare you?"

He paused, and there was no reply. Not a sound broke the stillness except a movement from Mr. Pagett. And suddenly Mr. Foxe knew the truth, he knew that he and his companion had been trapped, and they had walked into the trap open-eyed and like a couple of fools.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSEMASTER'S THREAT.

"O H, Gorgeous!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt enthusiastically. "My hat! The chap's a marvel!"

"Rather!"

"Begad! He's amazin', dear old fellows!"

The juniors were standing at one side of the gymnasium at St. Frank's, and in the centre of the apartment two figures were moving about actively. One was Ernest Lawrence, and the other was no less a person than myself. In short, we were having a little sparring about. And, incidentally, Lawrence was teaching me a few things about boxing.

I had always prided myself that I was fairly good at the noble art of self-defence. But, after half an hour with Lawrence, I changed my views. I came to the conclusion that I had a lot to learn. In a serious contest, Lawrence could have knocked me sideways within three rounds.

"By George!" I panted, pausing for a moment. "You're hot stuff, old man!"

Lawrence smiled.

"Oh, I don't know," he said modestly. "You're jolly good, Nipper—you're the best chap I've boxed with at St. Frank's, anyway."

"He's the champion of the Remove!"

said Tommy Watson stoutly. "Nobody's whacked Nipper yet, my son——"

"But I rather fancy somebody will whack me before long," I remarked cheerfully. "If I ever happen to enter the ring against Lawrence, the boxing honours of the Remove will go to the College House!"

"Dear old boy, I'm afraid you're right," said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "You're a wonderful boxer, Nipper—you're frightfully hot stuff. But you ain't so good as Lawrence—much as it goes against the grain to say so. He's got you whacked dear, fellow—he has really!"

"You bet!" said Bob Christine. "Lawrence is a College House chap—that's why he's better——"

"Now then!" interrupted Reginald Pitt. "We don't want to start any House arguments, my children. Lawrence is a first class boxer—and we'll let it stand at that. He's the best man with the gloves at St. Frank's, in fact—he can beat any chap in the Sixth Form—and do it easily, too!"

De Valerie nodded.

"Boxers like Lawrence ain't human!" he remarked. "There's something queer about 'em. They're born to it, you know—a chap can't be taught to box like Lawrence. He's got to know it naturally, by instinct. There's not one boxer in a thousand who possesses the gift. They call Jimmy Wilde the Welsh

Wizard—because he's so jolly tricky and clever. Well, Lawrence is just the same—he seems to know exactly what to do at the right moment, and I'm blest if it's possible to get a fist anywhere near him!"

Lawrence laughed.

"Oh, come off it!" he grinned. "If you go on at this rate I shall get swelled head before long. There's nothing so very wonderful about my boxing. My pater trained me—that's all—and I've given a good lot of attention to it. I know I'm pretty handy with my fists, but I don't claim any credit for it. It was born in me."

"Exactly," I remarked. "That's the secret, Lawrence. It was born in you—and you simply can't help yourself. Well, let's get on—I want to see if it's possible to land a jolly good smack on your chivvy!"

It wasn't possible. I tried all I could—I used all my tricks, and every atom of my science. But, somehow or other, I found it impossible to pass the amazing barrier of Lawrence's defence.

Lawrence was in training. Not many of the juniors at St. Frank's know this, but there was a certain number of fellows who were in the secret. All those in the gymnasium at the present moment were aware of the fact that Ernest Lawrence was booked to face a professional boxer in the Ring Pavilion at Helmford, on the following Wednesday evening. It was to be a great event—and, if possible, Lawrence was going to beat his opponent. We were doing everything we could to help him. He was provided with any number of sparring partners, and he was not allowed much rest. It was training all the time for him—for he knew as well as anybody else what a stiff ordeal he had in front of him. He would need to be in the very pink of condition—at the top of his form—to beat Mike Connor. This latter gentleman was a pugilist of some renown, having been successful in his last half a dozen fights. He was considered to be unbeatable by his backers, and they regarded the fight on the Wednesday evening as a foregone conclusion. They didn't even consider the possibility of their champion losing.

But we had considered that possibility all right—and we were just as determined that Mr. Mike Connor should leave the ring a beaten man.

The contest was an important one, and

I knew for a fact that every seat in the Ring Pavilion had been sold already. And the prices charged were double the ordinary amount. The boxers would divide a handsome purse, one hundred pounds going to the winner, and fifty pounds to the loser. It is hardly necessary to add that Lawrence was out for the hundred.

But how was it possible that a junior of St. Frank's should be mixed up in an affair of this kind?

The facts, after all, were simple.

Lawrence was comparatively a new fellow at St. Frank's, and he occupied Study T in the Remove Passage of the College House. He had soon shown his ability, for he had administered a sound thrashing to Grayson, the bully of the Fifth. This had been a big surprise for everybody, for Grayson had been popularly supposed to be a fire-eater.

Mr. Smale Foxe, the housemaster of the College House, had a great deal to do with these boxing engagements of Lawrence's. For, in a way, Mr. Foxe had first introduced the junior to the Ring. There was something very strange about Mr. Smale Foxe, and there was a mystery concerning him which nobody could fathom. Handforth, of the Remove, had done his best, and he positively declared that there were two Mr. Smale Foxe's—in other words, that the Housemaster had a double.

Mr. Foxe, who was by no means a conventional Housemaster, had taken Christine and Co. and Lawrence to Bannington one half holiday. And he had astonished them by entering a low class boxing booth, to witness the performance. The proprietor had offered twenty pounds to anybody in the audience who could beat his own particular champion.

And, that evening, Lawrence had returned to the booth, and had knocked the so-called champion out with comparative ease.

This had started him off, for a certain Mr. Norman Rook introduced himself to Lawrence, and invited him to take part in a fight at the Ring Pavilion in Helmford. Lawrence had done so, gaining a clear eighty pounds on the fight—a huge sum, indeed.

But Mr. Rook had known what he was doing. He had seen amazing ability in this schoolboy, and he had taken advantage of it. For, if Lawrence had done well out of that fight, Mr. Rook

had done better. He had made a considerable pile of money, in fact.

And now Mr. Rook had arranged another fight for Lawrence, at the same place. But this was to be a much bigger affair, and Lawrence was pitted against a well-known pugilist.

His reason for entering the ring at all was not that he wanted the money for himself. He was doing it solely for the sake of his father, who had met with a terrible financial blow a short time before. Practically every penny of Mr. Lawrence's money had gone crash in a banking collapse. And his business, in consequence, was tottering. It was Lawrence's plan to obtain as much money as he could from these fights, and to send that money to his father—acting on the principle that every little helps.

It was a praiseworthy object, and, at first, Lawrence had succeeded in keeping it to himself. But there had been complications. Mr. Foxe had learned of the junior's secret activity, and he had attempted to blackmail Lawrence. It had succeeded the first time, but not on the second. And now Mr. Foxe was furious with the junior, and he was determined to have a hand in the money which Lawrence would receive for his fight against Mike Connor. Whether the rascally Housemaster would succeed in his object remained to be seen.

Only a few days earlier, Edward Oswald Handforth had been suddenly seized by a violent and aggravated attack of detectivitis—in other words, he fancied himself as an amateur detective, and got on the track of the mystery which surrounded Mr. Foxe. He had, as I have already mentioned, discovered that Mr. Foxe had a double—but we were not inclined to take this marvellous discovery on Handforth's word alone. But the leader of Study D, with his two chums, Church and McClure, shadowed Mr. Foxe, and, quite by chance, overheard a conversation which the Housemaster had with Lawrence—a conversation closely concerning the boxing matches. As the result, Handforth had known the truth about the College House junior. He had come straight to me, and an enquiry had been held—by the prominent members of the Remove. And, as a net result, Ernest Lawrence had been placed upon his trial—and he had told the whole truth. He had explained to the select committee—a number of fellows from both Houses who

could be trusted—and he had told that committee exactly why he was engaged in these fights. He had been found ~~not~~ guilty, and, better than that, the juniors—including myself—had decided to help Lawrence as much as we could, so that he could gain the large reward by beating Mike Connor in the ring. We wanted to see Lawrence bring off the fight, for we knew it was in a good cause.

But Lawrence's secret was still a secret—so far as the majority of the fellows at St. Frank's were concerned. Only a handful of juniors of the Remove knew the secret—Tregollis-West and Watson and Pitt and De Valerio—and Bob Christine, and a few others. It would have been madness to let the whole form know of Lawrence's game. For the main body of the fellows could not be trusted to keep their tongues still. And it was highly necessary that this secret should not leak out.

For the Headmaster would look upon the whole affair with a very severe eye. If he discovered, in fact, that a Remove junior was engaged in prize-fighting against professionals he would wax extremely wrathful, and put his foot down hard. In fact, it was practically certain that Lawrence would be expelled from St. Frank's in dire disgrace. It was therefore highly essential that Dr. Statford should not get wind of the truth.

We felt that we were quite justified in keeping the secret, and in helping Lawrence along, for we knew that his object was a splendid one. He was using the money to help his father—he was doing his little bit to restore the family fortunes. And even Lawrence senior knew nothing, for he had frequently expressed the wish that his son should never enter a professional boxing ring.

Mr. Lawrence had been a boxer himself, in his earlier years, and, upon retiring, he had bought a large ironmongery business in London—and it was very successful until the bank crash came. He had intended to give his son a College education, and bring him up as a gentleman. Not that education could achieve this—since Ernest Lawrence was a gentleman already, by nature. But for the fact that the first term's fees had been paid, Lawrence would never have come to the school. And now he was doing his utmost to help his father—and, perhaps, he would be able to remain on at St. Frank's, not

only for this term, but for others. But Lawrence did not think of this when he entered into his agreement with Mr. Norman Rook, his one and only object was to help his father.

We were all entering into the thing enthusiastically, and I had quite a number of ideas in my head to assist Lawrence on the eventful evening. For I realised that it would be difficult for the junior to manage things unaided.

It was Monday evening now, so there was not much time left before the great fight took place. During the greater part of the previous week Lawrence had been training—he had put in every spare minute he could. And now he was as fit as a fiddle, and confident of victory.

And he was very grateful to us for the little assistance we were giving him.

"It's awfully decent of you fellows to take such an interest in me," he said, as he peeled off his gloves. "You're bricks—every one of you!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Of course, we don't approve of a St. Frank's chap fighting in the Ring Pavilion at Helmford—but the circumstances are exceptional. And you can bet your boots that we'll be along there to see you win!"

"Which conclusively proves that you don't approve of it!" said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I feel better than I've felt for months!" went on Lawrence, his eyes speaking. "I thought I was fit when I met Jimmy Rhodes the other week. But I'm in much better condition now. My muscles are harder, and I've got a better punch."

"I've noticed that punch!" I remarked pointedly. "I'd rather steer clear of it!"

"And if I don't win on Wednesday, I'll go under fighting gamely. But if I can beat him, I will. And he won't find me such an easy customer as he probably imagines. He's got an idea that he's going to eat me up, I believe."

"Oh, he'll soon get that idea knocked out of his head," said Pitt. "In more senses than one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now we'd better despatch," I remarked. "You go out first, Christine, with Lawrence and your own pals. We don't want to go out in a bunch—because it might cause comment"

"Right you are," said Christine. "Come on, you chaps."

It was highly necessary to exercise caution. For if the majority of the fellows had seen that Lawrence was constantly boxing, they might have smelt a rat. Therefore, he only came into the gymnasium occasionally—and this, of course, caused no talk. At other times Lawrence would box in his own study, or in somebody else's study, or anywhere in private. He was certain of a sparring partner.

Christine and Co. left the gynasium, but Lawrence was rather late, having remained behind to fasten a disorderly bootlace. And when the junior got into the Triangle, the others had gone on, and were just entering the College House.

Lawrence felt as fit as a fiddle. There was a gleam in his eye, and his step was springy. His fair hair was curly with health, and his cheeks were fresh and glowing.

He had hardly got half-way across the Triangle to the College House, when a dim figure emerged from beneath the shadow of the old chestnut tree. It was a figure which Lawrence recognised at once, in spite of the gloom. And the junior was not altogether surprised.

"Just a word with you, Lawrence, my boy!" said a smooth, soft voice.

"Yes, Mr. Foxe," said Lawrence quietly. "What is it?"

Mr. Smale Foxe came closer, and spoke in very low tones.

"I do not intend to beat about the bush with you, Lawrence," he said grimly. "Neither do I intend to waste many words. On Wednesday evening you have arranged to go to Helmford in order to fight a pugilist known as Mike Connor."

"I don't see——"

"Wait!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "In my capacity as your Housemaster, Lawrence, I could forbid this thing, and get you into very serious trouble if you disobey me. But I do not wish to take that course. I am willing to let you go on this errand, and I hope you will succeed in winning the fight."

"Thank you, sir!" said Lawrence, with a touch of contempt in his tone.

"My object in wishing you good luck is an obvious one," went on the Housemaster. "For, if you win, you will receive one hundred pounds. And you must give me precisely half that sum. Do you understand?"

Lawrence's eyes blazed.

"I understand that you're trying to blackmail me——" he said hotly.

"Not so loud—not so loud!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "You may call it what you will, my boy, but I am firm. I should advise you to try no tricks with me. I am not the kind of man to be flouted."

Lawrence set his jaw.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot enter into any agreement," he said. "I won't give you any promise——"

"You infernal young idiot!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "Do you dare to defy me?"

"The money isn't yours, sir, and I don't see any reason why you should demand it!" said Lawrence indignantly. "If I win, it will be——"

"You are talking nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "You do not seem to realise your position, Lawrence. And, the sooner you do realise it, the better. I will not stand any nonsense from you—and you had better realise that at once. If I choose I can prevent you going to Helmford; I can detain you for the whole of Wednesday evening in the classroom."

"But you won't, sir," said Lawrence grimly. "You can threaten all you like—and I defy you!"

Mr. Foxe swore under his breath.

"You'll defy me!" he repeated in a grating voice.

"Yes, I do!"

"You impudent young puppy——"

"Half a minute, sir!" interrupted Lawrence. "I don't intend to be impudent, but I'm not treating you as I would treat my Housemaster. I don't look upon you as a Housemaster now."

"What do you mean, you young rascal?"

"I mean that Housemasters do not usually descend to blackmailing!" replied Lawrence boldly. "Housemasters are gentlemen, and since you have shown yourself in your true colours, I cannot respect you. And you daren't try to keep me in on Wednesday, or report me to the Headmaster——"

"I daren't!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe fiercely.

"No, you daren't!" replied Lawrence. "Only last week you told the Head a deliberate string of lies because you thought you would be able to blackmail me, and obtain money. The little scheme failed, and if you go to the Headmaster now, and tell the whole

truth—if you reveal to him that I am Young Ern, who fought in the Ring Pavilion a fortnight ago—well, Mr. Foxe, you will show yourself to Dr. Stafford in your true colours. He will know that you are telling lies."

"Confound you——"

"And you will be in a serious position afterwards," went on Lawrence. "If it means the sack for me, Mr. Foxe, it will mean the sack for you. So I can easily afford to ignore your threats, and to snap my fingers at you!"

Mr. Smale Foxe fairly danced with rage. His eyes gleamed, and his thin, prominent nose seemed to stick out farther than usual from his somewhat bony face.

"By Heaven!" he grated. "I have a mind to pick you up, you young whelp, and thrash you now, with my bare hands! How dare you speak to me in this way? How dare you treat your Housemaster with such——"

"As I said before, sir, I don't regard you as my Housemaster!" interrupted Lawrence quietly. "During school hours it's different—but now you are not yourself, you're somebody else—you're a blackmailer trying to get money from me. And it won't work, Mr. Foxe, and that's all I have got to say!"

And Lawrence, his heart beating rapidly, turned on his heel, and walked straight towards the College House. Mr. Foxe stood for a moment or two, with his fists clenched, and with a dangerous glint in his eyes. But he did not follow Lawrence; he snapped his teeth viciously.

"Very well, my lad!" he muttered. "We shall see!"

And there was something in Mr. Smale Foxe's tone which boded ill for the champion boxer of the Remove!

CHAPTER II.

DR. STAFFORD'S PLAN.

WHEN Lawrence got into the Remove passage of the College House, he found Christine and Co. waiting just outside the door of Study Q.

"Oh, here you are!" said Christine. "You giddy slowcoach! We've been waiting—— Hallo! What's the reason

of the worried frown? Why the black looks, old son?"

"Come into my study!" said Lawrence shortly.

They passed along the passage until they came to Study T, and they entered. Lawrence closed the door, and Christine and Yorke and Talmadge regarded him curiously. They could see that something was wrong.

"Some of the Ancient House rotters?" inquired Talmadge. "Have they been rowing you—?"

"Of course not!" interrupted Lawrence. "The Ancient House chaps are all right—there's nothing wrong with any of them."

"What about Fullwood and Gulliver—?"

"Oh, I mean the chaps we know," said Lawrence. "The fact is, Foxey just collared hold of me in the Triangle, and had a few words."

"Oh!"

"The rotter!"

"What did he want?"

"The same as before, said Lawrence. "He told me that if I don't give him half the money for this fight he will let the Headmaster know all about it—and that will mean the sack for me!"

"Phew!" whistled Christine. "And what did you say?"

"I told him to go to the dickens."

"You—you ass!" gasped Yorke.

"Well, I didn't use those exact words, although it amounted to the same thing," said Lawrence. "I defied him, and told him so to his face, too!"

"My hat!"

"I told him he was a blackmailer—"

"You—you reckless idiot!"

"Reckless!" said Lawrence warmly. "How was it reckless? Foxe is a blackmailer—he's been trying to blackmail me all along, the cad! And I'm not standing it. I told him so; and he won't be able to do anything!"

"Only get you the sack—that's all!" said Talmadge.

"How?" demanded Lawrence. "If Mr. Foxe goes to the Headmaster, and tells him I'm the chap who fought in the Ring Pavilion the other week, what will be the result? Mr. Foxe told the Head on that occasion that I was with him in Caistowe, and he did that because he thought he could get some money out of me. But he was wrong.

I wasn't quite such a fool. If Foxe went to the Head now he would make himself out a liar, and would get kicked out of his job!"

Bob Christine nodded.

"Well, that's quite right," he admitted. "By Jove, you're a cute beggar, Lawrence!"

"There's nothing cute about it at all," denied Lawrence. "I simply refused to be intimidated, nothing else. And Foxe knows it—and he's furious. But, somehow, I've got an idea that he means to take some action."

"How's that?" asked Christine. "He daren't go to the Head, and—"

"Perhaps not—but he can let the Head know in some other way," interrupted Lawrence. "Supposing he carries out his threat? Supposing he lets the Head know that I'm going to fight at the Ring Pavilion on Wednesday evening? He could easily do that without the Head knowing anything about Foxe's part in the business. The result would be that Dr. Stafford will probably send somebody to Helmford, just in order to make sure. And that'll be the finish of things!"

Bob Christine looked worried.

"Yes, we've got to be jolly careful," he said. "I think we'll have a chat about this with Nipper—he's rather a smart chap, you know. He'll be able to tell us what to do."

And this was decided upon.

And, as events turned out, Lawrence's surmise was a shrewd one. Because Mr. Foxe acted in precisely the way that Lawrence had anticipated.

Mr. Foxe did not take any elaborate measures—he used the most simple methods possible, for, on the following morning, the Head received a rather mysterious letter. It came through the post in the ordinary way, and it had been mailed from Barnington.

Nelson Lee happened to be in Dr. Stafford's study when the letter was opened. The Head glanced at the sheet of paper, and then adjusted his pince-nez, and gazed more intently.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed.

There were not many words on the paper, and they were typewritten. There was no address, and no signature. The paper itself was a sheet of ordinary common notepaper, of no particular brand. And the words which caused Dr. Stafford so much astonishment ran as follows:

"I should advise you, sir, to keep your eye on Master Ernest Lawrence, a junior at your school. He will appear at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmsford, in order to fight a professional boxer named Mike Connor. Lawrence will appear under the transparent name of 'Young Ern.' A week or so ago he was booked to fight Jimmy Rhodes at the Ring Pavilion, but did not turn up, a substitute being provided at the last moment. This substitute was supposed, by many people to be Young Ern himself. But on Wednesday next it will be Lawrence, of St. Frank's. Keep your eye on this boy."

The Headmaster was rather startled. He did not say anything for a moment or two, but read the letter through again. He remembered the incident which had occurred some little time ago. He had received an anonymous communication then, stating that "Young Ern" was Lawrence of the Remove, and that Lawrence had fought Jimmy Rhodes at Helmsford. Dr. Stafford had believed this, and Lawrence had been on the point of expulsion when Foxe had come to his rescue.

The Housemaster, in fact, had calmly declared that the lad had been with him at Caistowe at the very time of the fight. This, of course, was a deliberate falsehood. Mr. Foxe had not lied in this way because of any particular love for Lawrence, but because he had been anxious to extract money from the boy. That plan had failed.

And now Mr. Foxe showed his cunning. After the other incident, Dr. Stafford would need some convincing, and so Mr. Foxe had worded the letter carefully. It caused the Head to think. Was it possible, after all, that "Young Ern" was really Ernest Lawrence, of the College House? Somehow or other, Dr. Stafford was suspicious and uneasy.

"This—this is most distressing!" he exclaimed. "I really don't know what to do, Mr. Lee. Perhaps you can help me? Perhaps you can suggest some way of dealing with the situation?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"If you will acquaint me with the facts——" he began.

"Please read this letter, Mr. Lee," said the Head.

He passed it over, and Nelson Lee rapidly perused the words. When he had finished there was a keen light in

his eyes, and he looked up at Dr. Stafford.

"I dislike anonymous communications, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I make it a general rule to ignore them. And, if you are inclined to take my advice, I should suggest that you ignore this completely."

"I am afraid I cannot do that, Mr. Lee," said the Head. "Much as I dislike the idea of it, I feel that I must make some kind of investigation. This is the second time I have received an intimation that Lawrence is participating in prize fighting. There must be something in it—it cannot be purely a fabrication. I share your dislike for anonymous letters, however, but, at the same time, I feel it is my duty to inquire further into this matter."

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"You may do as you wish, of course," he said. "It is really none of my business, Dr. Stafford. The boy does not belong to my House, and therefore the matter does not come within my province."

"Quite so—quite so," said the Head. "I am not going to ask you to take any action personally, Mr. Lee. I will leave that to Mr. Foxe——"

"Mr. Foxe?" repeated Lee sharply.

"Yes; he is the boy's Housemaster, and it will be Mr. Foxe's duty to investigate," said the Head. "I have a scheme, and I intend to put it into operation. I will settle this question once and for all. I mean to know the truth."

The Head spoke in a firm voice, and he touched his bell.

A moment later Tubbs, the page boy, appeared.

"Kindly go to Mr. Foxe, in the College House, and inform him that I require his presence in my study," said Dr. Stafford. "You will also take the same message to Mr. Pagett."

"Yes, sir," said Tubbs briskly.

He vanished, and Nelson Lee crossed the room and sat down. The famous detective had decided that he would not make his exit until after the visit of Mr. Pagett and Mr. Foxe. He, in fact, was rather curious to hear what was about to be done.

"May I look at that letter again?" he asked.

"Certainly, Mr. Lee, certainly," said the Head. "And if you can discover the writer I shall be greatly obliged. But

I am afraid that is a hopeless task. There is not the slightest clue. The paper is ordinary, without any watermark, and, of course, it is quite impossible to recognise typewriting.

Nelson Lee made no comment. But, just for a flash, a smile appeared on his features. It seemed that he did not altogether agree with Dr. Stafford's views. But he said nothing.

And he was still examining the mysterious communication when Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett appeared together.

Mr. Pagett was the master of the Fifth Form, and he was one of the most unpopular masters at St. Frank's. He was thin and acid looking, and his temper was notoriously short. Among the boys, Mr. Pagett was generally known as "an old beast."

But, apart from his personal failings, he was a conscientious schoolmaster, and a capable man. Thus he retained his position as master of the Fifth.

"Ah, Mr. Foxe, I am glad you have come," said the Head briskly. "Will you please glance at this letter, and tell me your opinion of it? I shall then be obliged if you will pass it on to Mr. Pagett."

The Head took the letter from Lee, and handed it over to Mr. Smale Foxe. The Housemaster took it gravely, and gazed upon it as though he had never seen it before. Considering that he had typed it himself, it was barely necessary for him to read it. But, of course, the fact that he was the author of the note was his own secret.

He did not betray himself by any sign or movement, but read the letter with an expression of mild astonishment on his face. Nelson Lee, apparently giving close attention to his nails, was really watching Mr. Foxe with an intentness which would have caused the College Housemaster much discomfiture had he known.

"This appears to be very serious, sir," said Mr. Foxe, at length.

"Pray let me see it!" exclaimed Mr. Pagett, who was filled with curiosity.

The note was handed to him, and he read it.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "A boy of St. Frank's—and a junior at that—taking part in a professional prize fight! Impossible! This—this must be a joke, sir, surely?"

"I wish I could agree with you, Mr. Pagett," said the Head. "But I am

afraid it is rather more serious than a joke. What is your opinion, Mr. Foxe?"

"Well, sir, I must confess that I am impressed," said the Housemaster gravely. "There was some little bother concerning Lawrence once before. You were informed that he had been fighting at the Ring Pavilion under the name of Young Ern. But I disproved that by informing you that Lawrence had been with me in Caistowe all the evening. But this letter throws a different light on the matter. It appears that Lawrence was really booked to appear, and found it impossible to do so—probably because he was compelled to accompany me. The promoters of the fight therefore obtained a substitute, without informing the audience of the change."

The Head nodded.

"In that case, Mr. Foxe, the first communication I received was correct," he exclaimed. "That is to say, the writer of the note believed that he was performing a good service by giving me the information. But, owing to circumstances which he could not foresee, Lawrence did not appear."

"Precisely," said Mr. Foxe. "It is practically certain, however, that Lawrence will appear at the Ring Pavilion on this occasion—to-morrow evening, that is. I really think something ought to be done, sir."

"That is precisely my opinion," said the Head. "I think I will send for Lawrence at once——"

"I should strongly advise you not to do that, sir," interrupted Mr. Foxe.

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because the boy will naturally deny all knowledge of the matter, and he will certainly not go to Helmford, to keep his appointment," said Mr. Foxe. "It will then be impossible for you to prove anything against him. It would be better, I should think, for you to let this fight take place, exactly as planned. I further suggest that you should go to Helmford personally, and attend the fight, incognito. You will then be able to see, with your own eyes, whether the lad is Lawrence or not."

Dr. Stafford shook his head.

"No, Mr. Foxe, I could not think of doing that," he said. "For one thing, I shall be unable to leave the school, for two gentlemen have made an appointment with me—Sir James Henson, and Mr. Roger Hale. They are two of our directors, and I could not possibly

be absent to-morrow evening. Your suggestion, however, is an excellent one, and I will adopt it. I shall take it as a favour, Mr. Foxe, if you will go, over to Helmford yourself to-morrow evening—and perhaps it would be a good idea if you took Mr. Pagett with you. You will then be able to find out the exact truth, and report to me afterwards. If this lad is really Lawrence, he will, of course, be expelled without delay. And that will settle the point finally."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Pagett. "A prize-fight! My dear sir, I have never attended such a performance in my life! I am appalled! But, for the sake of the school, I will consent to your proposal."

"That is very good of you, Mr. Pagett," said the Head drily.

"I do not think we shall have much difficulty in gaining admission to the Ring Pavilion," said Mr. Foxe. "And, as you say, sir, we shall know for certain whether this 'Young Ern' is Lawrence or not. It will be just as well to know the exact truth."

"That is precisely my own idea, Mr. Foxe," said the Headmaster. "I dislike anything of this kind intensely. I suspect the whole thing to be a mischievous practical joke—but, at the same time, I cannot afford to ignore it. If this boy is really a St. Frank's junior, the fact must be established. We cannot allow it to go on. Therefore, gentlemen, you will please make arrangements so that to-morrow evening will be free."

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett left the Headmaster's study. The Housemaster was extremely pleased. His plan had worked well; for now it would be firmly and finally established that Lawrence of the Remove, was the culprit. Mr. Foxe would have his revenge! Having failed to extract money from the boy, he would ruin him. That was Mr. Foxe's genial plan. He was delighted that Mr. Pagett would be with him, for there would be two witnesses now. And it would be absolutely impossible for Ernest Lawrence to escape the consequences of his actions.

In the Head's study, Nelson Lee had risen to his feet, preparatory to departing.

"I am not at all sure that this course is a good one, Dr. Stafford," he said.

"But we will leave matters as they stand at present, and wait until to-morrow evening. By the way, may I take that letter with me?"

"By all means, Mr. Lee—by all means!" said the Head. "I only wish it were possible to discover the writer. But that, I am afraid, is quite out of the question."

Again the trace of a smile came into Nelson Lee's eyes, and, very shortly afterwards, he left the Headmaster's study. He went straight along to his own apartment, and lost no time in making a few, trifling experiments.

To begin with, he submitted the typewritten letter to a very close scrutiny through a powerful magnifying lens. Each typewritten letter now stood out in bold relief, and many items were now visible which had been invisible before. For example, every letter 't' in the letter bore a slight defect. There was a chip out of the character, practically invisible to the naked eye, but obvious when magnified. The letter 'o' was chipped also, whilst the 's' was not precisely true. It was a shade out of alignment. These defects only became apparent when the lens was used.

"I rather fancy it will not be necessary for me to search far afield," murmured Nelson Lee. "Indeed, I do not think I need stir from this study."

He put the magnifying lens down, and lifted up a pile of examination papers. Some were written, others were typewritten. And one or two of them had been prepared by Mr. Smale Foxe. Nelson Lee picked up one of these, glanced at it closely, and then brought the lens into play. He smiled.

"Exactly!" he murmured. "Dear me! I really thought Mr. Foxe had more sense—but he apparently believes that a typewritten letter is not open to investigation. But that is a fallacy. For, as a matter of fact, the work of a typewriter is as characteristic as ordinary handwriting. It has its peculiarities, and its eccentricities."

Once more, Nelson Lee examined that examination paper—which had been prepared by Mr. Smale Foxe in his own study a day or so earlier. And every 's' was slightly out of alignment—every 't' and 'o' were chipped. In fact, the mysterious anonymous communication, which had been delivered to the Headmaster that morning had been written on Mr. Foxe's typewriter! It was therefore quite certain that Mr. Smale Foxe himself was the author.

Nelson Lee had suspected this from the first. And now he had the proof.

But he took no action. And he was still sitting in his chair when a footstep sounded out in the passage.

That footstep was mine. I was coming along to the gov'nor's study in order to have a few words with him before lessons.

I found Nelson Lee lying back in his chair, with his finger tips pressed together, and with a cigarette smouldering between his lips—with about half an inch of ash upon it.

"Penny for your thoughts, gov'nor!" I said cheerfully, as I closed the door.

Nelson Lee turned his head, and the cigarette ash dropped all over his waistcoat.

"Well, Nipper, what is it?" he enquired. "I am rather busy now——"

"Yes, you look it!" I grinned. "Is that what you call being busy, sir?"

"I have been busy with my brains," explained Nelson Lee. "In other words, Nipper, I am thinking. And it is hardly possible to concentrate upon one's thoughts when you are in the apartment. You are a disturbing element, Nipper."

"Thanks!" I said. "You always were good at paying compliments, gov'nor. Well, what's the mystery? What are you thinking about? And what have you been using that magnifying lens for?"

"Upon my soul! Your inquisitiveness is positively terrible, Nipper!" protested Nelson Lee. "I see no reason why I should satisfy your curiosity. But now that you are here, I would like to have a few words with you regarding Lawrence."

I stared.

"Lawrence?" I repeated. "Do you mean Lawrence, of the College House?"

"I am not aware that there is any other Lawrence at St. Frank's," said Nelson Lee. "I have noticed, Nipper, that you have been in Lawrence's company a good deal of late. I have had very little to do with the junior myself, but I believe he is a very straightforward youngster, and quite a decent boy."

"Right every time, sir," I said. "Lawrence is one of the best."

"Do you know if he is going out on Wednesday evening?" asked Nelson Lee casually.

I looked at the gov'nor with some suspicion.

"What's the idea, sir," I enquired. "Why are you so interested in Lawrence—he belongs to the College House."

"You have not answered my question, Nipper," said Nelson Lee.

"Is Lawrence going out on Wednesday?" I repeated. "Well, how should I know, and why should you ask me? Surely I'm not supposed to know what Lawrence's movements will be on Wednesday evening?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Still you have not answered my question, Nipper," he said pointedly.

I thought for a moment or two. I certainly had no intention of telling Nelson Lee all about it—for it was quite likely that the gov'nor would not look at the matter as we looked at it. And, quite apart from that, I had given Lawrence my word that I would not speak on the subject to any outsider—and, in this affair, even the gov'nor was an outsider.

"Well, as a matter of fact, sir, I can't give you any definite answer to the question," I said. "Lawrence may be going out, of course, but I rather fancy that he'll remain at St. Frank's. In fact, I'm willing to make a wager with you that Lawrence will be seen at St. Frank's on Wednesday evening. He'll probably remain at the school the whole evening."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That is just as well," he said. "I do not pretend to know anything, Nipper, and I am not making any enquiries, or giving any information. But I do know this—Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett have been instructed by the Headmaster to keep their eyes well open on Wednesday evening."

"What on earth for?" I enquired, with an air of surprise.

"Furthermore," proceeded Nelson Lee. "Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett will take a journey to Helmford on Wednesday evening. They have certain plans in view, Nipper, and I have an idea that there are certain suspicions against Master Lawrence. If the boy has been up to any irregularities—if he has been breaking the school rules—it might be bad for him. And I certainly think it will be better for Lawrence if he remains at St. Frank's on Wednesday evening. That's all, Nipper!"

I nodded.

"I quite understand, sir," I said. "I've got you exactly."

And, a few minutes later, I left Nelson Lee's study. He had said nothing definite, and he was apparently not in-

forested in the matter. But I knew differently. I put two and two together. And I knew that Nelson Lee had learned that Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett were going to Helmford on Wednesday evening for the express purpose of catching Lawrence red-handed. The gov'nor had given me a tip—a warning. He knew that I would pass it on to Lawrence.

It was just like Nelson Lee to do a thing like that. He wanted Lawrence to avoid trouble—and so he was doing his best to give the junior an indirect warning.

I was rather thoughtful during morning lessons. For Nelson Lee's words had given me something to ponder over. Did the gov'nor know that Lawrence was 'Young Ern'? I was fairly certain that Nelson Lee knew a great deal more than he admitted. But he took the view that this was none of his business—since Lawrence was a College House junior. Nelson Lee hated to get anybody into trouble, or to see anybody get into trouble. Therefore, he had taken this course so that I could use my efforts to keep Lawrence at St. Frank's on Wednesday evening.

It was decent of the gov'nor—it was sportsmanlike. And I decided to act upon the information which had been given to me. But one thing was quite certain.

"Young Ern" would meet Mike Connor at the Helmford Ring Pavilion at seven o'clock precisely on Wednesday evening!

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISE FOR TWO!

"**D**EAR old boy, you've been looking frightfully serious all day!" remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Is anything the matter? I wish you would tell us—I do, really!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West looked at me keenly through his pince-nez, and I noticed that Watson was paying me a good deal of attention, too.

We were in Study C, and it was nearly tea time. Tommy Watson, as a matter of fact, was already preparing for the meal. I looked at the table, and then

transferred my attention to my two chums.

"We're going to have some visitors for tea," I said. "Five or six, in fact."

"Visitors!" exclaimed Watson. "What the dickens for? We haven't got any too much grub, and Mrs. Hake has run out of pastry and pork pies and sardines. She's always running out of everything—she never has much stock, at the best of times. Besides that, you see, we haven't got sufficient cups and saucers and plates——"

"Oh, all right," I said. "We'll leave the little party until after tea—it'll do just as well, perhaps."

"Little party?" repeated Watson, staring. "What little party?"

"Begad! You're frightfully mysterious, dear old boy," observed Sir Montie mildly.

I smiled.

"Well, the fact is there's going to be a council meeting," I declared. "I'm going to have Christine and Co. over here, and Pitt, and one or two others. We've got to discuss matters. Something has cropped up which must receive immediate attention."

"About the fight?" asked Watson concernedly.

"Yes."

"Begad! I hope it's nothing serious," said Sir Montie.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is rather serious," I said. "But we've got to set our wits to work—and I'm fairly certain that we shall be able to overcome the difficulty. I'm not going to say any more now, my sons, because it would be a waste of breath."

"What?" snorted Watson. "A waste of breath to tell us?"

"Yes."

"You—you silly——"

"I might as well tell you when I tell the others," I interrupted. "There's no sense in saying it twice. You'll hear all about it when we hold the council meeting."

And I would not say anything further at the moment, although Sir Montie and Tommy were very curious, and somewhat indignant. They considered that it was my duty to tell them all about it beforehand. But my idea of duty was different to theirs.

And they had to wait until after tea.

Study C was rather crowded by the time all the members of the select council were present. The party num-

bered twelve altogether—Handforth and Church and McClure, Christine and Yorke and Talmadge, Ernest Lawrence, Reginald Pitt, Jack Grey, and, of course, the study's original occupants, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and myself.

"Now, what's the giddy idea?" enquired Handforth. "What's the party for?"

"It's no good asking me," said Watson. "Nipper knows all about it, but he won't say a word."

"It's about Lawrence," I exclaimed. "I'm getting to the point straight away."

"About me?" repeated Lawrence. "What do you mean, Nipper?"

"Exactly what I say," I replied. "We've got to discuss ways and means, my son. I've got hold of some information which is of the most terrific importance. It won't be such an easy matter for you to go to Helmford to-morrow evening, to keep that engagement."

"I know it won't be easy," said Lawrence. "I've already asked Reynolds for a pass, but he says he can't let me have one—because he's not a prefect now. But I think Carlisle will do the trick all right."

"My dear chap, that's not the point," I said. "I don't suppose you'll have much difficulty in getting a pass for the evening. Passes can always be worked, if a chap is fairly ingenious. But it may interest you to know that there will be some spies on your track."

"Spies!" echoed Christine. "What do you mean, you ass?"

"Out with it, Nipper!"

"Don't talk in riddles!"

"What's the idea?"

I frowned at the curious juniors. "Foxe is taking a trip to Helmford to-morrow evening—and Mr. Pagett, the Fifth Form master, will accompany him."

Lawrence started.

"They're going to Helmford!" he exclaimed. "Do—do you mean—"

"Exactly!" I said. "They are going to spy on you, Lawrence. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett are going to the Ring Pavilion, to witness that fight. And if they see you there they are to come back, and report to the Head—in fact, the Head has sent them. You can easily guess what the result will be. You might manage old Foxey, but you can't do anything with Mr. Pagett. He'll

report, too, and it will be known to Dr. Stafford that you are 'Young Ern.' That'll finally put the lid on it, and you'll get the sack!"

"In other words, my son," said Handforth, "you'll be presented with the order of the boot!"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"This—this is awful!" said Lawrence, turning slightly pale. "I—I hadn't reckoned on anything like this, Nipper. But how did the Head know? How could he guess?"

"It doesn't matter much to us how he knew, or how he guessed," I interrupted. "The main thing is that Foxe and Pagett are going to the Ring Pavilion to-morrow evening. If they arrive there and see that fight—well, they'll see you. So we've got to do something. We've got to put our heads together and conspire."

Lawrence looked thoroughly alarmed.

"But—but what can we do?" he asked anxiously. "If Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett are really going, there's an end of it—I shall have to give up the fight! I must send Mr. Rook a wire this evening, saying that I can't turn up to-morrow, and that he must get a substitute—"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "You can't let him down like that. He's arranged this fight, and you've got to keep to it, my son, even if you get sacked from St. Frank's afterwards."

"It's easy enough to say that," put in Christine. "You're not going to get sacked, Handy, and I'm jolly certain that Lawrence won't, either! If there's no other way out of it, he won't go to this fight at all!"

"Let me do the talking, my sons," I said. "I've got an idea, and what I want to do is to tell you chaps about it, and hear what you say. You might be able to suggest some improvements. If so, all the better. In any case, this fight is coming off, and Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett are going to be dished!"

"That sounds frightfully good, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "But how is it goin' to be done?"

"Well, Foxey and Pagett will leave here to-morrow evening," I said. "They'll probably go in the Head's car, and start at six, or they might go by rail; we shall have to find out before we make our final arrangements. But, in

any case, Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett will never get to Helmford."

"Eh?"

"They'll meet with an adventure on the way." I went on calmly, "and, unfortunately, they will be delayed for such a time that when they find themselves free again the fight will be over, and Lawrence will be back at St. Frank's."

"You—you ass!" said Handforth. "How do you know this?"

"Something seems to tell me so," I replied, with a chuckle.

"How do you know that Foxe and Pagett will be delayed?"

"Because you chaps will delay them," I replied.

"What!"

"We—we will delay them?"

"Precisely," I said. "You will be jolly busy to-morrow evening."

Everybody was speaking at once. All the juniors were asking questions.

"Ho'd on!" I exclaimed. "I'll tell you all about it in a minute. There's another thing I want to say. Lawrence, as a matter of fact, needn't worry about getting a pass out, because he'll be at St. Frank's all the evening."

"Eh?" said Christine. "Lawrence will be at St. Frank's all the evening?"

"Yes."

"Then why should we trouble about delaying Mr. Foxe and——"

"You'll understand everything after I've explained," I interrupted. "Now, then, you chaps—silence! Listen to your uncle, and you'll wear such grins within five minutes that you'll make your faces ache."

After a while there was silence, and I got busy. I told the fellows, in detail, what my plans were, and gradually their serious expressions changed, and they smiled. Then their smiles changed to grins, and, finally, they yelled.

"Oh, great!" said Christine enthusiastically. "It's a ripping wheeze!"

"Rather!"

"Begad! It's toppin', dear old boy!"

"Of course, it might be better," said Handforth grudgingly. "As a matter of fact, I was about to suggest something of the same kind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you yelling at, you fat-heads?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"We're yelling at you," grinned Pitt. "You get some marvellous ideas, Handy."

"I do!" agreed Handforth.

"After you've heard them from somebody else," concluded Pitt sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The meeting broke up half an hour later, and all the plans were cut and dried. We had set ourselves out to help Ernest Lawrence, and we were doing so with a will.

And he needed help, too! Without our assistance he would never have come through with flying colours. With our assistance, it was quite likely that he would do so. He was feeling fitter than he had felt for weeks, and he was quite confident of being able to put up a good fight against Mike Connor. But if he had worried over matters concerning St. Frank's, he would not be able to put his best into that match. Worry is a terrible handicap, and nobody can box properly when their mind is in a state of unrest. Therefore, we were doing our best to make Lawrence feel easy and confident.

On the following day we learned, through the agency of Mr. Cuttle, the school porter, that Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett were going for a trip in the Head's motor-car during the evening, and they would start at about five-thirty. This was good enough for us. We had got the information we needed.

"It's all serene, my sons," I said, to a group in the 'Triangle' at dinner-time. "They're going by car. Everything in the garden is lovely! We shall be able to work the dodge beautifully, and I don't see how any hitch can occur."

During the afternoon, which was a half-holiday, Pitt and Grey and Handforth and Co. went out on their bicycles. Nobody knew where they went to, and their mission, indeed, was a mysterious one.

They did not return until tea-time, and their bicycles were minus several parcels which had been tied to the machine, and the juniors were all looking content and satisfied.

"O.K.?" I inquired briefly, as I met them in the 'Triangle'.

"Absolutely!" said Pitt, with equal brevity.

They passed on to the bicycle-shed, and not long afterwards they were in their respective studies partaking of tea. They considered that it was a well-earned meal. But it was a rapid one, for, within half-an-hour the juniors were off again. I remained behind, for I was

taking no part in this particular section of the programme.

And I was watching from a convenient position when the Head's two-seater car was brought round into the Triangle, just before five-thirty. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett emerged from the College House together, and crossed over the Triangle. They were both wearing overcoats and gloves and warm motor-ing-caps.

Mr. Foxe elected to drive himself; he did not wish to be bothered with any chauffeur. Moreover, it was highly necessary that this trip to Helmford should be kept secret. When the two masters sought admission to the Ring Pavilion, they would use means to conceal their features to hide their identity. It was most important that no hint should leak out that two St. Frank's masters had patronised such an establishment.

For, in addition to being a kind of glorified boxing-booth, it was a club, where men of a very questionable character congregated. Gambling and drinking went on continuously. It was, taking it altogether, an extremely disreputable place. Lawrence would never have appeared there under his own name. But for the purpose of these prize-fights he sunk his own identity, and was merely "Young Ern." So he did not mind so much, and, after all, he was doing it for the sake of his father.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett left St. Frank's at about twenty minutes to six, and the car went driving away down the lane towards Bellton. Helmford lay nearly twenty miles distant, on the other side of Bannington.

Once in Bannington, Mr. Foxe sent the car buzzing along the main London road, which was also the Helmford road. The first place to be entered was Midshott, a small village about five miles beyond Bannington. Then came a tiny hamlet known as Little Hadlow, another three miles further on, and between Midshott and Little Hadlow the road was extremely lonely, quiet and deserted. For the whole distance of three miles there was hardly a house or a cottage to be seen. It was a very deserted stretch of road. For the main part trees overhung the high banks on either side, and there were corners, turns and valleys.

It was practically dark by the time

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett arrived at this stretch of road. The sky was overcast, although there was no promise of rain. Indeed, it seemed that a frost would set in when darkness finally arrived.

"I am not at all happy with regard to this visit of ours," said Mr. Pagett. "Personally, I have strong objections to witnessing a prize-fight, Mr. Foxe. I feel that it will be a degrading spectacle—"

"My dear sir, you needn't worry on that score!" said Mr. Foxe easily. "You must remember we are doing this for the sake of the school—for the honour of St. Frank's. For, if we find this wretched boy fighting in the ring, we shall then know the truth, and Lawrence will be forthwith expelled."

"Quite so—quite so!" said Mr. Pagett. "At the same time, I am rather nervous, Mr. Foxe. Supposing we are seen? What then? It will mean disgrace for us—our names will be talked about—"

"There is no necessity for you to worry in the slightest degree, Mr. Pagett," said Mr. Foxe. "We shall not be recognised. There will be an enormous crowd, and we shall be lost in that crowd. Moreover, we shall take due precautions to conceal our identity. It will not be necessary for us to witness this fight. Just one glimpse will be sufficient—one look at the ring while the fight is in progress. We need not remain there more than five minutes, if it comes to that."

"Yes, that is quite right," said Mr. Pagett. "I had not thought of that, Mr. Foxe. We shall easily be able to recognise Lawrence, if he is indeed in the ring. I suggest that we—Dear me! What is that light waving about for? Can it be a signal, intended for us?"

The car was just descending into a hollow, where the trees were very thick, and where the hedges were high, and, glancing down, Mr. Foxe could see a figure standing in the very centre of the road, waving a lantern. A frown came upon Mr. Foxe's brow.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "Is the road stopped down here? If so, it will mean that we shall be compelled to make a detour for seven or eight miles. What an infernal nuisance!"

They came nearer, and at last Mr. Foxe brought the car to a standstill. He

now saw that the figure with the lantern was that of a country yokel dressed in corduroys, with a smock covering the upper part of his body.

The youth was not carrying a lantern, as Mr. Foxe had supposed, but a bicycle-lamp, and the light did not play upon his features. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett could only see a red countenance, surmounted by a dilapidated old hat, and from underneath peeped a bit of untidy red hair.

"Well, boy, what is it?" demanded Mr. Foxe curtly.

"Ah, master, I'm main glad ye've stopped!" said the rustic, his voice coming in gasps. "There's summat awful happened up at the farm. I want ye to come along, sir."

"Something awful!" repeated Mr. Pagett. "What on earth do you mean?"

"That be only a few hundred yards down this 'ere old lane, sir," went on the boy. "I dunno what to do, an' that's a fact. You must come along, sir—both on ye! What with the mistress bein' fair off her head with worry—"

"We can't stop over your trouble, young man!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "If you're in difficulties of some kind, you'd better go and fetch the police. We're in a hurry!"

"Really, Mr. Foxe, if this lad is in sore straits, we must assist him!" put in Mr. Pagett, who, although bad-tempered, was not bad-hearted. "This is a very lonely part, and we cannot leave him—"

"You seem to forget, Mr. Pagett, that we are in a hurry," said the other master curtly.

"Nevertheless, we must stop just a few moments and make full inquiries," said Mr. Pagett. "Now, my boy, tell me what the trouble is. Be concise and clear."

"Well, sir, yer see, it's like this 'ere," he said. "There ain't no doctor here about, and when an old lady meets with a haccident, it's bad—awful bad! To fall right downstairs is enough to kill anybody, particularly an old woman. If you'd be so kind as to come along, sir, an' have a look—it ain't far, only down this little old lane, a few hundred yards. Supposing she was to die? You must come, gentlemen—both of ye!"

The yokel had made no definite statement; he had only vaguely hinted that an accident had occurred somewhere.

Neither Mr. Foxe nor Mr. Pagett realised that the boy had told them actually nothing. He had been suggesting things—that it would be serious if an old lady met with an accident, and things of that kind. He had not said that an accident had actually occurred. But naturally the two men would not be able to jump to the truth.

"I'm afraid it is hopeless to get much out of this bumpkin," said Mr. Pagett impatiently. "But it is quite clear that an accident has occurred to an old lady, and that she is in a bad way. We must go, Mr. Foxe; we must see what we can do."

"But we shall be wasting time!"

"Upon my soul!" said Mr. Pagett irritably. "Do you suggest for one moment, Mr. Foxe, that we should go on our journey and leave these poor people helpless? We can at least see what the trouble is, and promise to send a doctor from Little Hadlow."

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Foxe. "We'll do as you say, although it is none of our business."

A gleam of satisfaction came into the eyes of the yokel, although this gleam was unseen by the two masters. The "bumpkin" had been rather uncertain about Mr. Foxe, but he had been fairly sure of Mr. Pagett; he knew that the Fifth Form-master would not continue the journey without answering the appeal.

"Where is this house?" demanded Mr. Foxe gruffly.

"That be just down this 'ere old lane, sir," said the rustic. "If so be as you'll come along, I'll direct ye."

"All right; stand on the footboard and give your instructions," said Mr. Foxe. "Down this lane? If there are any turnings tell me."

"There bain't no turnings, sir," said the rustic. "That be quite straight until the farmhouse is reached; And that ain't fur, neither; you can see they lights from 'ere."

Twinkling through the trees, one or two lights could be seen, evidently the lights of the farmhouse. It was quite dark now, and it was impossible to distinguish everything very clearly. And after the car had been going for some little way along the lane it was brought to a halt in front of a gate, and there loomed before the trio one or two old buildings, evidently a farmhouse. At least, so it appeared to be in the dark-

ness. But Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett would have been surprised had they known that this old house had been deserted for years, and that it was partially a ruin, and generally innocent of all human inhabitants. One or two lights were showing from the windows, giving the old place a warm, inhabited appearance.

The yokel led the way to the front door, opened it, and passed inside. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett followed him. They found themselves in a brick-paved hall. Only a tiny glimmer of light was showing here, and it came from one of the half-opened doors. The country youth went right past this doorway, and led the way to the rear of this passage. He opened a heavy oaken door and stood aside. His bicycle lamp revealed a flight of stone stairs, leading downwards.

"That be the cellar down there, sir," said the youth. "The stairs are awful treacherous—"

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Mr. Pagett. "The old lady fell down these stairs, no doubt, and is lying there now. Dear me! This is very distressing, Mr. Foxe. We must see what we can do at once."

"Thank ye, sir," said the rustic. "If you'll go down fust, it'll be better."

He was still standing on the side, and Mr. Pagett led the way down the steps, to be followed at once by Mr. Foxe.

Both the masters were totally and absolutely unsuspecting. There had not been anything to cause them to suspect trickery.

But they had hardly got down four or five stairs, in fact Mr. Foxe's back was only just clear of the door, when the door closed with a slam. Mr. Foxe gave a start, and turned round. He heard two heavy bolts being shot, and a big key was turned in a huge lock.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe. "What—what is the meaning of this! I say, boy! How dare you?"

He paused, and there was no reply. Not a sound broke the stillness except a movement from Mr. Pagett. And, suddenly, Mr. Foxe knew the truth—he knew that he and his companion had been trapped, and they had walked into the trap open eyed and like a couple of fools.

"Confound it!" raved Mr. Foxe. "Open that door! Do you hear me? Open that door, hang you!"

Mr. Foxe hammered upon the panels

of the door with his hand, but no response came. The country yokel had vanished, without making a sound.

Mr. Pagett, who was lower down the cellar steps, hardly knew what to think. His brain was in a whirl, and he felt terribly alarmed, for he had often read in the papers how people had been lured into quiet spots, and then robbed with violence! Mr. Pagett suddenly felt his knees wobbling beneath him.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "This—this is extraordinary! What—what can it mean, Mr. Foxe? It—it seems that the lad's story was not true—"

"True!" shouted Mr. Foxe. "Of course it wasn't true—it was pure fabrication, in order to bring us here! And if it hadn't been for you, Mr. Pagett, we should not have come! I wanted to ignore the boy, and to go on, but you interfered, and—"

"Interfered!" interrupted Mr. Pagett. "I was only doing what I thought right and proper! How were we to suspect that anything of this nature would occur? You must admit, Mr. Foxe, that you yourself were totally unsuspecting—otherwise you would not have come."

"Well, the fact remains, that you landed us in this hole!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "We are prisoners, by all appearances, and, no doubt, we shall soon be robbed, and perhaps murdered!"

"Good gracious me!" gasped Mr. Pagett nervously.

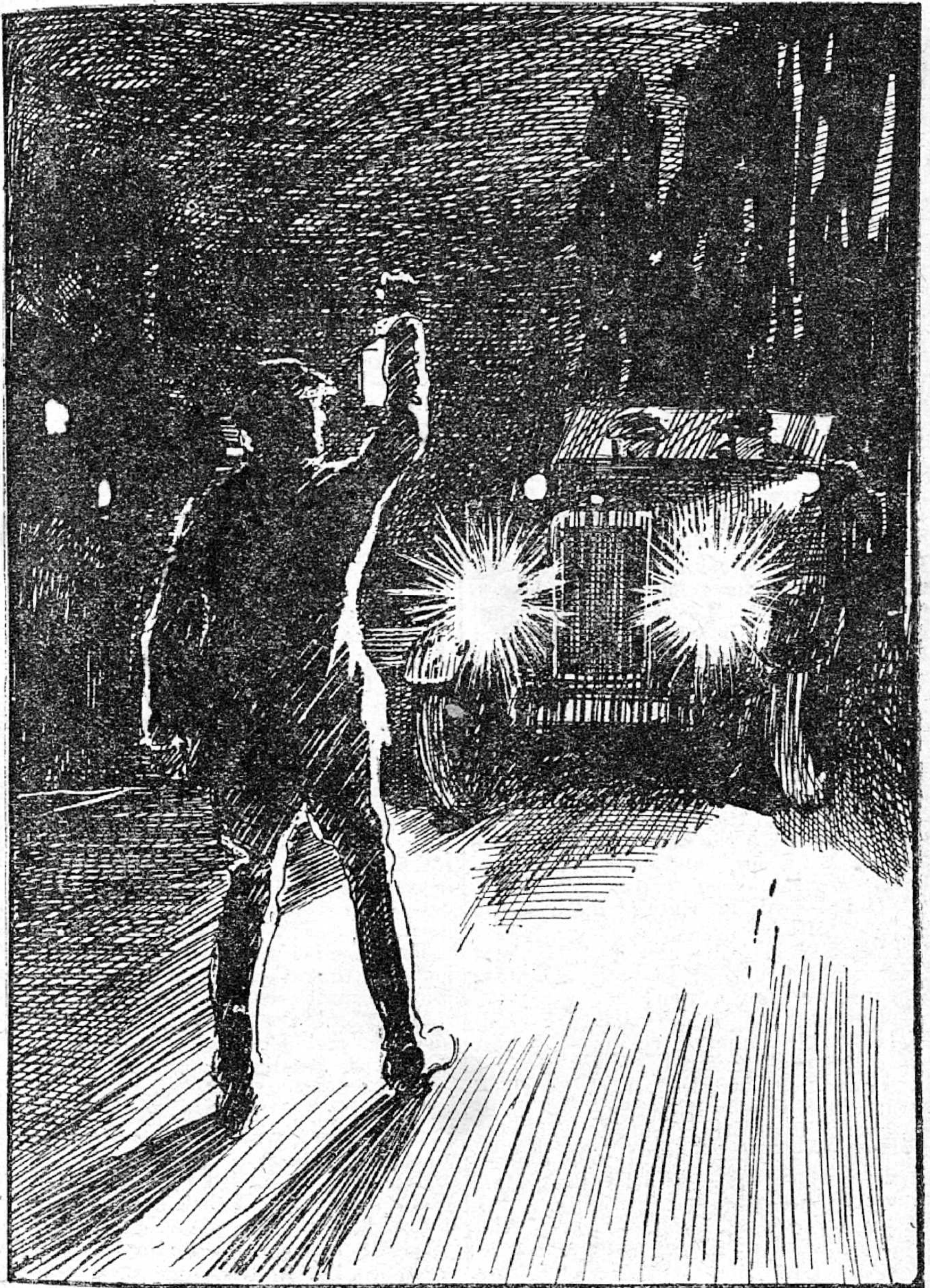
They went to the bottom of the cellar steps, and then Mr. Foxe struck a match. As he had suspected, there was no way out. The cellar was only a small one—quite a tiny place, in fact, with no window, and not even a grating. There was merely a ventilator, near the roof, but this was only a few inches in depth. The only possible exit from the cellar was by means of the door at the top of the stairs, and that door was of solid oak, and it was bolted and locked.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had been trapped; there was no escape.

But they were rather surprised, in spite of their alarm. Why had they been left here in this way, if robbery had been intended, why had the yokel bolted them in the cellar in this way?

And then suddenly Mr. Foxe jumped to the truth.

"By Heaven!" he snapped. "I've got it!"



"Ah, master, I'm main glad ye've stopped!" said the rustic, his voice coming in gasps. "There's summat awful happened up at the farm. I want ye to come along, sir."

"Eh? My dear sir——"

"We have been trapped!" stormed Mr. Smale Foxe. "There will be no attempt at robbery, Mr. Pagett. We have been tricked, probably by some of Lawrence's friends. Don't you realise what it means?"

"I must confess that I fail——"

"We have been brought here so that we cannot go to Helmford—to the Ring Pavilion!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe savagely. "That is the truth. Lawrence will fight there this evening, and, somehow or other, he and his friends got to know that we were coming. But we shall be unable to witness the fight, and it will be impossible to bring any charge against Lawrence!"

"Dear me," said the Fifth Form master. "What an astounding suggestion! But, really, Mr. Foxe, I have an idea that you are right. There can be no other solution to this strange problem!"

"I know I am right!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "Good gracious me! To think that we should have fallen so easily into the trap. But Lawrence need not imagine that he is safe! The very fact that we have been placed in this cellar and kidnapped is deadly proof against him. The wretched boy shall suffer for this!"

Meanwhile, outside, the country yokel had joined the other figures. They came like shadows out of the night, and, curiously enough, they were not country folks at all. On the contrary, they were attired in Etons, and wore ordinary overcoats and tweed caps.

"Did it work all right?" inquired De Valerie softly.

"Work!" said the rustic. "My hat! They walked into it just the same as sheep walk into a pen!"

"I must say you did the trick well, Pitt!" said Tommy Watson. "You acted the part to the life! No wonder Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett didn't smell a rat. And they're safe now—safe until we choose to let them out!"

"Which won't be until nine o'clock at the very earliest," said Reginald Pitt, removing his wig and grinning. "I rather enjoyed it, you know. And neither Pagett nor Foxe can prove anything. They may suspect, but they have no proof. I'll guarantee anything you like they didn't recognise me!"

Pitt had acted his part with extreme cleverness. And he was quite right

when he said that neither Mr. Foxe nor Mr. Pagett could recognise him. His own identity had been completely concealed behind his make-up, and he had changed his voice completely, too.

A great thing had been accomplished. It was now impossible for the two masters to reach the Ring Pavilion in Helmford, and to witness the fight between Young Ern and Mike Connor. So Lawrence was safe.

But other steps had to be taken, too.

For I had made up my mind to convince Dr. Stafford that black was white. In other words, that "Young Ern" was not Lawrence at all! And I had an idea that I should succeed in this somewhat difficult task.

CHAPTER IV.

A PERFECT ALIBI.

DR. STAFFORD was very thoughtful as he sat in his study at St. Frank's. He had been quite still for some little time, and now he rose to his feet, and paced up and down before the cheerful fire which blazed in the grate.

"I sincerely hope that Mr. Foxe will bring back a good report," he murmured. "I should not like to think that a St. Frank's boy is mixed up with prize fighting. It would be a terrible degradation. But, if Lawrence has been acting in this way, he will have no mercy."

The Head glanced at the clock, and he saw that the time was just ten minutes past seven. According to his information, the fight had now commenced, and Ernest Lawrence was in Helmford, battling in the ring against Mike Connor.

"I am glad that Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett have gone to Bannington," murmured the Head. "At all events, the matter will be settled once and for all. When they return I shall know the truth about Lawrence."

Dr. Stafford was expecting his visitors—two of the school Governors. They had not yet arrived, and the Head went to his door, and then passed out into the Triangle. It was a clear night now, and there was a touch of frost in the

air. Two or three juniors were to be seen, moving about the gymnasium and the Ancient House or the Collego House. And suddenly the Head paused, for he heard a voice.

"I say, Lawrence!" it shouted. "Just come here a minute, will you?"

"What for?" inquired another voice.

"I want you, you ass! That's what for!"

The Head started.

"Lawrence!" he ejaculated, under his breath. "Can it be possible that Lawrence is at the school? If so, then it finally disproves the idea that the lad has gone to Helmsford. I understood that Lawrence would be absent this evening. I will see into this at once!"

The Head moved briskly across the Triangle, in the direction of the gymnasium. And, when he arrived, he saw two juniors standing just against one of the chestnut trees. The light from the gymnasium windows shone upon the pair, and revealed their faces. It was not a strong light, but quite sufficient to see by.

Both the juniors raised their caps as the Head appeared.

"Good-evening, sir," they said.

"Good-evening, my boys," said Dr. Stafford.

One junior was Yorke, of the Remove, and the other was Ernest Lawrence! Dr. Stafford did not have very much to do with the juniors, but he knew them all by sight. And there was not the slightest shadow of doubt that Lawrence, of the Remove, was facing him now. The junior was regarding him rather curiously. His fair hair was well brushed, and his fresh, open face was smiling.

"Just having a little chat, boys?" inquired the Head cheerfully.

"Yes, sir."

"I understood that you were out this evening, Lawrence," went on the Headmaster. "But I see that you are here."

"Yes," assented Lawrence. "I'm not going out at all this evening, sir. I think it would be much better to stay indoors. It's rather cold, and I've got my prep. to do."

"Yes—yes, of course," said the Head. "Well, boys, I do not intend to bother you with my presence. I am very pleased to see, Lawrence, that you are here."

Dr. Stafford walked off, and he made

his way back to his study, feeling very relieved and delighted. So Lawrence had not gone to Helmsford at all! What could it mean? It was just possible, of course, that the fight had been put off, and that Lawrence had received a warning.

Dr. Stafford meant to make sure of this at once; and there was one way of doing so. He drew his telephone instrument towards him, and lifted the receiver. The 'phone directory was in front of him, and his finger was upon a certain number.

"Please ring up Helmsford 5301," he said.

It was the telephone number of the Ring Pavilion.

And in a few minutes the Head was through.

"Hallo!" came a somewhat rough voice. "Who's speaking?"

"Are you the Ring Pavilion, Helmsford?" inquired Dr. Stafford.

"Yes."

"Can you tell me if a fight is now proceeding between two persons named Young Ern and Mike Connor?" inquired the Head pointedly.

"Yes, of course!" came the voice. "The fight started a quarter of an hour ago. They're in the middle of the third or fourth round now."

"Dear me!" said the Head. "I am sorry to trouble you, but can you tell me for certain whether the fight is really between Mike Connor and Young Ern? Are you sure that the lad is Young Ern——"

"What's the game?" demanded the voice. "Are you sure it's Young Ern? What are you playing at? Don't try to be funny with us! Of course it's Young Ern!"

"I want to be quite sure——"

"Oh, I can't waste my time over you!" said the voice. "You can go to blazes!"

And he slammed the receiver down, and the Headmaster was cut off. Dr. Stafford, rather shocked, replaced his own receiver, and then lay back in his chair. And the frown which marred his face, soon gave place to a smile.

"Excellent!" he murmured. "I rather regret sending Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett to Helmsford now, for I know the truth. Lawrence is here, within the school building, and Young Ern is fighting in Helmsford! It is quite obvious, there-

fore, that Lawrence is not this boxer. I am greatly relieved and delighted. Nothing could have pleased me better.

The Head was convinced—absolutely and thoroughly convinced. No matter what was said to him now, it would make no difference whatever. He knew for a fact that Young Ern was fighting in the Ring at Helmford, and, with his own eyes, he had seen Ernest Lawrence chatting with Yorke in the Triangle. How was it possible, therefore, for Young Ern and Lawrence to be one and the same person?

Obviously, it was quite impossible.

Therefore, the Head was satisfied in every particular. After this he would inquire no farther, and he would take no notice of any rumours, or mysterious communications. He regarded that anonymous typewritten letter as a pure fabrication, sent especially for the purpose of getting Lawrence into trouble. Perhaps it had been sent by some maliciously inclined enemy. That is the explanation that Dr. Stafford suggested to himself.

And while the Head was thinking thus in his own study Lawrence and Yorke strolled across the Triangle in the direction of the Ancient House. They were near the steps when two figures appeared—the figures of Owen major and Hubbard, of the Remove.

"Hallo!" said Owen major.
"Monks!"

"Oh, pax!" exclaimed Lawrence easily. "No house rows now!"

"All right!" said Hubbard, who knew what a punch Lawrence had. "But I thought you were going out this evening, Lawrence?"

"Did you?" said the College House junior. "You'd better think again!"

"Well, come on," said Yorke. "We'd better be getting back—it's nearly half-past seven now."

They strolled away, and during the next hour Lawrence was seen by quite a number of fellows—juniors and seniors. He strolled to all parts of the Triangle, and entered the gymnasium. And, by half-past eight, there were at least fifty fellows who would be willing to swear that Ernest Lawrence was at the school between seven o'clock and nine o'clock on that particular evening.

Lawrence had shown himself to everybody—but not in the College House itself.

Finally, Yorke and Lawrence crossed the Triangle again, until they arrived at the window of Study Q. This had been left partially open, so it was only necessary for Yorke to give it a touch, and the sash flew up. He and Lawrence climbed through, closed the window, and pulled the blind, and then switched on the electric light.

Yorke saw that the door was closed, and he turned the key in the lock. Then he faced his companion, and grinned.

"Great!" he exclaimed ecstatically. "Absolutely great! You're a marvel!"

"Oh, come off it!" chuckled Lawrence.

"You're absolutely a double-barreled wonder!" said Yorke admiringly. "The voice! It's absolutely like Lawrence's in every particular. The same intonation, the same everything. And, outside in the Triangle, where the light ain't very strong, you looked like Lawrence to the life! I'd defy his own pater to know the difference!"

"What about his hair?" inquired the other junior.

"Well, here there's just a slight difference," said Yorke. "I don't think I'd chance calling in any of the fellows to have a look at you—they might smell a rat! But it's a wonderful make up, for all that."

It seemed, according to this little conversation, that Ernest Lawrence was not Ernest Lawrence at all! And this, as a matter of fact, was the absolute truth. The junior who was facing Roddy Yorke at the present moment was a fellow who generally went by the name of Nipper.

Precisely!

Dr. Stafford had been speaking to me in the Triangle—Owen major and Hubbard had been speaking to me! All the other fellows who had seen "Lawrence" had really seen me! To tell the truth, I had disguised myself as Lawrence, and was impersonating him—just for an hour or two. My object was to provide an absolutely cast iron alibi for the school-boy boxer.

Lawrence himself, of course, was in Helmford, engaged in his great fight with Mike Connor, and, while he was there, I had remained at St. Frank's, and was showing myself to all and sundry as—Lawrence!

It had been rather a tricky business, disguising myself, but I rather fancy I had succeeded all right. In the strong light, of course, I would not have risked

a meeting with either a master or any of the boys. For that reason I had avoided the passages, the common-room, and the studies.

I had only chatted with the fellows out in the Triangle, where the light was dim. But the wheeze had worked; nobody had suspected anything, and even the Headmaster himself had been satisfied that he had really spoken to Ernest Lawrence.

"I'm tremendously pleased with the Head!" I chuckled. "He saw me, and spoke to me—and he'll never believe that Lawrence really went to Helmford to-night. The whole game has been a great success, Yorke, and all we need now is to hear that Lawrence has won his fight. That will put the finishing touch to the evening!"

"Rather!" said Yorke, nodding.

"And I've got an idea that Lawrence will win, too," I said. "He was in fine condition—as hard as nails, and as fit as a fiddle. We've put him through some splendid training during the last week, and it's had its effect. He'll go into the ring ready for anything. In fact, he's in the ring now—perhaps the fight's over."

"Oh, it's bound to be over by this time," said Yorke. "I tell you, old son, you've done wonders to-night. It was all your idea—from beginning to end. I jolly well wish we had you in this house! You'd make things hum all right! You're ginger—you're pepper! There's not another chap in the school who gets ideas like you!"

I grinned.

"Oh, chuck it!" I said. "There was nothing particularly wonderful about this wheeze, Yorke. As a matter of fact, it was the only thing that could be done. Either that, or Lawrence stayed away from the fight. We couldn't think of that, so we've tricked everybody—including the Head and old Foxey!"

"I wonder how they are getting on?" chuckled Yorke. "I wonder if the wheeze has succeeded. If so, Foxey and Pagett are now confined in that cellar, probably fuming at one another!"

"I don't think Pitt and the others failed," I said. "Pitt was made up all right. I saw to that. And I know he's pretty good at theatricals. I'll guarantee he deceived Foxey and Pagett. And, in any case, he has others on hand if there was any trouble. We can take it as a

cert. that the prisoners are still in the cellar."

The scheme, as it will be seen, was rather elaborate. During the afternoon a party of fellows had cycled along the Helmford road until they reached the hollow between Midshott and Little Hadlow.

They had entered the dilapidated, deserted farmhouse, and had made certain preparations.

For example, they had fixed two strong iron bolts to the cellar door, to say nothing of a powerful lock. They had seen that there was no other exit from the cellar. And they had fixed up little imitation curtains to two or three of the windows, and placed candles near by, ready to light, so as to give the house an inhabited appearance from outside, after dark.

Pitt had full instructions, but if Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had failed to fall into the trap, other juniors were ready to take the two masters into the cellar by sheer force. They could easily have done this, for they were provided with cloaks and masks, so that their identity would be concealed. But such an expedient would not be necessary, for Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had fallen into the trap at the very beginning.

In fact, we had carried out our promise to Lawrence. We had done everything in our power to help him in his difficulties. We had made it possible for him to go to Helmford and fight Mike Connor, and his mind was easy. He knew that his escapade would not be discovered, and that he could return to St. Frank's with the full knowledge that his act would not be known to the Head.

CHAPTER V.

A GIANT'S TASK.

"SECONDS out!"

It was the sign for the audience to remain quite still, and breathe to be held. The big fight was just about to begin. The canvas-covered ring was brilliantly illuminated by several glaring electric lights which hung overhead.

In one corner sat Ernest Lawrence, cool, calm, and perfectly ready. His heart was beating steadily, and he was

feeling more fit than he had ever felt before.

In the opposite corner sat Mike Connor, the champion.

There was a deal of difference in the two boxers.

Lawrence was perfectly built and upright. His skin was white and clean, and his features were even—handsome. The same could not be truthfully said regarding Mike Connor. The Irishman was a prize fighter of great experience. He had toured the United States, and he had won nearly every battle which he had entered into. He had made a great name for himself, and was regarded by his backers as being well-nigh unbeatable. This particular fight was looked upon as a dead certainty for him—he simply couldn't lose.

His face was rugged, and bore the marks of many severe blows. He was round shouldered, and his skin was hairy and tough. He formed a great contrast to the boyish figure on the other side of the ring.

Everybody predicted that this would be a terrible defeat for Young Ern—that the unknown youngster would be knocked half out of the ring before the fourth round was through. And, to judge by appearances, these prophets would not be far wrong. For Connor was all muscle and brawn and confidence. He was afraid of nothing, and he possessed a right that seldom failed him.

It was quite easy to see that Mike Connor shared the general view. He was entering upon his fight with a feeling of certainty within him that he was on a soft job. There was almost a contemptuous expression in his eyes, and he seemed to regard it as degrading that he should be called upon to face such a novice as this Young Ern.

But the audience was expecting its money's worth, and would create trouble unless it got it!

This fight—the big one of the evening—was due to commence at seven o'clock. This was rather contrary to custom, for the preliminary bout generally took place first, and the big fight later. But, owing to the fact that Lawrence had to go back to St. Frank's—although the audience knew nothing of this—Mr. Rook had arranged things accordingly.

There were a great many boxing enthusiasts in Helmford—of a certain class

—and all these gentlemen were present. They had paid high prices for their seats, and the promoters of this fight would make quite a good thing out of it.

It was not a very dazzling scene.

There were no gleaming white shirt fronts in the seats which immediately faced the ring. This was not a fashionable fight. The members of the audience were dressed in ordinary clothes—many of them without collars, and with chokers instead. The gathering could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a distinguished one. However, they knew a great deal about boxing—and that was the thing that mattered.

"Seconds out! Time!"

Mike Connor hopped briskly into the centre of the ring, and fell into his guard to face Young Ern, still with that smile half with contempt and half with amusement, on his rugged countenance.

Lawrence was looking very serious and quiet. He never suffered from the unfortunate disease of over confidence. He let others do that. His idea—if he had one at all—was to go cautiously at first, in order to measure his man.

Mike Connor was a problem to him so far. He did not know what this champion was like or what he could do. It was therefore better to wait, and to see what Mike would show him. Until then he would mark time.

The referee was a short, middle-aged man who had been a boxer himself in his younger days. He was a keen man, and, upon the whole, quite fair. He would see that this fight was conducted in a proper manner.

On one of the seats, quite near to the ropes, sat Mr. Norman Rook. There was an expression of quiet confidence on his face. He knew what Lawrence could do, and he was quietly anticipating the surprise which was awaiting the audience.

True, a great number of people had seen Young Ern beat Jimmy Rhodes, but Mike Connor was a different proposition, and the greater portion of the audience had come fully prepared to see Young Ern wiped off the map.

Mr. Rook himself took nothing for granted—he knew how uncertain a fight can frequently be, but, nevertheless, he was confident. He had the greatest possible faith in his own champion. He knew that he had got hold of a boxing wizard.

The battle was opened by Mike Con-

nor. He was full of a determination to show the audience what he could do, and it was his present plan to play about with Young Ern as he liked, as a cat plays with a mouse. He would show everybody how ridiculous it had been to match him against a fresh, raw youngster like this.

Mike was as quick as a panther, and as tough as leather. Lawrence knew well enough that he would have a stiff task to defeat this man.

The first round was rather uneventful. Mike drove Lawrence round the ring, he was, in fact, all over him. Lawrence, according to his usual custom, remained on the defensive. He would not attack until he knew what kind of a boxer he had to deal with.

And Lawrence did not forget that this fight was the most important one he had so far been engaged in. He was now dealing with a professional boxer of great repute; and it would be better for him to wait until he discovered the true calibre of his opponent.

The round came to a close, and there was no applause. The audience were not particularly impressed; but it certainly seemed to them that Mike would be able to finish the fight just when and how he liked.

"This ain't going to be no cop!" muttered one man to another. "We shall be asleep before the fight's over—it'll be one of them long drawn out affairs, with nothin' doin'! I know 'em! Mike could knock the kid out in the second round if he wanted to—but he won't! It's a fifteen round contest, and he's got to earn his money!"

"That's about the size of it!" said the other man.

The second round and the third round were very much the same, Lawrence remaining on the defensive practically the whole time. It seemed rather dull to the audience, but Lawrence was gauging his man—he was taking his measure. And, more than once, Mike Connor gave evidence of great power and skill. And so far, he had been doing nearly all the attacking, and, on points, he was easily the winner up to now.

By the time the fourth round started Ernest Lawrence had accomplished his desire—he had found out exactly what Mike Connor could do, and what he could not do. And his confidence was unimpaired. He felt himself strong and

capable, and felt, within him, that he would be able to give the audience a bit of a surprise before very long. He was merely awaiting his time—and that time had nearly come.

Lawrence felt now that he could enter the fight in earnest.

Those three rounds had been rather brisk, but Lawrence was as fresh and cool as ever. Mike Connor had fought him in the never-stop-a-second style—something after the fashion of Kid Lewis.

It had been a very grim pace, and Connor was already quite positive that he had Lawrence completely in his power. And he felt inclined to take things easily. He would lounge through the next five or six rounds, and then begin the real fight.

Unfortunately for Mike, Lawrence began the real fight at once!

When the fourth round commenced Lawrence entered into the battle with a vim and zest which took everybody by surprise—particularly Connor.

Quick as a flash, the schoolboy boxer's fists shot home, and Mike was not prepared. He received a straight left which woke him up with something like a jar, and immediately following a second crash told him quite plainly that he would not be wise to relax his vigilance.

The pair rushed into a swift exchange of blows, and shifted round the ring in a grim battle. Lawrence's footwork was perfect to behold—and far better than Mike's. The latter was somewhat clumsy, and by no means as rapid and clever as Lawrence.

Connor's principal method of attack was a deadly left hook, and he repeatedly attempted to get this home. But he was not successful—he found it almost impossible to get through his young opponent's wonderful guard. And every blow he attempted to drive home was smothered before it became dangerous.

More than once Mike was cautioned by the referee for holding, and in that fourth round the referee found it necessary on several occasions to break the boxers apart. And, in every case, it was Connor who went into the clinch. He was beginning to take a strong dislike to Lawrence's right.

So far the junior was unmarked, and, when the fifth round commenced, he went into the battle with keen pleasure. He was enjoying the fight—he was revelling in it. And he opened the round in brisk style.

Almost before Mike knew what was coming he received a punch in the ribs which caused him to back away a pace or two. Then, quick as a flash, Lawrence came on, landing two terrific punches which literally drove Connor across the ring.

The Irishman was taken by surprise, and, for the moment, his guard was gone. Lawrence was like a tiger, and he could not be denied. The schoolboy boxer waded into Mike with both fists, and punished him severely.

Not that this had much effect. Mike could take a great deal of punishment without showing it. He was as hard as nails, and the most powerful body blows seemed to have very little effect upon him.

But Connor was receiving a shock.

He clenched his teeth, and savagely made two or three powerful swings at Lawrence, being determined to smother this attack. But Lawrence acted with the swiftness of lightning. He dodged thrust after thrust, and with apparently no effort.

Then, changing his tactics with the same rapidity, he swept in, just as Connor made a wild and deadly rush. If that left hook had got home Lawrence would have measured his length on the floor. But it didn't go home.

Instead, Connor received an unwelcome present on the point of his chin. He was almost lifted from his feet as he staggered backwards, to be brought up against the ropes with a jar. Then, before he could recover his wits, he was treated to a rain of body blows which fairly made him gasp. And he was immensely relieved when "time" was called.

Lawrence walked back to his corner calmly and steadily, showing no sign of exhaustion. Mike Connor, on the other hand, was rather puffed, and there was now a leer of savage anger on his mouth. He had received an unpleasant surprise, and he did not like it. He was finding that his opponent was an extremely difficult customer to tackle.

At first Lawrence had not been fighting at all—he had been merely measuring his man. Mike knew this now, and he realised how his youthful opponent had sized him up. And, to Connor's amazement he was finding that Young Ern was a match for him—perhaps more than a match.

But when the sixth round commenced there was only one thought in Mike's brain. He was going to give this youngster a taste of something which would lay him out.

But Lawrence had quite different ideas.

He had no intention to be laid out, and he was prepared for every one of Mike's moves. He could see through his opponent as clearly as one can see through glass. He knew exactly what this man was worth.

And, inwardly, Lawrence was astonished. He could hardly understand how this man could be a champion. But this failure to understand was because Lawrence did not know how really clever he was, how wonderfully skilful he, himself, was turning out to be. He had an idea that he was merely an ordinarily good boxer. But this idea was quite wrong. Lawrence was extraordinarily good.

"Time!"

One thing was quite obvious when that round commenced. Mike Connor was in a tempo, and he had thrown all defence aside. His main object now was to punch, and to smash home his blows at every opportunity.

It was a fatal policy.

For Lawrence's task was now much easier. The fight was his, indeed, and he knew it. His left swung in like a sledge hammer, and the blow landed upon Connor's jaw. It was a terrific punch, and Mike was practically lifted off his feet, to fall flat on his back with a crash.

He rose, rather dazed, as a buzz of excitement went round the audience. And Connor came charging in blindly and desperately.

But there had been no change in Lawrence.

He was still fighting calmly and coolly and with an assurance which was apparent to everybody. The onlookers gazed at him in a kind of awe. He fascinated them—his style was so masterly, so absolutely perfect. He seemed to be impregnable—he was afraid of nothing, and his defence was like iron.

To Lawrence's astonishment he was finding this fight even easier than his tussle against Jimmy Rhodes. And the reason for this was clear. Mike Connor had started off with the firm intention of winning, and he had not realised that he had a very difficult task in

front of him. He realised it now—but it was too late. He was groggy, whilst his opponent was still as fresh as paint.

And there was another thing very noticeable. Young Ern was not excited, he was not triumphant. He was still fighting calmly and scientifically. He allowed no personal feelings to enter this combat. He was there to box with Mike Connor, and to defeat him, if possible. And Lawrence thought of nothing else.

But Mike was game enough—he had no intention of throwing up the sponge. But when the ninth round commenced, he felt, instinctively, that he was beaten, and that Lawrence would be able to put the finishing touch on the fight whenever he liked. Still Connor fought on, intending to await his time. For he had an idea that he might be able to catch this cool youngster napping—and, if he could get home one of his deadly left hooks, he might win, even now.

But Mike did not know his man, or he would not have cherished this idea. Lawrence was not the kind to be caught napping — especially by a groggy opponent.

And, to make matters worse, Young Ern was full of surprises. He was not content to attack in the recognised manner.

Connor fell into a crouching attitude, and waited for Lawrence to close with him. He did not wait in vain, for the schoolboy boxer came in.

He leapt suddenly, and he swept up a powerful left. It was an unexpected attack, and Connor was not prepared for it.

A gloved fist, which appeared to be more like a battering ram, smashed through the Irishman's guard. And that fist landed squarely upon his mouth—with a thud which sent his head back, and which caused Connor to completely change his views. He had been trying to plan an attack of his own, but this was not possible now.

Mike had no time to bring round that left hook of his, and he was now on the jump. He did not know, during those fleeting seconds, what his opponent would do. He felt helpless, and he was helpless.

The blows which rained upon him immediately after that cat-like spring of Lawrence's were so rapid and so deadly that Mike hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

His ribs were battered, and the blows fell upon his chest and head, and every one had a fifty horse-power punch behind it. They were not merely taps—but powerful, driving blows. Mike Connor staggered back under that terrible hail, attempting in vain to guard himself.

There was no time for Mike to make a recovery.

He backed away, working his arms in a futile, helpless manner. And Ernest Lawrence brought the fight to an end at that very moment. He sent a punch to the body, which caused Mike Connor to grunt and stagger forward. Then, the next second, the disaster happened.

Up came Lawrence's right, and it found the point of Mike's chin—it was impossible to miss it, indeed. It was there, unguarded, and inviting attack.

Crash!

All the force of Lawrence's sturdy frame was behind that blow. The impact could be heard all over the hall, and Mike Connor went over and fell in a limp heap. He was knocked out, and everybody knew it. It was futile to wait for the count, for, if the count had gone on to a hundred, Mike would never have found his feet.

"Young Ern wins!"

"Oh!"

"The kid's a fair wonder!"

"Splendid—splendid!" muttered Mr. Norman Rook, with intense satisfaction. "I knew that my judgment was not at fault!"

Again Ernest Lawrence had won. It had been a hard, gruelling fight—harder than he allowed the audience to see.

But a song of triumph was throbbing in his heart, and he had only one thought in his mind as he left the Ring—after being satisfied that Mike would soon be on his feet again. That thought was one of intense satisfaction that he would be able to send his father one hundred pounds—and perhaps more! For Mr. Rook had promised him more if he won—quite a large sum, in fact.

It all seemed like a dream to Lawrence. When he had first started, at that little boxing booth in Bannington, he had thought that he might be able to send his father ten or twenty pounds now and again. But his success was so phenomenal that he could command big purses, even now. It was wonderful—and it was glorious to think that he

might be able to help his father in his great financial trouble.

But it was all one rush for Lawrence now—he could not think of these things at the moment.

It was a rush in the dressing-room, it was a rush when he interviewed Mr. Rook and the referee, and one or two of the other officials. Then it was another rush to the railway station, in order to catch his train home. He would be able to arrive at St. Frank's before bedtime. It was great—it was simply splendid.

And nobody in authority at St. Frank's would ever know the real truth. Lawrence's eyes gleamed as he thought of things.

"They're a fine lot—Nipper and the rest!" he muttered to himself. "They've helped me more than they realise! They're bricks—every one of them!"

CHAPTER VI.

A STAGGERER FOR MR. FOXE.

REGINALD PITT glanced at his watch in the darkness. It was quite easy for him to read the face, for it had luminous hands and numerals.

"Just half-past eight," he murmured. "I didn't think it was quite so late as that. We shall have to be making a move before long, my sons."

Pitt was himself again now—he had cast aside his "rustic" disguise. It was no longer needed. It would not be necessary for him to show himself to the prisoners again. And it was quite impossible for either Mr. Foxe or Mr. Pagett to know who their captors actually were. They might guess things—but they had not one atom of proof!

Bob Christine had been looking thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Well, I think we had better be making a move, now at once!" he said. "It's half-past eight, so it's a certainty that the fight is over by this time—and I'm jolly well hoping that Lawrence has won. But we shall find that out later."

"The fight's over?" said Handforth. "What rot! Why, it didn't start until seven—"

"Well, how many rounds do you think there are?" asked Pitt. "I understand that it's a fifteen-round contest, so it's

bound to be over by now—it's probably been over for more than half-an-hour. So I think he might as well let the prisoners out. Even if they go to Helmsford, they'll find nothing—Lawrence will be gone!"

Church nodded.

"That's right!" he agreed. "And we've got to think about getting back ourselves—we don't want to be left in the cart, do we? Even if we start almost at once, we shall only arrive just in time for bed. I think we'd better be getting busy, you chaps."

The other conspirators agreed. They were all very sorry that they had been unable to go to Helmsford, in order to witness the fight. But I had advised them strongly that it would be better not to do so. I had hoped to be there personally, in order to see Lawrence win, but, on the whole, it was far better for us to avoid the Ring Pavilion. For one thing, the place was absolutely out of bounds, and it was not right that we should go there. But, more important still, we might have jeopardised Lawrence's safety if we had gone—and if we had been seen by somebody who mattered. As things were, there was nothing whatever to indicate that we had been mixed up in this affair in any way whatever.

"Well, we've done everything," said Pitt. "All that remains is for us to get off now. You chaps had better take all the bikes out into the road, and have them there ready with the lamps alight. I'll get into the house, and pull those bolts back. Then I'll buzz out, and we can get off as soon as you like. I think the measures we have taken for causing delay will be quite effective."

"They ought to be!" grinned Christine.

The bicycles were soon taken out into the road, and the lamps lit. Pitt, meanwhile, went into the house, and slipped quietly along the passage. For a moment or two he stood outside the cellar door, listening. He could hear the voices of Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett. The two masters were talking together—and Mr. Foxe did not appear to be in a particularly amiable mood. But this was hardly surprising.

Pitt grinned to himself, and then felt cautiously upwards for the top bolt. He found it, and slipped it noiselessly back. Then he turned the key in the lock.

The door was now unfastened, except for the lower bolt. This bolt was not secured to the door very tightly—not because of carelessness, but because a definite object had been in view. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had to be released—and, at the same time, the juniors wanted to allow themselves plenty of time to get away. And the problem had been solved in this manner.

The prisoners would very soon find that the door was as good as open. A little gentle persuasion, and some muscular exercise, would soon conquer that lower bolt, and the door would then fly open. The juniors reckoned that it would take the two masters about five minutes to get out.

Pitt slipped down the passage, and a moment or two later he was out in the open. He joined his chums in the road, and they quickly mounted their bicycles and pedalled away.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett, down in the cellar, were in fierce moods by this time. Their captivity had told upon their tempers—particularly upon Mr. Foxe's. The Housemaster fumed up and down in the darkness, finding great difficulty in restraining himself from uttering language which would have greatly shocked the staid Mr. Pagett. But Mr. Foxe knew well enough not to offend the Fifth Form-master.

"It is really too bad!" said Mr. Pagett. "Heaven only knows how long we shall be kept here. Mr. Foxe! Probably all night—we do not know! It seems that our captors have gone—we have been deserted. In that case, we might be here for days——"

"That is quite impossible," snapped Mr. Foxe. "I am quite certain that we have only been imprisoned for an hour or two, so that we cannot arrive in Helmsford to witness that fight. By now the fight is over, and Lawrence is probably on his way back to St. Frank's. We must do something, Mr. Pagett—it is absolutely impossible for us to remain here, idle and helpless!"

Mr. Pagett shrugged his shoulders.

"Really, my dear sir, it is idle to use such words!" he protested. "Have we not tried everything? The door is so fastened that we cannot hope to shift it. There is no other exit—so we must wait until——"

"Hush!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "What is that?"

"Really, I——"

"I am certain I heard a noise just now—a slight sound!" said Mr. Foxe quickly. "Listen!"

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Pagett. "I believe your are right! I heard something myself!"

They both remained still, but no other sound came to their ears. The old place seemed to be quite deserted and uninhabited. Mr. Foxe remained still for a minute or two, and then he moved cautiously forward, striking a match. He found himself at the foot of the stone stairs, and he mounted them.

Reaching the top he touched the door—not because he thought it was open, but simply in order to steady himself. And he was astonished to find that the door seemed loose. It gave as he pressed against it. And it only took him a few seconds to discover that the lock was undone, and that the top bolt had been drawn. The door was therefore only secured by the lower bolt—which seemed to be none too fast.

"Yes, there was somebody here a moment ago," said Mr. Foxe grimly. "Come up here, Mr. Pagett. The door is unfastened, except for the lower bolt. Our united efforts will enable us to force it down, and then we shall be free."

"I—I sincerely hope so!" said Mr. Pagett. "This is an outrageous affair altogether, and I shall certainly inform the police as soon as I regain my liberty. I have never known such a scandalous occurrence!"

The two masters used all their strength against the door. It creaked and groaned as they pressed and pushed and hammered. But, for some little time, it resisted their efforts. But Mr. Foxe did not intend to be foiled. He used all his strength, and, at length, the lower bolt gave way with a sudden snap.

The door flew open, and precipitated Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett headlong upon the stone floor of the passage. Mr. Pagett fell first, with the other master on the top of him.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Mr. Pagett. "Really, sir—— You are leaning on my chest! Upon my soul! This—this is terrible!"

"At last, we are free!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "And now we will see if our car is intact—or if it has been taken away."

"I think that possibility is extremely likely," said Mr. Pagett, as he got on to his feet. "Indeed, as I mentioned to you a short while ago, Mr. Foxe, it is quite possible that we were attacked by motor thieves. It was probably a trick. We were left in that cellar, and the thieves have gone off in our car—or, rather, Dr. Stafford's car."

"I do not think your theory is correct, Mr. Pagett," said Mr. Foxe. "In any case, we shall soon see—we shall soon know for certain."

They did know.

For they had only been out in the open for a few minutes when they saw Dr. Stafford's car, standing there, quite unharmed. Mr. Pagett was greatly relieved.

"I will guarantee that boys are responsible for this outrage!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "Either boys, or Lawrence's associates. We were kidnapped and kept in that cellar merely in order to prevent us going to Helmsford. I am positive of that, Mr. Pagett. I intend to hurry back to the school with all speed. If boys are the culprits, we shall probably overtake them before they arrive at St. Frank's."

"Your suggestion is a wise one, Mr. Foxe," said the Fifth Form master. "It is quite useless for us to go to Helmsford now—that fight will be over and done with. So we might just as well return to the school as quickly as possible. Dr. Stafford will be anxious regarding us."

Mr. Foxe leaned over the front of the car, and pressed two or three switches. Instantly the head-lamps and tail-lamps blazed out, and then Mr. Foxe adjusted the controls, and went round to the front of the car. He whirled the starting-handle fruitlessly several times, and then paused, fuming.

"I cannot understand it!" he muttered. "The engine ought to start without any trouble whatever!"

He tore up one of the side flaps and stared at the engine. And then he noticed that the carburettor had been interfered with. It was quite intact, and had not been damaged. But several parts were loose and required adjustment.

"The infernal rascals!" rapped out Mr. Foxe furiously. "This has been done to cause us delay—without the slightest

doubt! We cannot possibly start until this carburettor has been put in order!"

Mr. Pagett looked alarmed.

"Then—then we are helpless!" he ejaculated. "We need a mechanic——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Foxe. "It will not take me long to make the necessary adjustments!"

He soon found a spanner and some pliers, and then he got to work. But it took him fully ten minutes before the carburettor was in working order. The engine started all right then, and Mr. Foxe's anger had oozed away somewhat.

"Splendid!" said Mr. Pagett. "I did not know that you were so accomplished, my dear Mr. Foxe!"

The Housemaster was staring at the car. It seemed to be vibrating far more than it ought to have done. And then, suddenly, Mr. Foxe noticed something else—something which fairly made him dance with rage.

"Look!" he shouted huskily. "Look at the tyres!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Pagett. "You startle me, my dear sir——"

"All the tyres are flat!" roared Mr. Foxe savagely. "They have been punctured—they—they——"

The Housemaster choked, for he could not say anything else at the moment. He believed that all the tyres had been slashed with a knife, or some other sharp instrument.

But a careful examination showed that this was not the case. The tyres had merely been deflated—all the air had been removed. They were quite intact, and the valves were in perfect order. This welcome discovery, however, did not improve Mr. Foxe's temper to any great extent.

The misfortunes of the two masters seemed never ending.

"There is only a hand pump here—that is to say, a foot pump!" rapped out Mr. Foxe. "It will occupy every moment of twenty minutes to pump these tyres sufficiently hard for us to start our journey. We must take it in turns, Mr. Pagett, but the work must be done!"

"How extremely annoying!" said Mr. Pagett crossly.

There was nothing else for it. The masters were compelled to take it in turns at the pump. It was heavy, arduous work. The tyres were large, and it seemed ages before they were all fully inflated. As a matter of fact, nearly half an hour had elapsed before the job

was done. And Mr. Foxe was now dangerous with rage. He could hardly trust himself to speak. He knew that it would be utterly hopeless to overtake anybody who had started off on bicycles for St. Frank's. And the two masters were perspiring freely, and their arms ached abominably.

At last, however, they were able to get into the car, and drive off. And Mr. Foxe let out some of his temper into his driving. For he sent the car shooting along at a reckless, mad pace. Mr. Pagett was fairly startled and scared.

"Really, Mr. Foxe!" he protested, as they spun round a corner, almost on two wheels. "This—this speed is excessive—"

"You need not worry, Mr. Pagett!" snapped the Housemaster. "You are quite safe—I know how to drive!"

And they went roaring along towards Bannington and St. Frank's.

Meanwhile, Pitt and Christine and Handiorth and Co. had arrived on the outskirts of Bellton by this time. They had a stiff trip, pedalling for all they were worth. And they were now perspiring freely, but feeling quite triumphant. They knew that they would arrive in the Triangle well before bed time, and everything would be all serene.

They were on the last lap of the journey—pedalling up the lane from Bellton to the school—when they saw three dim figures in the distance ahead. They proved to be the figures of three juniors, who stood waiting for the cyclists to come up.

"That you, Pitt?" came a voice.

Pitt jumped from his machine.

"Nipper!" he ejaculated. "I thought perhaps it was you. Why, hallo! It's Lawrence!"

The three pedestrians were Ernest Lawrence, Sir Montie Tregollis-West, and myself.

"Lawrence!" echoed the other fellows.

"Good man! How did you get on?"

"Did you win?"

"Let's have the yarn!"

"Did he win?" I grinned. "Yes, my sons—he did! He knocked Mike Connor silly, in the ninth round—or the eighth—I forget which. Anyhow, Mike was put to sleep, and Lawrence hasn't got a mark on him!"

"Good man!"

"Oh, topping!"

"You're a wonder, Lawrence!"

All the juniors were enthusiastic—and

delighted to hear the good news. Sir Montie and I had met the train, and we had been quite astonished when we saw Lawrence step on to the platform, bright, alert, and apparently as whole as ever. The fight had left him unscratched. We were overjoyed to hear his news, and we congratulated him heartily.

He, on his part, could not thank us enough for all we had done. He appreciated our good services, and was filled with gratitude.

We listened to Reginald Pitt's report with interest.

"Everything is as right as ninepence," I said, at length. "The whole scheme has worked as though on oiled wheels. There hasn't been a hitch of any description—our plans have been carried out from the start to finish with beautiful precision."

"That's because the plans were so jolly good!" said Pitt. "We must give you credit, Nipper, for being a wonderful organiser. You thought out this scheme entirely on your own—and it's a masterpiece of ingenuity."

"We haven't got time to continue the conversation," I said lightly. "Come along—the best thing we can do is to get in as fast as we can. And, if we're lucky, we shan't be questioned, and we shall be able to go to bed in peace."

We were all feeling tremendously elated. We had hardly expected such success to attend our plans. And we felt that we were well repaid for our trouble by Lawrence's wonderful success. He had done magnificently, and we were all proud of him. Mr. Norman Rook was undoubtedly right when he described Lawrence as a boxing wizard.

Luck favoured us right to the end.

We succeeded in getting our bicycles over the wall, and stowed away in the bicycle shed. Then the Collego House fellows, including Lawrence, went over to their own quarters, and we strolled into the Ancient House, just as the bell was ringing for bed. Nothing could have been better.

I happened to be a little in the rear of the others, and Nelson Lee came striding across the Triangle from the little side gate. He had evidently been out. He came quite close to me, and touched my arm as he was passing.

"Good-night, young 'un!" he said cheerfully.

"Good-night, sir!" I said with equal cheerfulness.

Nelson Lee bent a little closer.

"Very clever, Nipper!" he murmured drily. "Very clever indeed, my lad!"

"Eh?"

But Nelson Lee had gone—he had passed into the Ancient House.

Ten minutes' later we were in our respective dormitories, and no questions were asked. Nobody, in fact, knew anything about the happenings of the evening—except those in the secret. And, naturally, we did not talk.

And, very shortly after the prefects had come in to turn out the lights, we heard the sound of a motor-car out in the Triangle. I grinned to myself in the darkness, as I lay in bed. Mr. Smale Foxe and Mr. Pagett had returned. They would not discover much at St. Frank's.

The very instant the car had come to a standstill, Mr. Foxe dashed out of it, and made his way straight to Dr. Stafford's study. Mr. Pagett came in his rear. The two master's practically burst into the Headmaster's study together. They found Dr. Stafford sitting in an easy chair, reading a heavy volume. He started up, and looked rather astonished when he saw the expressions upon the faces of Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett.

"Sir, we have been subjected to a violent outrage!" said Mr. Pagett huskily.

"We have not been to Helmford!" snapped Mr. Smale Foxe. "Before we arrived there our car was stopped, and we were kidnapped! We were taken to a dark cellar, and locked there until eight-thirty! And then——"

"Really, Mr. Foxe, I must beg of you to be more concise!" interrupted the Headmaster. "What is this extraordinary story you are telling me? Upon my soul! I—I cannot understand what you mean, sir! Kidnapped!"

Mr. Foxe glared.

"Yes, sir—kidnapped!" he shouted. "We have been subjected to outrageous

treatment! And I will guarantee that Lawrence is at the bottom of it!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Head curtly. "Please do not talk wildly, Mr. Foxe!"

"I am quite concerned about this matter, Mr. Foxe," he said gravely. "And I can only surmise that you have been subjected to a particularly foolish practical joke. I regret that it should have occurred. The fact that you were not robbed, and that you came to no harm, clearly indicates that the affair was not intended seriously. And your suggestion that Lawrence is responsible is quite absurd."

Mr. Smale Foxe glared.

"And I repeat, sir, that Lawrence went to Helmford and appeared in the Ring under the name of 'Young Ern.'"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Head. "Lawrence has been at St. Frank's all the evening."

Mr. Foxe staggered, and gulped.

"He—he has been at St. Frank's all the evening!" he gasped. "But—but that is impossible, sir——"

"When I tell you, Mr. Foxe, that I was in conversation with Lawrence at seven-thirty, you will perhaps believe that I am not speaking without knowledge," said Dr. Stafford grimly. "Furthermore, it will be quite easy for you to ascertain that Lawrence was in the school all the evening."

As for Mr. Smale Foxe, he was completely outwitted. He had nothing to say. His treacherous scheme had come to nothing and Ernest Lawrence had not only met Mike Connor in the Ring, but he had won, and he had escaped all consequences.

But, he had made a grim, relentless enemy. From this moment onwards, Mr. Smale Foxe was determined to devote himself to the task of obtaining revenge. The Housemaster's hatred was like an intense, burning fire.

And, before so very long, that fire was destined to burst into flame.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK

THE HOUSEMASTER'S HATE!

A Splendid Story of how Mr. Smale Foxe tries to get even with the Lightweight of St. Frank's.

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AUSTRALIAN TALE OF ADVENTURE BY AN AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION.

The Barracuda, an old sea tub, encountering nasty weather in the Arafura Sea, is wrecked on a reef off the Australian coast. Jim Harding and Jack Maxwell, the sole survivors, manage to reach the shore on a raft after an exciting tussle with sharks. Having thoroughly rested, the castaways set off along the coast, and presently sight a bush hamlet gleaming in the distance. Shortly after they meet a man, who tells them that the hamlet is Wurra-Wurra, and offers to help the two Englishmen.

(Now read on.)

A New Partner.

THE air was heavy with an odour, like nothing so much as the smell of a greenhouse where there are many musk plants. Harding sniffed as he handed his pistol.

"What is it?" he whispered.

The young Australian held up a warning hand.

"Follow me. Tread softly," he muttered, and stole towards the bank.

The long grass at the top of the mud-bank fringing the stream rustled, something black and scaly-looking slithered down to the water, but not swiftly enough to escape. The pistol bellowed twice, there was a tremendous commotion, mud and water flew in showers, and out of the whirlpool came a big alligator, its jaws clashing viciously.

Another bullet crashed into its eye, its tail lashing the muddy stream, then it turned over on its back and floated slowly away.

"There! You see you've got to be careful about camping near water," said the young man, jerking out the empty shells before returning the weapon. "It's a wonder he didn't pay you a visit last night. But, anyway, he'd have chewed up your dunnage if we hadn't come back. I'll help you lug it along a bit, but—" He paused, con-

sidering them thoughtfully. "I can't go to Wurra-Wurra with you. The fact is I'm wanted. I hammered a chap. Dunno whether I killed him or not, but the police will have it in for me, I guess, anyhow. But if ever a fellow deserved it, he did. Are you going to give me away?"

"We didn't come here to play policeman," answered Maxwell. "Perhaps we might be able to do something. If you'd like to tell us about it—well, we can keep our mouths shut, you know."

"Come along to my camp. I'll think on it," said the other abruptly, and, picking up as much of the baggage as he could carry, strode off, followed by the two friends.

It seemed that he had resolved to confide in them, for no sooner had he reached his camp—a hut roughly built of boughs—a mere shelter of a place not deserving the name of hut, than he began abruptly.

"My name's Anson—Tom Anson—and I got back something over a year ago. Looked about for a job, came to Wurra-Wurra as assistant to a fellow called Brown that ran the store there. I had a wad. You understand—back pay and bounty, not so much, but all I had. I hung on to it, meaning to buy a business, mebbe, or a store of my own, or a share in a cattle-run, perhaps. I wasn't particular. Brown knew of it. He told me about a deal he was going into in some mining shares. If they rose he'd stand to make a pile. He got me to go in with him. I gave him the cash. Then, about a month after, he came to me in a great heat and showed me a paper. The shares had gone down instead of up, and I'd lost the lot."

"That was hard lines!" exclaimed Jack and Jim together. "But still—"

"Oh, I wasn't squealing," said Anson. "I'd gone in for a gamble. I would never have complained if Brown had been on the square. But he wasn't. It was only by chance I found out that he'd done me. The shares had gone up, not down, and the paper he showed me had been faked by a printer

who owed him money, and was being squeezed. It was a fine plant, and I might never have known if I hadn't come on a copy of that very identical paper among some packing."

"And then you went for him baldheaded, I suppose?" asked Harding.

"That I did. Two days ago, after I'd put two and two together and was certain, I taxed him with it, and what d'you think he said? Why, he made out that I'd never given him any money at all! I had no receipt, you see, and he'd bought the shares all in his own name. So what with one thing and another I sort of lost my temper and landed him one. Down he went and smashed his ugly head on the corner of a packing-case. He was done in, I reckon. Then I took his keys and opened the safe and found all the boodle there. He hadn't put it in the bank, for I think he was getting ready to scoot. I took what was mine, not a penny more, and all the grub I could lay hands on, and came away, walking in the sea till I got here to cover my tracks. And that's all. I guess they're looking for me now. It's a wonder I haven't been copped!"

"Humph! Seems to me you were rather hasty. Are you sure the fellow's dead?" asked Maxwell.

"He looked dead as mutton. Anyhow, I've bolted and that would count against me."

"I suppose it would. But we'll hear all about it I suppose as soon as we get there. Have you any friend you can trust?" asked Maxwell.

"There's Billy Burke. He's inspector of police. Perhaps Billy hasn't been too anxious to look for me, and that's how I've escaped so long, but it wouldn't be like him to shirk his duty. Anyhow, you'll see him, and mebbe you'll hear something. Better go on now. It's mighty hot walking along the sands."

He accompanied them for some distance carrying part of the baggage, but turned back when they drew near the little town or rather, village, leaving them with a promise to be at that place in the evening.

Wearily the couple marched into the single street of the place, one end of which ran down to a wharf built on the bank of a creek, while the other lost itself in the bush. The houses and stores were built of wood, roofed with corrugated-iron, and all were raised a couple of feet from the ground on piles driven deep in the ground.

Stray goats browsed in the yards, and on one or two, people snoozed in the shade of wide verandahs, but otherwise there was no sign of life in the street. The castaways paused, looking about them, then made for a building which had a flagstaff, though no flag. It proved to be the police-station.

No one was visible so they cast their baggage down at the door and entered. Another door, partially open, displayed a figure in white asleep in a chair, his feet on his desk, a handkerchief draped over his face to keep off flies. As Maxwell rapped

loudly on the door, he started, grunted, and awoke, bringing his feet to earth with a crash.

"Hello! Where did you spring from?" he exclaimed. "What can I do for you?"

Maxwell told their story omitting all mention of Anson. The inspector made notes in a very official-looking notebook. When they had finished he sprang to his feet and shook hands heartily.

"I congratulate you on your escape," he said. "Now, what do you propose to do? Have you any money?"

"Yes. We saved that at all events. We have a certain amount of cash and drafts on the Bank of Australasia. Is there an hotel here?"

"Yes. But it's rather a hole. I can put you up if you can stand bachelor quarters. I've a Chink who cooks very fairly. Hi! Orderly! Go and tell Wong Fu I want him."

So it came about that within an hour the castaways were washed, shaved, and seated before an excellent lunch to which they did full justice.

"Your coming breaks the monotony," Burke told them. "Though, as a matter of fact, we had the beginning of a bit of excitement yesterday. It's fizzled out, though. The fellow bolted, and between you and I, I don't think there's much chance of catching him. I'm worried about young Anson, though. He's been missing for a day or two and my fellows are out after him this morning. I hope Brown—or Braun, as the fellow's real name is—hasn't done for him."

"Eh? But what did you want Brown for?" blurted out Harding.

"To deport him. It seems he is really a German. During the war he lay low, though he's suspected of having done his best for the Vaterland. But it's only recently that the authorities got on the trail of his activities, and he has covered himself so cleverly that it will be hard to prove anything against him even if we do catch him. He must have been warned somehow. I saw him yesterday evening, walking down the street with his head done up in bandages. Said he'd slipped, and—What's up?"

Maxwell was leaning across the table. He began to speak. The tale Anson had told him was swiftly related. With the last words Burke was on his feet calling for horses.

"We'll round the beggar up at once," he said, and was as good as his word.

They found Anson easily enough. When he knew that he had not only not killed his man, but that Braun was a fugitive, a great load seemed to drop from him, and he rode back to Wurra-Wurra a new man. Wong Fu was given his orders and produced a dinner worthy of the occasion.

When it had been eaten and the four men were seated on the verandah smoking Burke's best cheroots, the inspector turned to Maxwell.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

"Your name seemed familiar to me, somehow," he said. "Are you by any chance related to Professor Maxwell, the naturalist and explorer?"

"He is my uncle," replied Jack. "We were on our way to join him at Cairns. He has a house and part of his collection there, you know. We thought of trying sugar or cattle, and we reckoned that he would put us in the way of getting experience first. In fact, it was because he lived in Queensland that we chose to come round by Torres Straits, and so sailed in the poor old Barracuda. I wrote to him a week or two before we started so that he should know that we are coming."

"He doesn't," said Burke. "This is odd. The long arm of coincidence has made another reach. Your uncle isn't at Cairns. He couldn't have got your letter. He was here for a few days about three months ago. He'd crossed from Cairns and he was on his way into the interior. He'd heard tales concerning some new beast, and he was anxious to verify them, and get a specimen, if possible. He had got a bit of hide from some black fellow, and so far as I remember, he said that it didn't belong to any sort of living animal that he knew of—and, as you know, he is a regular authority on all that sort of thing."

"Three months! And you've heard no more of him?"

"Not a word, except that one of our trackers heard from another black fellow that the expedition had left the Worlee waterholes. Since then there has been nothing more. Still, your uncle has a lot of experience, so I shouldn't worry too much. He may have found his animal, or a tract of well-watered country. The country for which he was heading has never been explored. He may be in clover."

"Or he may be starving and unable to return. I'm going to see if I can find him," said Jack Maxwell. "I'll start at once—as soon as possible."

"And I'll go with you," proclaimed Harding.

"And, if you'll have me, I'll come along, too," said Anson quietly. "I'm fed up with life in a township. There may be gold, and most likely turquoises. I'll see to the outfit."

"And since I can see I can't dissuade you, I'll find a black fellow to guide you," added Burke. "But I think you're on a wild goose chase. Professor Maxwell has most likely made for the coast opposite. Anyhow, get to bed early, for you'll have plenty to do to-morrow."

(To be continued.)

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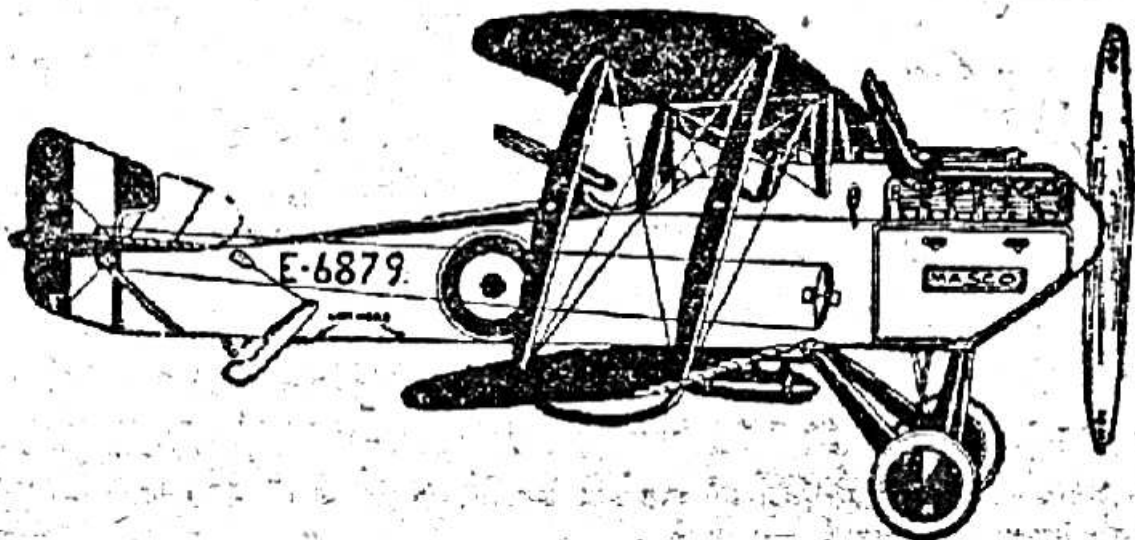
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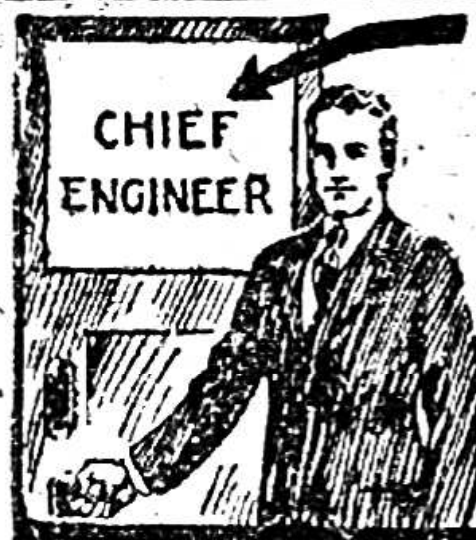
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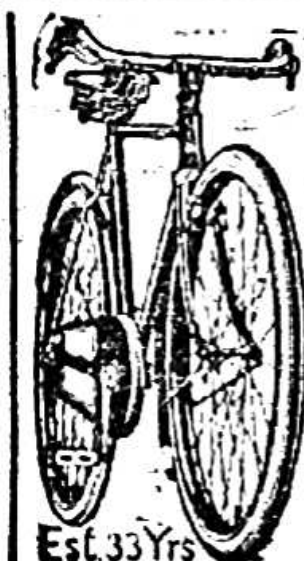
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